50 Activities for Promoting Ethics within the Organization

by

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Introduction

The headlines scream at us daily: “Thousands lose retirement funds in collapse of company.” “Accounting firm shreds documents.” “Top executive commits suicide as investigation widens.” “President pardons tax evader.” “Police officer admits taking bribe.” “Priest confesses to murder.” “Crematory operator faces 339 charges of theft by deception.” “Quality of surgical facilities woefully inadequate.” “Conflicts cloud objectivity of corporate boards.” “Directors’ conflicts of interest often buried deep in firms’ SEC filings.” “Buffett tells directors to really dog auditors.”

Tyco, Enron, Adelphia, WorldCom, Arthur Andersen, Merrill Lynch, Imclone Systems, Global Crossing—the deeds and misdeeds of corporate officers have entered the shame-filled, scandal-filled pages that capture for history unethical misappropriations and misreporting of funds. Following these business meltdowns, change is finally under way. Corporate governance policies are being revisited, as are the methods corporations use to compensate their top executives. (Witness former CEO Jack Welch’s decision to return his post-retirement perks to General Electric.) Many companies are contemplating, if not enforcing, the disclosure of executive stock plans and the treatment of stock options as expenses. (In the words of Warren Buffett, “The ratcheting up of compensation has been obscene.”)

So common has been the breach of ethics by individuals and organizations in which we have placed our collective trust that the language has evolved new words to express our collective concern. “Institutional betrayal” is the phrase that denotes the destruction of faith that we once placed, without question, in organizations such as police forces, schools, churches, and bureaucratic organizations. As a nation, we are in the midst of an identity crisis, redefining the rules that once governed us individually and collectively.

Demands for reform are being made by the media, community members, activists, investors, stakeholders, Congress, employees, and the public at large. In fact, a survey by Dale Carnegie Training reported in *HR Fact Finder* (“Would You Blow the Whistle?” August 2002, page 6), finds 75% of business people surveyed would “blow the whistle” if they discovered bad management practices in their company.

Reforms will continue because of public outcries and Congressional investigations will continue. Securities laws are being overhauled; the New York Stock Exchange and the American Stock Exchange have proposed changes for closer regulation of corporate governance policies. The schism that once existed separated the soft world of ethics (often considered subjective) and the hard world of finance (considered objective and quantifiable) is closing. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a force behind that schism-closing, as systems are developed to make leaders accountable and to create a culture that fulfills its responsibilities. Activism and accountability are no longer strange bedfellows.

There are those who believe rules cannot make someone moral—a person is either ethical or not. To be sure, no course, no book, no training activity can convert an unethical person into an ethical one. You cannot "teach ethics." We believe this. And yet, living as we do in an Age of Paradox, we also believe:

- People may be engaged in activities they don't realize are unethical or illegal.
- Discussion and thought can create a cognitive dissonance that may lead to an altered state of behavior.
- Serious events can prompt serious shifts in perspective and action alike.
- One person can serve as a powerful force to offset the inertia born of long-standing practices.

For these reasons, we've compiled a series of activities for you to use as a training program in and of itself. These activities can also be used as elements within training you are already doing in the areas of general Leadership, Corporate Citizenship, Sales, Management, and Teamwork. The activities are designed to probe, to push, to prod, and to remove the calcified plaque that may have accumulated over time through repeated thoughts and actions. The activities in and of themselves may not effect sudden ethical behavior. However, they just might create a climate in which existing practices and policies can be examined. In time, it is hoped such examination will lead to an improved moral climate.

This is not a book to be used only by trainers, however. Anyone who serves in an official or unofficial position of leadership can employ these activities to stimulate thought and discussion regarding appropriate decisions/behaviors/words/actions. Supervisors can use the activities during staff meetings; team leaders can energize their process-improvement meetings; managers can distribute excerpts such as the monograph to department members; executive decision-makers can take some of the activities into account as they engage in strategic planning; editors of the organizational newsletter can use the quizzes as integrity-driven fillers for their publication.

