INTELLIGENCE

/IN PRACTICE/

Course and Discourse

Programs alone aren't cutting it. So what can trainers and leaders do to ensure a more ethical workplace?

By Jan Thibodeau

THERE WAS A TIME when handing new hires the ethics manual or showing a PowerPoint presentation on company ethics was considered sufficient training. But recent, well-publicized cases of malfeasance are causing many HR and legal departments to question the efficacy of their ethics training.

Recent research on organizational ethics concludes that ethics training is falling short. In a new study published by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation, "The Business of Truth: A Guide to Ethical Communication," 63 percent of respondents said that their current employer did not provide them with ethics training or education such as seminars and workshops. The study surveyed more than 1,800 communication professionals from around the world on the ethical climate at their organizations. Interestingly, these same respondents reported that they often play the role of ethics counsel or core values manager in their organizations.

The 2005 Ethics Resource Center National Business Ethics Study found that although formal ethics programs are on the rise in the United States, positive outcomes—such as observed misconduct, reporting behaviors, and pressure to compromise standards—are not. In the study, 52 percent of employees observed at least one type of misconduct taking place, but just a little more than half of them reported it to management. That's a 10 percent drop from the 2003 survey results.

This new research indicates a need for more comprehensive, frequent, and applied training to build a culture of ethics. In addition, both studies conclude that leadership commitment to ethics must be reinforced in a variety of ways.

While most organizations have a formal code of ethics, the challenge is to define and interpret fluid constructs—such as integrity, honesty, and truth—within the context of day-to-day business decisions. These sobering findings present a mandate for action for HR professionals, trainers, and company leaders alike. Their goal should be for every employee—from senior leaders to line workers—to consciously apply the organization's ethical framework to every business decision. Here's how.

Make dialogue an ongoing practice, rather than a single event. Meaningful ethics training includes contextual discussion about the code of ethics and recurring dialogue about ethical dilemmas and decision making. And who is best to lead these ongoing discussions? The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that line managers should lead ethics training and discussions because "hearing it from the boss reinforces the importance of the message."

Translate your code of ethics into relevant business situations. Experts agree that dialogue about ethical decisions in the context of real situations is more pertinent and memorable. Ask leaders and managers for examples of ethical dilemmas facing their departments or business units. Then use those examples to develop meaningful case studies for various functions, levels, and work situations in the organization.

Make it easy for workers to remember organizational values and ethics. Some companies regularly tell stories about how employees demonstrate the organization's values and standards. One savvy company created "values calendars" for its employees. Each month an inspirational photo and quote remind employees of one of the company's four core values. In offices, cubes, and meeting rooms, the company's values are always visible in a creative and appealing way.

Make ethical behavior part of every employee's performance review. The old adage, "what gets measured, gets done" applies to ethics, too. When an organization's ethics become part of performance expectations, they become real. The challenge is to translate ethics into observable behavior or business results. Managers should be able to identify what ethical practice looks like for their business divisions or departments. Another source of information is the codes of ethics that various professional associations disseminate. Public relations, communications, finance, HR, and other disciplines each have codes that offer examples of compliance.

Ensure that leaders and managers walk the talk. In the IABC Research Foundation study, 67 percent reported that their top management let it be known that unethical behavior will not be tolerated. While a CEO's insistence upon ethical behavior is an essential first step, employees pay more attention to the way leaders and managers reinforce that message every day. Do line managers engage in ethical discussions with workers on a regular basis? Do leaders communicate in a truthful and transparent way to employees and customers? Are workers pressured to compromise company standards to meet financial goals? Leadership behavior is what shapes the ethical culture of an organization.

Provide a safe environment for employees report misconduct. The organization should provide a resource for every worker to seek advice and report misconduct. At the department level, the best managers provide a safe environment for employees to question decisions and discuss ethical dilemmas. Make discussions about ethics a normal part of the business day and the ethical culture will be stronger.

Research and recent events underscore the need for applied training and an ongoing discourse on ethics. A company's reputation has enormous market value, and erosion of company trust directly affects the bottom line. In this time of heightened public awareness, can any company afford to ignore what IABC researchers call the "ethical tick-

Last year, more than half of American workers observed ethical misconduct in the workplace—a slight increase from 2003. The types of misconduct most often observed include

● using abusive or intimidating behavior toward employees

● lying to employees, customers, vendors, or the public

● placing employee interests over organizational interests

● violating safety regulations

● misreporting of actual time worked

● discriminating on the basis of race, color, gender, age, or similar categories

● stealing or theft

● engaging in sexual harassment.

SOURCE/The Ethics Resource Center

ing bomb?" Taking steps toward creating and sustaining an ethical culture is not only the right thing to do, it is a business imperative.

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Managers and Morals

Both the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and the Ethics Resource Center studies commented on how managers reinforce proper behaviors in employees.

When questioned about reprimanding unethical behavior in the IABC study, 68 percent of the communication professionals said their companies would promptly reprimand managers found to be acting unethically for personal gain. However, if the unethical behavior was primarily for corporate gain, only 51 percent believed that the manager would be reprimanded by the company.

