

FOR THE  
IB CP

# Personal and Professional Skills

Skills for Success

Paul Gallagher

**SAMPLE MATERIAL**

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# Debates about



What is the difference between unethical and illegal? Is it alright for a business to carry out practices which are legal but unethical? Why should a business behave in an ethical way if it is beneficial and legal for it not to?



Can businesses and industries be trusted to regulate themselves with regard to ethical matters? Should they be subject to external legislation and guidelines?



Who is responsible for ensuring professional behaviour is ethical? The government? The individual company? Line managers? Individual employees?

# professional ethics



Is whistle-blowing an ethical practice? What might be the positive or negative outcomes? Are there alternative measures that could be taken?



What level of responsibility does a business have in relation to its customers?



What benefits might a company gain from acting in an ethical way?

## Applied ethics

Through applied ethics, students explore values and attitudes applicable to real-world situations. The IB's commitment to principled action requires students to take responsibility for their actions and consequences and act with integrity and honesty.

### Introducing ethical dilemmas

#### ■ Introduction to ethics: exploring right and wrong

Corporate executives and business owners need to realize that there can be no compromise when it comes to ethics, and there are no easy shortcuts to success. Ethics need to be carefully sewn into the fabric of their companies.

**Vivek Wadhwa**

Our very lives depend on the ethics of strangers, and most of us are always strangers to other people.

**Bill Moyers**

Non-violence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of all evolution. Until we stop harming all other living beings, we are still savages.

**Thomas A. Edison**

More and more companies are reaching out to their suppliers and contractors to work jointly on issues of sustainability, environmental responsibility, ethics, and compliance.

**Simon Mainwaring**

Ethics are more important than laws.

**Wynton Marsalis**

Ethics or simple honesty is the building blocks upon which our whole society is based, and business is a part of our society, and it's integral to the practice of being able to conduct business, that you have a set of honest standards.

**Kerry Stokes**

So, what is this thing called 'ethics'?

In many ways it is the manner in which we choose to live. Our guideposts, our philosophies, our beliefs and even our values. We often, especially at early ages, adopt ethics from our home life, mentors and role models. As we grow older, peers and personal contacts and experiences reshape our ethics – at least a bit. And then, when we reach a certain level of maturity, and our own knowledge and life experiences have become more abundant, we solidify or adopt a set of ethics that directly shape our individuality.

We live our ethics every day – in the choices we make, the decisions that come upon us, the priorities we set forth. In fact, we have been covering ethics a great deal already throughout this course.

A strong ethical code can help you to:

- form and maintain relationships
- maintain a clear conscience
- be consistent to the idea of who you are and just what you stand for
- make choices and have the courage to explore difficult questions
- accept the consequences of doing what you think is right.

### ACT IT OUT

In small groups, students will be assigned one of the quotations on the opposite page. As a group, complete the following activities.

- Choose two of the central themes covered thus far: Personal development, Intercultural understanding, Effective communication, Thinking processes. Prepare an oral presentation that connects the central themes to the quotation. How are they connected or related?
- Keeping in mind your quotation and your chosen themes, imagine a scenario that takes place in a work environment (think of your career studies, internship or after-school job) in which an ethical matter might present itself.
- Write a script in which the ethical issue is dealt with. Film yourselves acting it out, or act it out in front of the class as part of your presentation.

After each presentation, the class should discuss the ethical issue presented and any issues arising from the group's presentation.

### IS IT ETHICAL?

Look over some of the reading material you have studied so far in this course, as well as your reflections, your assignments, your blog and so on. You may even want to consider a discussion that was brought up in another course. Choose an issue, a question or a quandary that is an ethical matter, to one degree or another. In your journal or blog, investigate and discuss the ethical question that is presented. Try to choose an area that is directly associated to your career studies.

What is the ethical matter? What are the various viewpoints that may be held? What evidence do different sides maintain? What is your position? And why? Give evidence or reasons to support your view. Be prepared to discuss this assignment in class.