Overview of the Book

50 Activities for Promoting Ethics within the Organization is divided into five sections, each of which is introduced via an interview with a leading business ethicist. Among them are authors Nan DeMars, Laurie Haughey, and Kristen

Arnold, consultant/coach Robin Wilson, and attorney Tom Mitrano. With their own unique perspectives, these contributors present both microcosmic and macrocosmic views of ethics at work. Excerpted, they can serve as thought-provocative material for anyone and everyone in the organization interested in ethical issues.

The five sections each have ten exercises designed to stimulate discussion and promote inquiry regarding business ethics. The activities focus on Leadership, Corporate Citizenship, Salesmanship, Management, and Teamwork. (Despite their placement in one section or another, many of these activities are "crossovers"—with just a little tweaking, you can adapt them to several other purposes.) Contributing to this collection is a wide range of trainers from a variety of disciplines and locations, including Europe, India, Canada, and a broad cross-section of the United States.

I. Activities to Promote Ethical Leadership

Is it possible to operate within the letter of the law and still do something questionable at best, unethical at worst? Many believe, for example, that President Clinton's pardon of billionaire Marc Rich represented just such a scenario. On the other hand, is it possible to break the law and be considered honorable for having done so? Perhaps even be honored for having done so? Such was the case with Dorie Miller, who was honored posthumously for having brought down enemy aircraft at Pearl Harbor. Dorie Miller was a black sailor. He broke the law of the land when he used weaponry labeled "For Whites Only."

This section promotes leadership, the kind of leadership that takes courage, commitment, and moral rectitude.

II. Activities to Promote Ethical Corporate Citizenship

Toynbee's Law of Progressive Simplifications states, "The measure of a civilization's growth and sustainable vitality lies in its ability to transfer increasing amounts of energy and attention from the material side of life to the educational, psychological, cultural, aesthetic, and spiritual side." It is this law that serves as the foundation for *50 Activities for Promoting Ethics within the Organization,* for the root of all evil truly is money and, if not money, the need to acquire "more" than we have—more power, more favor, more material things that bespeak our power or wealth. This is as true on a personal level as it is on the organizational level. Think of some of the most scandalous ethical breaches in recent corporate history. Uncover the reason behind the ethical breach and you'll almost always find money or power at its core.

The activities in this section help participants examine their micro- and macro-motivation. They'll have opportunities to think about the power of ethical persuasion, the pros and cons of charisma, and choices and their consequences.

III. Activities to Promote Ethical Salesmanship

Whether it's an entire corporation, a sales division or department within that corporation, a single office, or an individual salesperson, the questions regarding business ethics cannot be answered without having definitions to serve as guidelines. We'll explore a number of issues that warrant the issuance of written definitions—issues such as values, goals, policies, and the very relationships the corporate body has to its suppliers, its shareholders, its competitors, its employees, and, of course, to its clients.

Participants will be engaged in this section in surveys, role-plays, and panel discussions.

IV. Activities to Promote Ethical Management

Ethical management involves, in part, the larger issues of being socially responsible. Even if your participants are not in the corporate echelon that decides what profits can be earmarked for charitable purposes, they can still consider issues such as energy conservation; creating a work culture free of "isms" like age-ism and sex-ism; environmental damage; diversity; and everyday issues involving honesty and integrity. Participants will be encouraged to do more than think, though: they'll be asked to undertake some grass-roots movements in support of these issues.

Small-group activities and self-assessments are included among the activities that explore situational ethics.

V. Activities to Promote Ethical Teamwork

"Truth, justice, and the American way" are some of the topics examined in this section, which explores both loyalty and divided loyalties that team members often have to face. In several exercises, participants will act as "paper-judges," ruling on real-world, real-workplace cases. In so doing, they'll learn to avoid the mistakes others have made in work conditions similar to their own. They'll also have an opportunity to compare their rulings with those of the court.

In addition to litigation scenarios, participants will engage in activities of a game-like nature, but activities with a serious intent: to engender ethical behavior by team members.

