Compare ethical and nonethical workplace attitudes



Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you had taken unfair advantage of someone? Maybe the situation involved money, property, another's feelings or your own principles. Did you feel uncomfortable? Ashamed? Guilty? We instinctively know right from wrong and ethical from unethical because we each have an established set of values or norms—a code of ethics.

In the workplace, your code of ethics is important to your success. It affects how you do your job and how you view your coworkers and supervisors.

In school, you receive a report card as a measure of your hard work and success. On the job, you are given a different type of report card—an employment evaluation. At most companies, your supervisor will evaluate your performance once or twice a year. He or she will judge you according to formal or informal standards set by the company. This evaluation may cover technical ability, work habits, productivity, or interactions with others. Evaluations are often the basis for promotions and salary increases. Industry values a strong work ethic and generally rewards its employees accordingly.

Activity 1
Read the scenario below and consider the questions asked. Then in the space provided, write what you would do.

You are working as a server in a popular restaurant to support yourself and your family while you attend school. You earn minimum wage and are expected to make additional tips from your customers. The restaurant is very popular with young professionals who stop in after work. One evening you wait on a well-dressed young couple. When they ask for their bill, you bring it to them. Its total is $11. The man takes some bills from his wallet and tells you to keep the change as your tip. The couple starts to walk out the door. As you count the money, you realize that the man has handed you a $10 bill, a $20 bill and two $1 bills. You still have time to catch up with the couple.

1. What personal values are involved here? _____

_____

2. Which of these values would you rate highest? _____

_____

3. What should you do? _____

_____

Optional activity
Have students role play scenarios similar to those described. Initiate classroom discussion.

Tip
Keep in mind the impact of the ethical consideration in the scenarios on customer service.

Tip
Many videos are available on this topic. Ask your curriculum resource department or career counselor to provide one to give your students more examples of workplace ethics.

Activity 2

Read the following seven scenarios. They represent situations common to the workplace. Reflect on the examples and respond to a minimum of three.

1. A coworker is spending work time on personal phone calls at his or her desk. What should you do?

2. Several of your coworkers gather in the staff lounge for a mid-morning break. One person continually makes negative comments about your supervisor. How should you respond?

3. You work for a company that has more than 100 employees. Two of your friends at work want to leave work 15 minutes early so they can pick up some concert tickets for a group of friends (including you). They want you to punch their time cards when you leave work so they get paid for the 15 minutes they are not working. You really like these friends and appreciate that they are picking up a ticket for you, but if you get caught punching their time cards, you will be fired. What should you do?

Optional activity
Break students into teams and ask them to create a scenario that depicts unethical behavior. Students can then conduct a panel discussion on unethical issues and make recommendations for correcting the unethical behavior.

Tip
Ask students to do this activity individually or as a team. Compare notes during a follow-up discussion.

4. You and your friend Joe are assigned to drive the company van to pick up parts for the service department. During the 10 a.m. run, Joe drives 10 miles out of the way to a fast-food restaurant to visit his girlfriend. When you return to work, your supervisor notes that you have taken extra time, quizzes both of you about where you have been and why, and asks if you stopped anywhere else. Joe lies about taking the extra trip. What is the ethical response for you to give to your supervisor?

5. You work for a construction company that has heavy-duty tools you want to use to do work for your cousin on the weekend. Even though you know you should ask your supervisor for permission to use the tools, you also know it is unlikely he will ever know you used them. You use a saw and break the blade. How should you handle the situation when you return the saw?

6. You work in a local beauty salon. You have eight clients scheduled for cosmetology services on Saturday, but you get an invitation to attend a concert in a town two hours from work. You know the salon has a busy day, but some of the other cosmetologists can absorb the clients into their schedules. You also know that the clients scheduled with you because they prefer your work. How should you handle the situation?

7. You work in a retail operation and accidentally break several pieces of glassware. You clean it up, but since no one saw or heard you break the glass, you do not tell anyone. Two weeks later your supervisor notices the shortage and confronts everyone at a staff meeting about the shortage. How should you respond?