According to the ERC, 88 percent indicated that their supervisors disciplined employees who violated ethical standards. The only element to decrease since the 2003 survey, however, was the percentage of employees who said their supervisors evaluated ethical conduct as part of their performance, which was down to 67 percent from 74 percent in 2003.

/YOUR HEALTH/

Manage Moods, Work Better

By Paul Hannam

MILLIONS OF DOLLARS are spent on learning new skills, techniques, and knowledge, yet little is invested in possibly the most important skill of all—mood management. Moods can enhance or damage every aspect of your work.

When you are in a bad mood it is difficult to be positive or confident, and the smallest obstacle can throw you off course. When you are in a good mood everything flows and you feel and act more confidently and effectively.

Moods often seem to have a life of their own and come and go for no apparent reason. So what can you do to manage these powerful, transient states of mind?

First, pay attention to what is happening mentally and physically throughout the day so that you can recognize your different moods. Normally, you will experience warning signs as your mood changes, such as fluctuations in energy levels. The more you understand your patterns, the better you can prepare. For example, I often feel a dip in energy mid-afternoon followed by a mood down-swing. Consequently, I know this is a bad time to talk to clients and a good time to do administrative tasks.

While some moods have a physical cause and are difficult to control, many can be managed. The key to mood management lies in handling your moment-to-moment awareness, by using a fundamental psychological strategy called cognitive shifting.

Cognitive shifting is like having a remote control for your mind, which enables you to move readily among different states to optimize your performance. It works through the use of focus phrases that target your moods.

For example, when you are in a restless, tense mood, you start to have tense thoughts. Those thoughts, in turn, aggravate your mood, which creates a vicious cycle that can sabotage your performance. To stop it, you need a focus on a phrase or reminder that will interrupt the negative mood and replace it with a more positive state of mind.

So when you are feeling tense or stressed, take deep breaths, say these words to yourself, and take notice of how they bring your mind back on track by activating more beneficial feelings and physical states: "I give myself permission to feel good."

While it might sound strange, that phrase was carefully chosen to address your unconscious mind and help break the deep-rooted scripts that run internally. It is a powerful reminder that shifts your attention from unhelpful, unconscious, and habitual thoughts to helpful, conscious, and intentional ones.

The next step is to "let go of your worries and feel peaceful in your mind." This is your natural mood of relaxed alertness, the foundation for excellent performance.

When you are in a peaceful, relaxed mood you are more resilient, focused, and productive. You also are better able to listen, motivate, and lead others.

Paul Hannam is co-author of a new book called *Take Charge of Your Mind,* on which this article is based; www.paulhannam.com; www.takechargeonline.com.

Employers Not Prepared for Avian Flu

Despite publicity on the topic, American businesses are still ill-prepared for the potentially devastating effects of a global avian flu pandemic, according to a new survey by Thompson Publishing Group.

According to the survey, 76 percent of the 468 respondents have no contingency plan for an avian flu outbreak, even though 47 percent said senior management considers the issue important.

"Moderate estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that up to 25 percent of the workforce could be lost in a pandemic," says John Ortman, Thompson's editor in chief. "This should spur companies to protect against an outbreak."

However, of the 63 percent of the survey respondents who reported having a business continuity plan, only about one-quarter of them have contingencies for a possible avian flu outbreak.

What are employers worried about? Human resources-related issues (72 percent) and remote work agreements (48 percent) are the areas of greatest concern in developing a plan.

Of the 225 people known to be infected with the virus as of June 6, 2006, 128 have died, according to the WHO. Although the virus has mostly spread to humans through contact with infected birds, the possibility of the virus mutating and transmitting human-to-human has health authorities concerned. The World Bank believes that the economic consequences of a pandemic will be severe, costing the global community an estimated $800 billion a year. The U.S. cost alone could top $625 billion.

/YOUR CAREER/

Did I Do That?

RESEARCHERS working with OfficeTeam, a global staffing service, recently talked to more than 500 office workers about job hunting. The following are some of the responses they received to the question, "What is the biggest mistake you've heard of someone make during his job search?"

● "Someone interviewed for a position and was not given the job. But he showed up anyway, saying, 'Here I am!'"

● "Someone tried to bribe me during the interview."

● "An applicant came in with his recruiter, and the recruiter answered the questions."

● "A job seeker didn't hang up the phone after calling about a job. I overheard everything he said, and it wasn't good."

● "One gentleman submitted a résumé that contained misspelled words and an orange juice stain."

● "I interviewed someone who had a jawbreaker in her mouth during the interview."

● "When asked what he had been do-ing while unemployed, the applicant said, 'staying home and watching TV.'"

● "I interviewed a person who was only interested in the benefits and salary, and not the details and responsibilities of the job."

● "One woman immediately described her faults to the interviewer and men-tioned days she would need to take off."

● "Applicants have shown up in torn shirts, blue jeans, and flip flops."