Overview of the Exercises

These exercises are diverse: Contributing authors vary in their backgrounds and locations. International trainers from the Netherlands, India, and Canada are represented, as are American trainers with a wide range of specialties and experience. In addition to exercises by the editor/author, other exercises have been submitted by academic leaders and entrepreneurial consultants.

The exercises range in duration from 10 minutes to an hour and a half. Each begins with the **Timeframe,** followed by an **Overview** and **Purpose**. The ideal **Group size** and the best **Room arrangement**, which can impact the amount of activity participants engage in and the degree of creativity they offer, are noted next. In the instructional construct, the required **Materials** and a step-by-step **Method** for executing the activity are listed. What makes the activities unique are the **Discussion** prompts, which enable the trainer to widen the exercise's application.

Similarly, the **Quotation** in each activity can be used in the following ways:

- ✓ Post the quotations around the room and encourage participants to view and discuss them during breaks.
- ✓ Ask table group leaders to select a favorite quote posted around the room and discuss it within their groups.
- ✓ Write a given quote on the flipchart (or put it on a transparency) and use it as a stimulus for whole-class discussion.
- ✓ Select two quotes that imply contradiction and call on two different participants to explain/substantiate the differing viewpoints.
- ✓ Ask table groups to share examples of their own experiences as they relate to various quotes.
- ✓ Compile the quotes and distribute the sheet to participants. Periodically during the training day, call on someone to share his or her favorite quote and the relevance it has for that person.

Scattered throughout the activities are **Variations**, alternative ways of presenting the material or expanding its applicability. The **Points of Interest** present relevant research and material that can easily be incorporated into the exercises.

Overview of the Methodologies

A deliberately wide array of methodologies is employed within these activities, in view of the facts that:

- ✓ Adults used to multitasking need to switch their attention and focus from one kind of activity to another every 15 or 20 minutes.
- ✓ Dry and prolonged lectures do not appeal to adult learners as much as interactive, hands-on exercises in which they can do more than merely listen.
- ✓ Because some view the training experience as one fraught with danger, i.e., their reputations and competence are on display, these exercises have success virtually built-in. Some are done privately, such as the assessments. Others are done in groups. Group assignments lessen the "exposure" of any one participant. And, many of the assignments have neither right nor wrong answers—merely ideas to be explored. (Group discussions, for example, encourage the exchange of ideas.) We do recommend the trainer begin the day with an encouragement to participate but with the acknowledgement that some may prefer not to and that preference will be honored.
- ✓ Each of us has a preferred learning modality. Some of the methodologies are designed for visual intake, others for auditory, still others for tactile expression. Coupled with traditional classroom alternatives—video, flipcharts, and overhead transparencies—these exercises will enhance the typical learner's ability to absorb and retain ideas.

You'll find considerable flexibility with these exercises. Some can be used as icebreakers; others as energizers; still others as a medium for transferring knowledge via the written word. Some are designed to be taken back to the workplace and shared with colleagues. Some are designed to develop awareness; some diagnose; some develop documents that can be used on the job; some work to establish an ethical congruence between what is right and what is being done; some stimulate discussion, and some are simply enjoyable excursions into the world of ideas. All, though, have this in common—they are easy to use *and* they have a solid instructional core from which an ethical power can be released.

While the collection is primarily designed for use by trainers, its use is not limited to trainers. These exercises can be used by team leaders, supervisors, managers, and employees at any level. In other words, anyone interested in promoting an ethical culture and/or assuming a leadership role in continuous improvement will find in these pages numerous ideas that, when implemented, will truly make a difference.

Participant Assignments: Dyads, triads, teams, and whole-group exercises are used to achieve various purposes. When the exercise calls for some type of revelation or personal experience, the dyad or other small-group formation is suggested. When role-plays are used or other exercises calling for an observer to note an interpersonal exchange, we suggest using triads. When an exercise merits full-group attention, the method incorporates speaking to the class as a whole, throughout a given exercise or for any one part of it.

