

## ETHICS OF...



LEADERSHIP  
ETHICS  
AT WORK:  
MORE THAN  
MERE TALK

by Barbara Elmore

Leadership classes. The associate professor of Management and Entrepreneurship offers a focused picture of an ethical leader as a person who encourages workers to speak up when something on the job is wrong, someone who promotes an environment in which people enjoy going to work.

If anyone needs more explanation than “leading ethically is the right thing to do,” Neubert offers this: “RESEARCH SHOWS THAT ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT TO THE SUCCESS AND VIABILITY OF AN ORGANIZATION. It’s more than just a nice idea to discuss.”

Still, discussions about different kinds of leadership and leadership styles make up an

important part of Neubert’s upper-level class, which mostly attracts business majors but sometimes draws in others interested in ethical leadership, such as students in the Academy for Leader Development and Civic Engagement, who study leadership from a Christian worldview.

“I try to make the class practical as well as conceptual,” said Neubert, who holds the Chavanne Chair of Christian Ethics in Business. His discussions of leadership styles include talking about the meaning of a servant leader and how to lead situationally. He also looks at working in groups and leading from within groups.

“We also spend quite a bit of time on the ethics of a leader and how those ethics apply to the decisions a person makes as a leader,” he said. Here, students must find and report on recent ethical failures in business and analyze the results of poor ethical decision-making.

Bad decisions do not have to be mammoth failures, such as News Corporation’s cellphone hacking scandal, but they do have to be relevant. For example, in a similar exercise in an Executive MBA class, one of Neubert’s students used an example of an employee fired for inappropriate use of social media.

“That was a small, individual type of behavior, not systemic like News Corp.,” Neubert said. “Examples don’t have to be limited to large corporations because it’s not just a corporation that has ethical failures.”

Also part of his classes are “leadership cafes” in which local leaders talk to students about their own leadership styles and ethical challenges. They discuss the actions they take to incorporate their values at work.

“I want to expose students to real world challenges in addition to what they are reading in academic literature,” Neubert added.

In the fall semester, Neubert encourages his students to attend Baylor’s Dale P. Jones Business Ethics Forum events. This two-week-long forum offers students opportunities to hear from national, recognized business leaders and participate in competitions that assess their own ethical decision-making.

During the spring semester, Neubert sends his students to the business school’s Paul J. Meyer Christian Leadership in Business Speaker Series, a one-day event. Speakers are asked to talk about how they link their Christian faith with their businesses, and have included Gil Stricklin, founder of Marketplace Ministries (2010); Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager* (2011); and Gary Heavin, CEO of Curves International (2012).

“At Baylor we can have this broad discussion about bringing values to your work or your leadership,” Neubert said. “IN CLASS, I OFTEN TALK MORE GENERICALLY ABOUT VALUES TO BE INCLUSIVE, BUT I ALSO TALK DIRECTLY ABOUT CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP. WE DISCUSS, AS A CHRISTIAN, HOW CAN YOU INCORPORATE YOUR VALUES IN BUSINESS?”

The last part of the Principled Leadership course examines virtuous leadership, and the cast of interesting people available to focus on energizes Neubert. Students have looked at the lives of Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz; Jeffrey Katzenberg of DreamWorks Animation; Blake Mycoskie of Tom’s Shoes; and Dan T. Cathy of Chick-fil-A. Neubert’s purpose in this portion of the class is to move students beyond recognizing what’s wrong and how to avoid doing it, to learning what’s good and right and promoting those practices, or “stop doing wrong and learn to do good.” His words are a paraphrase of Isaiah 1:16-17a: “Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.”

In this part of the class, Neubert advances the philosophy of learning what deeds are harmful for an organization, and avoiding them. The second part of that philosophy is to spend time with people who are doing the right things. Neubert explained why he purposefully ends on a positive note.

“We end with virtuous leadership behavior, which is rooted in ethics and values, to try to make principled leadership practical and ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO DEMONSTRATE COMPASSION AND SELF-CONTROL, CONTRIBUTE TO HOPE AND OPTIMISM, ACT JUSTLY AND WISELY, AND HAVE FAITH IN AND SERVE OTHERS,” he said. “IT’S ABOUT MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON OUR WORKPLACE AND COMMUNITIES.”

When students leave the class, Neubert wants them to be able to reflect on their own leadership styles and think about what they desire their own legacies to be. Students depart with a practical framework for living out their values so that they are the best leaders possible.

Even though he sees a waning moral consensus in the United States about what is right and wrong, Neubert expresses faith in the future of business. A decline in moral consensus affects ethical behavior in business because capitalism is based on trust, he notes. But he believes there are still many businesses that promote and teach ethical, principled leadership.

“We hear more about unethical behavior now because information is so accessible, but that does not necessarily mean unethical business leadership is more widespread,” he said. “It is just more transparent. My great hope for business is that it does a considerable amount of good by providing jobs, meeting needs and spurring development. Business leaders should not assume this will naturally happen. They must be vigilant about promoting ethical leadership and virtuous behavior.”



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