

## Bicharaf Business Ethics Roundtable - [26 Feb, 2009]

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Attendees were welcomed by the Bicharaf team and professor Tony Feghali. T Feghali started with a brief introduction on Bicharaf organization. He stated main points about Bicharaf's creation, evolvement and the efforts Bicharaf is contributing towards enhancing the state of ethics in Businesses.

### **Where do you stand?**

A framework was presented on which to base the roundtable's discussion upon. The framework covered a matrix with four quadrants and discussions revolved around real examples from participants about the quadrants (legal/illegal versus ethical/unethical) and how they pertain to their workplace experiences.

Different factors affect decisions people take at the workplace. Factors such as consequences, relatedness and society's opinion affect the extent to which an employee views their violation as serious.

As an output of roundtable activities, below were the main ideas raised.

#### **Legal/Ethical Dimension:**

- Wearing the seat belt
- Respecting a contract's deadline

#### **Illegal/Unethical Dimension**

- Israelis killing Palestinians
- Stealing
- Counterfeit products (Fake products such as a fake "Pantine")
- Paying a doctor to prescribe a certain medicine (which is mostly done by local companies)
- A bartender serving drink for free when he is not supposed to
- Signing a contract to work for a specific company then simply disappearing or giving excuses to stop working

A discussion took place on whether an employee should be hired for the skills he/she possesses even if they're projecting unethical action. Some participants agreed that the labor market in Lebanon is limited and due to the competitive market company's are sometimes obliged to hire certain employees even when unethical behavior has occurred.



A specific note was made that the labor law in Lebanon is the only legal force committing an employee with a company and all other contract serve only to remind employees of their obligations towards the company.

### **Illegal/Ethical Dimension**

- Killing for your honor
- Euthanasia
- A person sharing work-related confidential information with his/her spouse at home
- When a company tries to help an employee overcome a financial problem with a bank

### **Recommendations**

The different participants were asked about the different manners in which they promote ethics at their companies. The answers varied from having yearly and monthly training sessions, having blogs in which employees can share dilemmas they are facing, having an ethics booklet, ethical agreements, and code of conducts.

Almost every attendant agreed that the most important aspect is to continuously remind people what to do in unethical cases. Moreover, it is important to consult with the HR or ethics director in order to facilitate ethical decision making. It is important to give employees a rational explanation behind the actions they are required to take.

The following recommendations for promoting and maintaining workplace ethics were compiled from the above discussions.

- Ensure that employees are able to talk to someone in a specified department, such as  
human resources or ethics coordinator
- Form a disciplinary committee for dealing with employee misconduct



- Implement an incident reporting system. Should be anonymous. Can be implemented by email, blind box, or hotline
- Involve employees in policy-making and
- Involve employees in decision making to have them belong to the entity as a whole in which they are responsible for every action they make
- Continuously remind employees of the code of ethic and reasons behind every requirement

Though some believed that discussion on ethical decision making is relative, there is always a system to guide employees in the right direction. It is important to think win/win and work towards increasing the well-being of all stakeholders.

T. Feghali ended the workshop by reading a small excerpt from “All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten” to show that the little things we learn as kids are as valuable in the workplace. As the session ended, attendees gathered for small group discussions.(Appendix 1)



## Appendix 1

### ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN

#### (A guide for Global Leadership)

All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sand pile at school.

These are the things I learned:

- Share everything.
- Play fair.
- Don't hit people.
- Put things back where you found them.
- Clean up your own mess.
- Don't take things that aren't yours.
- Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
- Wash your hands before you eat.
- Flush.
- Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
- Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
- Take a nap every afternoon.
- When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.
- Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: the roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.



- Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.
- And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned - the biggest word of all - LOOK.

Everything you need to know is in there somewhere; The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation, ecology and politics and equality and sane living.

Take any one of those items and extrapolate it into sophisticated adult terms and apply it to your family life or your work or government or your world and it holds true and clear and firm. Think what a better world it would be if we all - the whole world - had cookies and milk at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and then lay down with our blankets for a nap; Or if all governments had as a basic policy to always put things back where they found them and to clean up their own mess.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out in the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

[Source: "ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN" by Robert Fulghum.  
See his web site at <http://www.robertfulghum.com/>