



An MBA's Thoughts On Being Taught Ethics

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Perhaps the best way for us to improve teaching ethics in MBA programs is to start by asking current MBAs what they think. The following is a guest blog submitted by [Lachlan Magee](#), an MBA candidate at Endicott College in Beverly, MA, on being taught ethics as part of a MBA program:

To me, it's a strange concept to attempt to teach ethics in a formal academic setting. After all, aren't ethics born out of a person's environment and inherent motivations? How can ethics possibly be taught?

One way to approach teaching might be to start with an education on the practice and implications of white collar crime. It is not only informative, but essential for budding students embarking on their professional careers. Many students possess an overwhelming naivety and lack of experience that may leave us vulnerable to crossing ethical and legal lines upon entering the business world.

White collar crime invokes an image of a "mastermind" of sorts; images of Bernie Madoff, Kenneth Lay, and Allen Stanford immediately spring to mind. This image, however, turns out to be an anomaly, as the majority of white collar criminals are fairly average, hardworking, and in most cases, good people who, for a variety of reasons, engaged in unethical behavior and suffered the repercussions of their actions. The crime scene for the majority of white collar misadventures is not dissimilar to an MBA classroom; dress shirts, business shoes, dresses and ties form the backdrops to trillions of dollars worth of fraud and embezzlement each year.

Another challenge for students is figuring out what constitutes a white collar crime. Something as simple as misappropriating expense reimbursements over a period of time or sharing valuable company information with a friend, could have far reaching repercussions unseen to the average worker.

The most important way for us to understand ethics in an educational setting is to identify the traps that can lead even the most morally upstanding person to act unethically. How are students with little or no professional experience to know that even the most seemingly innocent decisions could end up ruining far more than a career? The essential information should focus on the various influences that leads good people to do bad things. For example, a strictly performance-driven company culture can place employees in a situation of anxiety and even desperation, where unethical decisions are made to satisfy demanding managers. The company culture

may even ignore or turn a blind eye to unethical behavior to ensure high margins, making it all the more easy for a well-intentioned employee to make a bad decision. New graduates are often so willing to please and impress their superiors that they may not only cut corners to begin climbing the ladder, but be open to do most anything that will advance their career. New grads are often so sponge-like in absorbing everything around them that they never even consider the implications of what they're being asked to do. As seen in many white collar crimes, chasing bonuses, stature, and the rewards from unethical activity is what blinds many professionals into rationalizing their poor decisions.

Another very important point that may help a student avoid unethical decisions is understanding how work itself could lead to poor decisions. Rest and recuperation are important in order to avoid burnout and excessive stress that can lead to poor decision making. Teaching students not to multi-task, or buy into chasing over inflated incentives is also key to understanding the various traps of the corporate world.

Many lessons in business are often learned the hard way over many years in the corporate world. However, it should not take jail time to realize these important steps. What I want to learn is not only to stay away from poor decisions and situations that might ruin my life, but how to forge a career with my own morals as opposed to being forced to accept those of someone else.