Quizzes: The element of surprise can be a powerful force in retaining new knowledge. Many of the quizzes are designed to both elucidate and educate. By juxtaposing what they knew pre-quiz to what they learned post-quiz, participants can more quickly appreciate the width of the knowledge gap. Other quizzes are simply designed to test the degree of retention or to determine the degree of comprehension. (We recommend you never ask any one participant how he or she scored on a given quiz. Additionally, never ask for a show of hands related to scores at the lower end of the continuum.)

Handouts: These are designed to supplement the intent of the exercise and to reinforce the main points being made. Handouts are also employed when participants need to have a common understanding of a situation, on the basis of which they'll take further action. Many of these handouts are designed with "portability" in mind—i.e., it's our hope that participants will take them back to the office and share them with colleagues.

Case Studies: Case studies, due to their real-world nature, enable participants to correlate their own experiences to someone else's and to project possible outcomes. When the actual outcomes are compared to their projections, participants can then learn through discussion and analysis how best to handle comparable situations if and when they occur in their own lives. There's a safety net associated with case studies—they reveal pitfalls without making participants take the actual steps into those pits. By studying how someone else did or should have handled a difficult situation, participants can derive benefit that can later be applied to their own personal and professional situations.

Buzz Groups/Small Groups: There's a definite "buzz" that emanates from a classroom filled with small groups working on the same assignment and probably approaching it from different perspectives. Trainers can optimize the excitement by establishing a few ground rules, among them the time element and the fact that groups should try to keep their voices down so that others can work more easily. Additional factors to be considered include the following:

Selection of group participants: To avoid having people who work together all day sit together all day in a training session, here are several possibilities for grouping (or re-grouping):

- ✓ Match well-known business titles with their authors. (In a group of 20 participants, you'd have 10 titles and 10 authors.)

- ✓ As participants enter, give each a different colored candy kiss. Then assemble groups based on their colors.
- ✓ Write the name of the course on three large sheets of heavy paper or cardboard—each sheet will have the course name. Divide each sheet into irregular puzzle-pieces (seven or eight pieces for each puzzle if class size, for example, is 22). Cut the pieces for each sheet and put them in an envelope. Shake the pieces up and then distribute one to each participant who enters the door. Groups form on the basis of assembled pieces.

Selection of group leader: To avoid having the most vocal person always serve as the group leader or reporter (and to have the recorder always be a woman "with neat handwriting"), rotate the assignment as follows:

- ✓ Issue directions such as: "The person with the longest hair will be the reporter this time."
- ✓ Make this request: "Raise your hands with one finger protruding… preferably the little finger. Now, as you lower your hands, let the finger point to the person at your table whom you wish to be your group leader."
- ✓ Ask participants to figure out who has been with the organization for the longest period of time. That person becomes the group recorder.

Reports: Group after group delivering an oral report, all day long, can be soporific. Consider these alternatives:

- ✓ Appoint a roving reporter who will circulate among the groups, sitting in just long enough to gain a sense of their discussions. The reporter then gives a brief overview of each group's discussion, allowing limited input from the groups to update or amend any of the reporter's comments.
- ✓ Have each group prepare a one-paragraph report on flipchart paper. You will then read each of the posted paragraphs.
- ✓ Challenge the group spokespersons to submit their reports in a creative fashion: a rhyme, an alliterative phrase, or even a rap song.

Guided Discussions: These activities are predicated on monographs that participants read in class. (Ideally, these can be distributed prior to the class so that valuable class time need not be spent on the reading. The advance arrangement also prevents the "lag" that results from people reading at different rates.) Once the group has internalized the material, you'll discuss it with questions that have been prepared ahead of time.

Scripts: Scripts bring out the creativity in participants. They also provoke insights and help participants convert theory to practical applications. Scripts have a way of sharpening the distinctions between best-case and worst-case scenarios and provide an interesting alternative to direct discussions of a given point. (Note: Scripts need not always be enacted. Often, the mere exploration of ideas on paper is sufficient to illustrate the point.)