### ETHICS IN THE IB

Look once again at the IB mission statement on page 18 and the IB learner profile on pages 2–3.

Discuss with the rest of your class the way in which ethics are central to the IB programmes of study.

## ■ Identifying ethical dilemmas

We face ethical questions every day. Watch the two videos below to see examples of the kind of situations we might come across at school or work.

- At school: <https://youtu.be/aIS7tnUaQ-o>.
- At work: <https://youtu.be/loXqK6D6lbk>.

### WHAT IS AN ETHICAL DILEMMA?



Research the true meaning of the phrase 'ethical dilemma'. Think about the videos above and decide whether the situations presented qualify as true ethical dilemmas.

## ■ Approaches to ethical dilemmas

Read the following article, which describes five ethical dilemmas. In each case, the author has provided an argument both for and against acting in a certain way.

### ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Exploring five common conundrums.

Posted Jun 24, 2017, Marty Nemko Ph.D.

One way to improve our ethics is to example arguments on both sides of common ethical dilemmas.

Here are nine. For space, the arguments are truncated but

hopefully this article will still serve its purpose: to encourage people to not overweight expediency relative to other considerations, including universal, cosmic justice.

#### 1. Terminate an employee with cancer?

You're a manager at a non-profit. Your supervisee has been a planned-giving fundraiser there for five years. Four years ago, his performance was poor because he was undergoing chemotherapy. Since then, it's improved to average but, in the past few months has declined severely again—He's raised only half as much money as before. He explains that his cancer has recurred and has spread to his lymph nodes, so he's in the middle of a six-month round of chemotherapy and his prognosis is not good. He says he prefers to keep working but if you terminate him, he won't file a claim under

the Americans with Disabilities Act. He is his family's sole source of income and his non-profit salary is modest and so he has little in savings. He's just getting by. Do you retain him?

**An argument for retaining him:** Most organizations but especially non-profits espouse putting people above profits. To let him go when he's been an acceptable performer and now has to endure treatment for recurred cancer would be hypocritical, especially since you know he is his family's sole support and he's saved little because he's worked for non-profits. From a pragmatic

standpoint, letting him go would hurt the organization's morale. Besides, with his cancer having recurred and in his lymph nodes, it's unlikely he'd want or be able to stay employed for very long. Retaining him would be an appropriate "cost of doing business."

**An argument against retaining him:** Less money raised means less services to the many needy people the non-profit services. He's only one person. Yes, he's an employee, but the wise person makes decisions mainly based on what will do the most good, not giving extra consideration

to the person in front of you. You can mitigate the toll to staff morale by telling the employees the ethical basis for letting him go and giving them ample opportunity to process

it. To help him financially, you might give a generous severance package. That would still save much money compared with keeping him on.

*So what would you do? And would your decision be different if it were a small company? A large company? The government?*

## 2. Do you cut into a lane?

Every day, your commute back home requires you to exit from a two-lane road onto a freeway. To do so, you must be in the right lane. But that right lane backs up for two miles, adding 20 minutes to your daily commute. You're tempted to stay in the left lane, which moves much more quickly and then, right before the freeway on-ramp, cut ahead of the cars that have been waiting the 20 minutes. Do you cut in?

### **An argument for cutting in:**

Unlike some of the drivers, you're exhausted from a full work day and when you get home, you're going to have the equanimity to listen to your children, break up their fights, be present for your spouse, and so on. To sit in that gridlock for that 20 minutes every day makes you a worse spouse and parent.

### **An argument for staying in the right lane:**

Many other people also would be more effective human beings if they didn't have to sit in that right lane for 20 minutes. Even if your rationale is more compelling than some of theirs, the lesson you give to the other drivers—that selfishness pays—imposes too great a social cost.

