

## Time for a Leadership Ethics Check

Now may be the time, being in the midst of an economic recovery, that companies take a good hard look at their ethics initiatives. A number of companies have begun to notice that being ethical, acting ethical are vital and integral to business success, especially in this economic climate.

If your code of ethics is five years old or older, it is time to reevaluate and review it in detail. Now I'm not referring to your code of conduct. A code of conduct is a compliance document and is not really considered a code of ethics.

A code of ethics needs to be designed to focus on what is acceptable or not acceptable, what is negotiable and what is not negotiable. The terms of "right" and "wrong", can at times, be too subjective and absolute.

A code of ethics is like the rules of a game. If I come to your house to play a game, shouldn't you explain the rules before we play? And what if you change the rules in the middle of the game? What happens to your credibility? The credibility of the game? So it is with a code of ethics, everyone in the company, needs to play by the same rules.

So let me share with you a short series of questions to help you reflect on your company's ethics initiative and where you might need some help or work.

1. Do you have a code of ethics? If not, why not? If so, do all employees have a copy of it? Does the company provide ongoing ethics training to reinforce the code? Is the format working?
2. With so many different formats for learning, how do you know which one is the most effective? Is your ethics training a "one shot" deal or is it ongoing? Are all employees, from the top down, required to participate in ethics training?

3. What are the options for your people to confidentially report unethical behavior, i.e. hotline, ombudsman, ethics committee? How well are they utilized? If not, do you know why? If they are, how expedient and justly are you in dealing with the issue?
  
4. What type of initial ethics training do your new hires receive? If none, why not?

I have been suggesting to job seekers that one of the first things to ask a prospective employer is for their Code of Ethics. If they can't produce one, think twice about any possible job offer. Why do you think that is?

Like anything else, it is easy to preach it, but more difficult to live it. Many companies who played a role in this economic turndown, had codes of ethics. So what's the problem?