

22. Workplace Ethics

JUST THE FACTS: We all have our own set of values or standards of behavior that we operate by on a daily basis. However, we may not always feel we can apply these same principles or standards while at work. The purpose of this lesson is to help participants learn some of the steps necessary to make ethical decisions on the job.



Time

30 minutes



Materials

- Activity 22 - one copy for each participant (or group). *These materials were adapted from Lesson Planet: Tools For Success: A Study in Employer/Personnel Issues, Ethics, and Professional Behavior (Alabama Learning Exchange)*



Directions

Ask participants the following questions - and discuss answers with the group: How do you make decisions? Is decision-making a skill that was taught to you? Do you have personal rules for decision-making? If you have rules, do these rules change if you are making decisions at home, at school, with friends, or at work?

Now, let's discuss ethics. What are ethics? [Possible answer to be discussed: a set of (often unspoken - and generally understood) moral principles relating to a specified group, field, or form of conduct; a group of moral principles, standards of behavior, or set of values regarding proper conduct in the workplace].

Ethics on the job often deal with a code of conduct or a set of principles for BOTH the employer and the employee. Ask for and offer some examples of workplace ethics from both the EMPLOYER and the EMPLOYEE. For example:

A list of work ethics for an employer or a company might be:

- To provide a safe work environment for staff and employees
- To treat employees with dignity and respect
- To provide a fair wage for the services rendered
- To handle all business transactions with integrity and honesty

A list of work ethics for an employee might include:

- To show up on time
- To tend to company business for the whole time while at work
- To treat the company's resources, equipment, and products with care
- To give respect to the company; that means honesty and integrity

Ask the group what types of ethical issues might come up at work?

Choose one of the scenarios in Activity 22 for group discussion (be sure to read the introduction first). Read the scenario aloud (and have copies for those who would like to read it as well). With the group, walk through a basic process for ethical decision-making.

Four-Step Process for Making Ethical Decisions at Work:

1. Define the problem (or ethical situation).
2. List the facts that appear to be most significant to the decision (and consider who is affected).
3. List two or three possible solutions (and how these solutions could impact each person).
4. Decide on a plan of action.

Divide the group into four smaller groups (and have each group choose one of the remaining scenarios). Each group should take no more than 10 minutes to read, discuss, and have a plan in place for discussion.

Conclusion

Do you think these situations really happen on the job - in real life? Share how the decision-making process worked for each group. Were these easy problems to solve?

Journaling Activity

When it comes to decision-making, there are some people who like to make decisions by themselves, while others would like to talk things through with someone else. Which type of person are you? Give an example or two. What are some of the pros and cons associated with each type of decision-maker?

Extension Activity

Have the group create additional "case studies" to share with each other for problem solving practice. Participants might ask an adult they know to offer a "real life" example of an ethical dilemma they have faced. These should be shared with the group.

You might also consider expanding the discussion to include more examples of sexual harassment on the job. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon issue for teens to be dealing with on the job.

Activity 22. Workplace Ethics: Case Studies

For each of the following case studies, assume you are employed by a large computer company, with approximately 1,000 employees. The company is located in your town. Read each case study and follow the four steps for making ethical decisions. You will be discussing your decision-making process (and your ultimate decision) with the group.

Case 1: LaKeisha is an administrative assistant in the Human Resources Department. Her good friend Michael is applying for a job with the company and has agreed to be a reference for him. Michael asks for advice on preparing for the interview. LaKeisha has the actual interview questions asked of all applicants and considers making him a copy of the list so he can prepare.

Case 2: Emily works in the Quality Control Department. Once a year, her supervisor gives away the company's used computers to the local elementary school. The company does not keep records of these computer donations. Emily really needs a computer. Her supervisor asks her to deliver 12 computers to the school.

Case 3: Marvin is an assistant in the Building Services Department. He has just received a new work computer and is excited to try it out. His supervisor has a strict policy about computer usage (for business purposes only), but Marvin wants to learn the email software. He figures one good way to do this is to send emails to his friends and relatives until he gets the hang of it. He has finished all of his work for the day and has 30 minutes left until his shift is over. His supervisor left early.

Case 4: Jennie was recently hired to work as a receptionist for the front lobby. As receptionist, she is responsible for making copies for the people in her office. Her son, Jason, comes in and needs some copies for a school project. He brought his own paper and needs 300 copies for his class. If he doesn't bring the copies with him, he will fail the project. The company copier does not require a security key, nor do they keep track of copies made by departments.

Case 5: Nonye works in the Customer Service Support Department and spends a lot of his day responding to email. One day he got a message from an email address he didn't recognize. It said, "I'd like to get to know you better, outside of work." Nonye had no idea who sent it, so he deleted it. A few days later, he received another message from the same source. Nonye ignored the message again, thinking they would stop. He mentioned these emails to one of his co-workers, who responded, "You're lucky to have a fan." The messages continue to come every few days and he's feeling pretty weirded out.

Activity 22. Continued - Steps to Solving Ethical Dilemmas

Identify the problem or ethical issue:

What are the facts?

What are some possible solutions?

What are you going to do? Why?

Also consider....how will you know if your decision was the right one?