Training on corporate ethics

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Corporate ethics is a challenging topic to train on. A common misconception is that most people will be ethical, because we are basically an ethical culture. This, coupled with the misconception of "common sense," results in employees (and sometime leadership) not seeing the value in a corporate ethics training program.

Introduction to ethics

The base of our cultural ethics training begins for most people at home. We are taught: (1) not to take things that do not belong to us; (2) not to lie when we have made a mistake; and (3) to help those who need help. This base is important to establish at a young age, when the ramifications of unethical behavior are relatively minor. Although, a young child may not feel it is minor, upon losing their dessert privileges after lying to their mother.

If this base is not solidified as we grow, and the situations become slightly more complicated, an adolescent will struggle more than those with a solid ethical base. It is during the adolescent years that we start to consider the level of harm within any given situation:

- "Who does it harm?"

- "How much does it harm them?"

- "Does it benefit me more than it harms someone else?"

These considerations form our second layer of ethics. In these years, there are likely greater consequences to ethical situations, and sometimes the consequences are greater than any adolescent should have to face. Building on from our earlier concepts, we learn to ask:

- "Is it ethical to cheat on a test?" It is your classmate who did not cover their answers and you would have come to the same answers anyway, since you studied together.

- "Is it ethical to tell an untruth so as to not hurt a friend's feelings?" Your friend does not have to know you think they were in the wrong; if they knew, they might not be nice to you anymore.

- "Is it ethical to stand by while a classmate gets picked on?" After all, *you* are not the one picking on them.

If individuals are not taught better ways and given the necessary tools to handle these scenarios before they arise, and if people are not corrected for their poor behavior, as a society we are only encouraging the growth into poor corporate ethics. We need to start teaching a solid ethics course in high school, not college where it is often only mandated for business students. If we can teach the lessons to address these exampled scenarios and the many other common situations adolescents find themselves in, our youth will be better positioned to handle the more complex corporate world.