Role-Play: You'll find some participants naturally hesitant to engage in role-plays. It's important to overcome that reluctance, though, because role-plays provide an instructional value provided by no other method. Reluctance is usually tied to tension—a tension that results when individuals think about being someone or something other than themselves. If unchecked, tension can stultify creativity and can even block the natural flow of ideas. One simple and quick way to relieve tension is the Y-E-S technique: Have the entire group engage in a deep, satisfying, collective **Y**awn just prior to the role-plays. Then provide **E**ducation about the value of role-plays: they help participants prepare for real-world encounters, they illustrate significant points, and they can actually be fun. Also provide education regarding the specific parameters of the roles and of the exercise itself. Finally, provide a few moments of **S**ilence, during which they can collect their thoughts (perhaps even jot down a few notes). Then…let the role-plays begin.

Assessments: If it weren't for training opportunities, some participants would never introspect. The training environment is ideal for encouraging participants to take time to consider questions with potentially far-reaching implications. The assessments provided as part of some exercises invite self- and organizational-analysis.

Panels: An interesting variation on the theme of knowledge-acquisition is the use of panels. Panels can be composed of "outsiders," who are invited to the training room to present their views on a given topic. Following this presentation, a question-and-answer session will bring effective closure to the event.

Panels, though, can also be composed of participants—either volunteers or spokespersons selected by their table groups to present summaries of the work groups have just completed. Panel members, representing the class as a whole, can exchange ideas on behalf of their groups. (An alternative would be to have participants write additional questions for panel members and to have a moderator collect these and present them to the panel for response.)

Fishbowls: This technique involves having one group work in the center of the room while the remainder of the class sits in a wider circle around them, observing their interactions. It's quite effective, for example, for the inside group to participate in a team meeting while the outside group observes their interactions and their effectiveness in accomplishing a given task.

A Final Note

It would be remiss of us not to mention the ethical obligations you have as a trainer, especially a trainer of business ethics. At the risk of offending veteran trainers, but as an important checklist for new trainers, we include here a list of responsibilities/recommendations that bespeak both professionalism and an ethical commitment to the profession. (Ideally, most of the following behaviors are already part of your professional persona.)

- ✓ I know this subject well enough to be considered something of an expert in it.
- ✓ I get to the room at least half an hour early to set it up and to greet early arrivals.
- ✓ I do all I can to make participants feel welcome, including the placement of a welcome sign on the door or the writing of the word on the flipchart.
- ✓ I begin with an introduction of the course and its purpose, of myself and my credentials for teaching the course, and then with introductions of the participants themselves.
- ✓ I present an overview or agenda of what the course entails.
- ✓ I make a sincere effort to remember names of the participants.
- ✓ I periodically review the material or provide summaries.
- ✓ I consciously avoid sarcasm, vulgarity, inappropriate humor, and references that may be offensive.
- ✓ I anticipate questions that will arise and prepare responses to them.
- ✓ I employ anecdotes to illustrate points.
- ✓ I assure participants they will never be made to feel uncomfortable.
- ✓ I never lecture for more than 15 minutes at a stretch.
- ✓ I incorporate humor into the presentation.
- ✓ I include relevant news events and statistics in my presentation.
- ✓ I am physical with knowledge—i.e., make dramatic gestures from time to time.
- ✓ I provide a change of pace on a regular basis.
- ✓ I consciously think about ways to make the presentations interactive.
- ✓ I encourage participants to meet and work with others in the room.
- ✓ I invite feedback about the presentation.

- ✓ I strive to relate the material to participants' jobs and missions.
- ✓ I attempt to learn as much as I can about participants and their organizations.
- ✓ I schedule breaks as needed.
- ✓ I ensure the screen and flipchart can be seen by every participant.
- ✓ I keep abreast of developments in the field.
- ✓ I revise my materials on a continual basis.
- ✓ I provide professional-looking handouts and references.
- ✓ I employ a wide variety of methodologies.
- ✓ I invite questions and feedback on my presentation.
- ✓ I invite (but put limits on) the telling of "war stories."
- ✓ I make myself available to participants.
- ✓ I provide ways for participants to be continuous learners.
- ✓ I design effective closure.