● During the interview, when asked what his greatest faults were, an appli-cant gave too many answers. He kept go-ing and going and going."

● "A job seeker wrote on her applica-tion, 'My boss was a jerk, so I quit.'"

/IN PRACTICE/

Employee Engagement: Still a Goal

While many employees express positive feelings about their work, employers, and managers, that doesn't mean that they are enmeshed in their work.

The latest *Employee Engagement Report* by the global consult-ing firm BlessingWhite indicates that less than one-fifth are fully engaged in the office.

"Engaged employees are not just happy or proud. They are what we call 'enthused and in gear'—focusing their talents to make a difference in their employer's success," explains Christopher Rice, BlessingWhite's president and CEO. "We found that only 18 percent of our survey respondents had all the pieces of this engagement puzzle in place."

According to the report, lack of alignment is a primary rea-son for so few employees being fully engaged. Rice says that's mostly because strategy isn't getting very far outside of the boardroom.

The number of employees who believe their organization's strategy is communicated effectively increased by 8 percent.

Only 19 percent indicated that they believe daily work priorities are linked to a clearly communicated strategy.

"Our findings suggest that a lot of well-meaning, hard-working employees are spinning their wheels on work that may not matter much to their employers," Rice says. "Sooner or later, their attitude will take a nose-dive or they'll burn out."

This year's report also found that more than two-thirds of employees do not see visible actions by their employers to in-crease employee engagement.

"We're not suggesting that organizations implement work-force initiatives emblazoned with 'engagement' in neon let-ters," says Rice. "There is evidence, however, that if leaders begin talking about engagement or conduct employee engage-ment surveys, they need to be vigilant in helping their work-force understand what's happening as a follow-up."

MORE/www.blessingwhite.com

British Employers Prepare for Age Discrimination

ACCORDING to the latest projections from the Office of National Statistics, nearly one-third of the British labor force will be over the age of 50 in 2020.

To ensure that businesses treat older workers fairly, The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 will make it unlawful to discriminate against employees, job seekers, or trainees because of their age. The regulations take effect October 1.

The new laws will give individuals important new rights, extend existing rights, and remove traditional barriers. The laws will help ensure that people are no longer denied jobs or harassed because of their age, and in most cases, workers of all ages will have an equal chance of training and promotion.

The current upper age limit of 65 for unfair dismissal and redundancy rights is being removed. This means that older workers will get the same rights to claim unfair dismissal or receive a redundancy payment as younger workers, and employers will not be able to avoid their responsibilities by calling dismissal for other reasons "retirement."

According to British law, a genuine redundancy only arises when either there has been, or is going to be
- a termination of business
- a cessation of business at the employee's site
- a reduction or end of work.

A Department of Work and Pensions survey of British employers revealed that nearly 50 percent of employers had a maximum recruitment age, and most employees are employed in organizations where there is a compulsory retirement age.

These new regulations also give all employees the right to request to work beyond the new default retirement age of 65 or any other retirement age set by the company, and all employers will have a duty to consider requests from employees to work beyond the age of 65. Employers must also give workers at least six months' notice of their retirement date.

Under the new law, age will not be a barrier when it comes to young or old employees seeking vocational training. Training providers will not be able to set age limits for entry to training, unless they can show there is a real need to supply such limits.

"A lot of organizations are under the impression that the regulations will not affect them—this simply is not true," says Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service Chair Rita Donaghy. "Age discrimination can affect employees of any age, not just the young and old. The legislation goes into effect in October, and the frightening fact is that recent research shows around 80 percent of United Kingdom organizations are not training or informing their staff about the regulations."

—Paula Ketter

MORE/www.dwp.gov.uk

Who Works More
The parents of teenagers are more overworked than parents with younger children. In addition, employees with elder care responsibilities tend to be more overworked than employees without those responsibilities.

Members of the baby boom generation (ages 40-59) feel more overworked than employees in other generations.

SOURCE/The Families and Work Institute

Diversity Training Boosts Productivity

Companies have dramatically changed their views on diversity training, according to Howard J. Ross, president of Cook Ross, an organizational change and diversity consultancy.

During the 1980s, much of the focus was on compliance and the violation of workers' rights. Ross says that little critical thinking was devoted to how a diverse workforce—and a corporate climate that embraced differences—could affect morale and the bottom line. But recently, the business case is driving diversity to new territories.

According to a Cook Ross study conducted by the Department of Human Resources Education at the University of Illinois, the best reason for including diversity is to increase worker productivity.

The organization says the study's authors identified a trend in which diversity will become more of a business than a social concern and will be more closely linked to competitive strategies.

"When push comes to shove, diversity management is just good management," says Ross. "It's simply the awareness that each employee is an individual who has unique needs."

An enlightened awareness of others' needs and differences, says Ross, provides a competitive edge in many areas, including recruitment and worker productivity.

Ross points out that today's world is diverse and the workplace should reflect that.

"It comes down to this: When you have a marketplace that will only have 15 percent to 20 percent native-born white men, will you be the one in position to pick the best talent?"