*So what would you do?*

## 3. Is a salesperson ethically obliged to reveal his product's core weakness?

You sell new Chevys. A prospect is deciding between a Chevy Cruze and a Mazda 3. She tells you that reliability is the #1 criterion in choosing the car. "I hate getting into my car to go to work and then it won't start. Or the vulnerability of being on the side of the road waiting for a tow truck." She thinks the Chevy is more reliable than the Mazda. You think s/he's wrong but aren't sure. You're thinking of checking Consumer Reports and letting the customer know what you find.

**An argument for checking and reporting:** If you do find that the Mazda is more reliable, you'll likely save the prospect much anxiety – She'll buy the

Mazda, which she'll feel more confident in. And the car will, in fact, be less likely to break down. Of course, you can cite any benefits the Chevy has over the Mazda.

### **An argument for not checking and reporting:**

It's unrealistic to expect a salesperson to do research that will likely eliminate the possibility of a sale. If that would be the case, the Chevy salesperson probably will sell few cars. That will both cut the dealer's income and result in the salesperson getting fired and being less likely to obtain another job to support the family. If in a subsequent job interview, he is asked why he lost the job and says,

"Because I keep doing research for prospective customers that reveals that my company's cars are inferior," he may never get hired for a sales job and have to train for a new career. It is ethical for a salesperson to not do such research for the customer but rather, listen to their needs and point out any relevant advantages the Chevy has over the Mazda.

*So what would you do? Would the customer's gender, attractiveness, or age, affect your decision?*

*Would your decision be different if the salespersons were pitching for donations for a charity even though he suspects a competing charity does more good with the money?*



## 4. When you're desperate, is it worth lying to land a job?

You're a soft-skilled employee. You're not technical and have gotten by on being organized and well-liked. After having been laid off, you've looked hard for a job, but it's now been 10 months and you've received no offers. You've exhausted your savings and are just two months from being unable to pay the rent. You could move back in with your parents but then your child would have to change schools, to a worse school. You know that the longer you're unemployed, the harder it will be to convince an employer to hire you—You're increasingly viewed as having been picked-over. No one else wants to hire you, so why should they. So

you're wondering if you should lie on your resume and say you're working and ask your friend if it's okay to list him as your boss.

**An argument for lying:** Many jobs require just soft-skills and you're good at them and so deserve a job, but with that gap in employment, it's really hard to land one. So if you leave that gap on your resume, you'll lose your apartment and have to live your parents, which will be hard on them, and your child having to change schools will mean she'll get a worse education and be around worse kids, not to mention she'd lose all her current friends. The small lie is

more than compensated for by the benefit.

**An argument against lying:**

You're being unfair to the honest job applicant who thereby would be denied the job. Yes, it's possible that person needs the job less than you do, but that's far from certain. Also, the fact that you've not been selected despite 10 months of trying suggests that you may not be as worthy an employee as you think. It's wiser to look inward and to get some honest feedback so you can improve your skills or change careers to one in which you'd more readily be hired.

*So what would you do?*

## 5. Is it always right to be a whistleblower?

Your coworkers routinely pad their expense accounts. Do you blow the whistle?

**An argument for telling**

**your boss:** Except in unusual circumstances, stealing is unethical. A society in which property is unjustifiably wrested, cannot survive. Even if the company makes plenty of money and underpays you, that's insufficient justification for stealing. The appropriate response is to ask for a raise

and/or look for an employer that will treat you better.

**An argument for not telling**

**your boss:** A few employees padding an expense account has minimal impact on most organizations' bottom line. And study after study shows that whistle-blowers normally lose their jobs and have a hard time finding new work. For a relatively venial sin, is it worth jeopardizing your and your family's financial security?

Besides, many organizations and their leaders make far more money than the workers – that's unjust. Not ratting on your coworkers is a mere bit of justifiable Robin-Hooding, income redistribution.

*So what would you do? Would your decision be different if it were your boss padding his or her expense account? Would it matter if it were a small company, large company, non-profit, or government agency? Why?*