



# **WORK ETHICS AND COMMITMENT**

**A talk delivered**

**by**

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## **I. Work Ethic and Attitude to Work**

### ***What is ethic?***

Generally, ethic refers to a code of values guiding the actions of persons, especially towards other persons. In simpler terms, ethic could also be considered as a guide to separate right and wrong, or good and evil. It is also defined simply as norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Ethical norms are ubiquitous. In fact, it is ethics that give rise to codes such as: the golden rule (do unto others as you would like them to do to you); the Hippocratic Oath of medical doctors (First of all, do no harm); and even the ten commandments. Without these norms, society would become chaotic as every individual would try to do whatever pleases him. Therefore, every human endeavour must be guided by certain rules of conduct.

Ethical norms are different from legal rules. Most societies have legal rules that govern behaviour, but ethical norms are broader and more informal than laws. An action may not be illegal and still be unethical.

*Example 1. Is it illegal for a lecturer to date his female student? No.*

*Is it ethical? That is another matter altogether.*

*Example 2. Is it illegal to insist on group prayers or personal prayers at the office before beginning work for the day? No.*

*Is it ethical? That is another matter entirely.*

### ***What is work ethic?***

Given the foregoing definitions, one could say that work ethic is a set of principles governing behaviour in the work place. Most times, work ethic is understood as a value associated with hard work and diligence, but while these are part of it, they are not all of it. When work ethic is considered solely in terms of hard work and diligence, it tends to suggest that all that matters is the effort of the employee. However, work ethic is not unidirectional. Since ethic talk about acceptable behaviour of persons towards one another, it cannot be all about the expectations of an employer from his employees, but also about expectations of employees from the employer.

Every organization should have a set of principles which guide it and these may affect its productivity, reputation and bottom line. Ethical behaviour among staff ensures that work is completed with integrity and honesty and staff that are ethical adhere to policies and rules while working to meet the objectives of the Organization. Staff with strong work ethics, generally have higher productivity. When employers, executives and employees all adhere to an ethics code, an ethical work culture is stimulated. The following are some elements of a strong work ethic:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Impartiality/Fairness
- Professionalism/Discipline
- Respect for others
- Determination
- Dedication
- Reliability and Dependability
- Accountability
- Legality
- Alertness
- Openness
- Responsibility

Attitude refers to a person's opinions, beliefs, feelings and dispositions that make the person behave in a certain way. A person's attitude to work is essentially defined by the extent to which the person adheres to work ethics. Therefore, any organization that plans to succeed should be concerned about the workers' attitude to work. A worker's attitude to work may be positive or negative. A positive attitude to work can define a person as a good and valuable staff, because such a staff would usually exhibit good work ethics and accomplish tasks faster and better. Such workers are very productive whereas the opposite is the case for workers with negative attitudes.

## **II. Relationship between work ethics and Productivity**

Productivity may be regarded as the output resulting from a certain input. In any organization, there are a variety of inputs, including labour, capital, materials and other resources. Every organization aims to have maximum yield for its expended resources (that is maximum output for input), be it in terms of financial returns for a

business, or in terms of trained and employable graduates for a University. The inputs or efforts that the system (administrators and staff) put in, determine the extent to which productivity can run its proper course. In other words, the inputs directly impact the productivity. In an organization, the inputs may not always be tangible and measurable since human efforts and attitudes are not tangible. Nevertheless, these intangible inputs such as work ethics and attitudes determine, to a great extent, the quality of the output. To maximize staff productivity, an organization needs to have an environment in which positive attitudes dominate and people exhibit strong work ethics.

### **III. Building an Ethical Work Culture**

In order to establish a productive work environment, it is essential for the Organization to consider the factors that may contribute to a non-productive system. As previously mentioned, the issue of work ethic is not unidirectional. Fostering a productive work environment involves the efforts of both the employer and the employee. Studies have suggested that employees' work attitudes tend to be favourable when the organization is able to facilitate industrial harmony, affection, recognition, friendliness and freedom, but that when these are ignored, absenteeism, labour turnover and low morale become a common phenomenon. It is believed that an unfavourable work attitude could come as a result of poor relationship with a leader, manager or employer. This could be due to the employer's lack of recognition, lack of flexibility, partiality, inconsistent promotion and payment of salaries etc. Essentially, a worker that is not satisfied with the pay, working environment, ethical values, culture or company policies, would not exhibit a good work attitude and this would in turn be detrimental to the productivity of the Organization.

To foster the right attitude to work, therefore, the Organization must establish a work environment that makes employees look forward to coming to work, staying at work and giving their best. In other words, the Organization must have some basic work ethics. Some of these are:

- **Uniform rules and regulations:** An ethical organizational example is the common treatment of all staff, i.e., with the same respect, regardless of race, culture, religion, or lifestyle, with equal chances for promotion. Therefore, small company managers should desist from favoring any one employee, for it can lead to lawsuits and is also highly counterproductive.
- **Communication of the rules and regulation to all employees:** Company policies must be clearly communicated to each employee with a transparency at all levels of the hierarchy. Employees are the spine of all organizations and should have a say in the goals and objectives of a firm.
- **Respect for Employees:** If the employer respects the employees, he receives the same in return. Regulations should not be so rigid, and therefore, don't

expect staff to attend work two days before a marriage. If somebody is not well, don't ask them to attend office unless or until there's an emergency.

- **Allow a degree of freedom to employees without constant micro-management:** Key roles of responsibility need to be established on the first day of joining with responsibilities commensurate with a person's expertise. Employees should be inducted into training if needed.
- **Clear cut salary and promotion policy:** Employees are unhappy if they are underpaid. An employee should get what is deserved or has been agreed upon and promotions should be based on merit, not favor. Clarity is crucial.
- **Clear and uniform holiday schedule:** It is the responsibility of human resource professionals to prepare the holiday calendar at the beginning of the year and circulate the same among all employees.

Ideally, when conducive and supportive work environments are provided, the employees should be happy and motivated and therefore be productive. However, this is not always the case. There are employees, who even given the supportive environment, still do not perform. These are simply bad employees. Some examples are:

- The Vanisher – who often disappears without explanation, leaving others to cover his/her duties.
- The Victim – very similar to the vanisher. He/she is always a victim of something. He/she never lacks an excuse for not coming in to work; if the car does not break down, he/she is ill or a child or other relative is ill. The employer and other staff are forced to say sorry when they should actually be chastising.
- The Procrastinator – who always waits till the last minute to do his part, leaving everyone else anxious and frustrated. These are the sort of lecturers that will teach throughout the semester and then do four-hour marathons when students should be revising or hold on to examination scripts for one month, even knowing that other lecturers will still have to mark.
- The Delegator – makes an art of getting other people to do his/her work.
- The Troublemaker – the worst of the bunch; not only does this employee not perform, he/she stirs up trouble among the other employees.

These bad employees are very difficult to motivate and they leave the employer no other choice but to discipline or dismiss them.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of every Organization is to achieve its set goals and objectives (Vision and Mission), that is, to achieve maximum productivity. To be able to achieve this is the responsibility of both the employer and employees. The employer has the

responsibility of providing a conducive environment for work and the employee, in turn, has the responsibility of exhibiting good work ethics. It must be accepted, however, that even given the supportive environment, some employees still do not perform. Such employees must either be re-orientated or dismissed, so that they do not inject low morale among the other staff.