

Ethikos Volume 36, Number 2. March 26, 2022 Pioneers in business ethics: Jeffrey M. Kaplan

Jeffrey M. Kaplan (jkaplan@kaplanwalker.com), JD, is a Partner with Kaplan & Walker LLP in Princeton, New Jersey, USA. Kaplan was interviewed by Joan Elise Dubinsky, JD.

A note on this series: In the last 40 years or so, an entirely new academic and occupational niche for practicing ethics in business has emerged. Many of the original academic business ethicists came to the field through philosophy, then brought their thinking and research into business schools. Many of the original practitioners came to the field through the law and remain close to the practice of law.

In an effort to preserve and share this knowledge and practical experience, the Center for Professional Responsibility in Business and Society at the University of Illinois Gies College of Business has filmed and transcribed the oral histories of these pioneers and early adopters. To date, almost 50 academics and practitioners have been interviewed, each with 25 years or more of experience in the field of business ethics. This series aims to provide a better understanding of how the business ethics field and profession have evolved over the decades, through the interviewees' own experiences. For more details on the series, contact Gretchen Winter (gwinter@illinois.edu), JD, the Center's executive director. This interview was condensed for clarity and brevity.

JD: Tell us a funny story about how you got started in ethics and compliance.

JK: About 30 years ago, I made a short video on this brand-spanking-new field of compliance and ethics. And I remember taking it home to my then-seven-year-old son, who thought I was so ridiculous that he laughed so hard that he couldn't breathe. I was that preposterous to him. But notwithstanding that welcome, I've stuck it out over the years, and I'm very glad I did.

JD: What's the rest of the story about how you got into this field?

JK: Since 2006, I've worked at a small law firm with my law partner, Rebecca Walker. We help companies develop and assess their compliance and ethics programs. So sometimes we are called in when the company is in trouble and they have to show the government that they're trying hard to stay out of further trouble. Sometimes, the board of directors wants a second set of eyes to tell them what is working and what isn't. Sometimes, we are asked to review a compliance program by the U.S. Department of Justice, Securities and Exchange Commission, World Bank, or United Nations. I hope to be doing it for a long time to come, and my son can laugh when he sees me 20 years from now.

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