



ETHICS AND RESPECT IN THE WORKPLACE

Ethics are moral principles which not only distinguish right from wrong but also rights and responsibilities in terms of the law. Ethics are usually structured and adopted by a group of people. It dictates their conduct and behaviour towards their organisation, company, association or society. Business ethics refer to the principals and values followed in all aspects of the running of a company.

An ethical company is one seen by staff, suppliers, customers and the general public as choosing right over wrong, good over bad. In today's volatile economic climate no company wants to be seen in a negative light. Ethical business practices are those that encompass the entire business process and how a company interacts with its employees, customers, suppliers, investors, government, its competition and other stakeholders.

While employees should be trusted to act in the best interest of the company, a company code of ethics should be put in place to outline the company culture, responsibilities of staff and how employees should act in particular instances.

Good ethics go hand in hand with morals and values. For example, the company may have an opportunity to make a big profit, but the execution of the project may be unethical and therefore turned down by management.

Is it important? Unethical behaviour can damage a company's reputation and can have a direct impact on profits. It can also erode trust among employees and customers, creating a negative environment.

Maintaining high ethical standards can assist a business to form lasting relationships with all stakeholders and the community in which the business is located. Creating a work environment that fosters respect and honesty will help to improve job satisfaction among employees, boost productivity, build teamwork and increase morale.



Ethics and honesty in the workplace

Key principals surrounding business ethics include honesty, loyalty, integrity, fairness, keeping one's word, upholding the law and showing respect for human dignity.

- › Good leaders in any organisation will follow set of personal values and align these with the company's code of ethics. If you lead a team, ensure that you uphold ethical behaviour to the highest standards. You cannot expect your team members to follow the rules if you don't. Display the same behaviour you would like to see in your team members. Your position makes you a role model, so be a positive one.
- › If your company does not yet have a written ethics policy, one should be put in place. See the box 'Company Code of Ethics and Conduct'.
- › Ensure that policies are put in place to deal with instances of unethical behaviour. Just one instance of unethical behaviour can ruin the reputation of a company. Perpetrators must face the consequences, but still be treated fairly and honestly through the disciplinary process.
- › Put channels in place where employers can report unethical behaviour. If whistle blowers come forward, there should be policies in place to protect them.
- › Always show respect towards colleagues and be transparent in your business dealings. If you lead a team, be open in your communications. Give constructive feedback. 'Constructive' doesn't always mean positive – if feedback is negative, provide ways for the employee to approach these problem areas and rectify them. Be professional in how you approach the problem.

