

Memo

To: Writing 340 Students
From: Janna Wong Healy
Date: March 2, 2017
Re: **Business Ethics Assignment**

Learning Objectives

There are several objectives to this assignment:

- To get you thinking about business ethics;
- To help you make a difficult decision concerning business ethics;
- To communicate that message in a professional manner;
- To write two pieces of correspondence that deliver the same message in two different tones, to two different audiences.

Specifically, this assignment satisfies the following Learning Objectives from the Center for Management Communication: #1, #2, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10. And, it satisfies the following Marshal School Learning Goals: #3, #4, #5, #6.

Assignment

You are the CEO of a company that produces and markets a product or service in North America. (You may choose to use the company from A1 or you can deviate and select a company you see yourself working for in your future business career.) You become aware of a serious – potentially damaging – ethical problem in the company. You may have learned of this through an internal source (a whistleblower), an external source (a private individual or a watchdog group) or on your own. At the time of your discovery, the situation may already have been made public and/or discussed inside and/or outside of the company by individuals, groups or the media. Please note: the action was legal but unethical.

As CEO, you must make decisions about this ethical problem. After investigating, you might find the allegations of unethical practices are unfounded, in which case you would defend the company's current policies and practices and then offer amendments to existing policies to avoid any future charges of unethical behavior. Or, you might discover that a serious problem does exist and needs to be addressed. If this is the case, what will you do? Should you make changes to company policies? Make personnel changes? On top of making decisions that will save or rescue your company, part of your decision-making should include how best to avoid a repeat of this situation.

Whatever your decision, keep in mind that these changes could have significant financial or personnel repercussions to your company. But, if you don't make policy or personnel changes, you could be enabling your company to continue with its potentially unethical behavior. Before you act, you must also think about the following: How will your decision affect all the company's **stakeholders** (employees, stockholders, the public)? If it affects one side more positively than another, how will you explain the decision to each constituency?

So, first, you must **make decisions on how to proceed and position your responses**.

To get started, think back to the in-class writing assignment on crisis communication. Remember those steps:

- Identify and know your stakeholders.
- Assess the crisis situation.
- Position your response. Think about the following examples of categories for positioning:
 - Human error
 - Clerical error
 - Unauthorized procedures
 - Inadequate supervision
 - Inadequate quality control
 - Misuse of confidential information
 - Errors of judgment
 - Inadequate standard operating procedures
- Finalize and adapt your key message

Remember to analyze: Purpose, Audience, Content, Medium.

Then, **communicate your response to two different constituencies**. Your two pieces of communication can be in the form of a letter, memo and/or press release, depending upon your two audiences. Keep in mind that one constituency may be pleased with your decision while the other may be troubled by it. You must *write strategically*. For example, if you write a press release, think about what you can and cannot say to your intended audience.

As writing is a process, you must Analyze, Compose and Evaluate as necessary and proofread your final draft. This process should take weeks, not days.

Steps

- Select the company. Remember: you're the CEO and chief decision-maker.
- Create an ethical issue facing the company. **If you use a real company, the ethical dilemma should be fictional to this company.**
- Read up on ethical breaches.
- Think about how your ethical breach may affect the company and its stakeholders. Carefully consider the company's culture so that your decision falls in line with its history of decisions.
- Make a decision about what you should do about this breach.

- Determine the two audiences you will write to. Remember: they can be two different groups (one positively affected and one negatively affected by your decision); or, they can be two groups that are affected in the same way but belong to two different strata (executives and rank-and-file); or they can be an internal group (employees) and an external group (consumer advocacy group). The choice is yours...but who you're writing to must be clear in your two documents. Analyze each group carefully; figure out what will motivate and persuade each one. Don't neglect tone and style. (**Note:** For the purposes of this assignment, it's best to write to two very different audiences.)
- Write two documents explaining and justifying your decisions. These can be any combination of these three documents: memo, letter, press release. The format(s) will depend on the audiences you've chosen. **While the message to each constituency may be the same, each document must be strategically written for that specific audience, so the two documents must be different from each other.**

Specifics

- The two documents do not have to be the same length but together, they should be around three pages. Do not exceed 3½ pages.
- Use standard letter, memo and/or press release formats.
- This paper is worth 125 points, or 15.5% of your course grade.

Due Dates

Tues., Mar 7 **Roundtable.** Bring two copies of your Prewriting – one for you to write notes on and one for me to read. Your prewriting should contain your company, the ethical breach, the stakeholders involved, your decision(s) and what two audiences you'll be writing to.

Thurs., Mar 9 **Conferences.** To be held in ACC 403. A sign-up sheet will be posted to Google Docs a week before. Come with at least the first page of your assignment and an outline for the remainder. **Class is canceled on March 9 due to Conferences.**

Sun., Mar 19 **Email** your draft to your Peer Review group no later than 9:00 p.m.

Review drafts and fill out the worksheets from your group members in preparation for the Peer Review on Wednesday.

Tues., Mar 21 **In-Class Peer Reviews.** Come to class with copies of your group members' drafts and a Peer Review Worksheet for each draft that has already been filled out. Failure to participate in any component of the Peer Review process will result in a markdown of your final assignment by one-third grade.

All Worksheets should be delivered to the author of the paper, who will turn them in with his/her final draft. I will review the Worksheets and grade them on a scale of 5 (best) to 1.

Thurs., Mar 23 **Final Draft Due.** *Submissions of final drafts cannot be made by email.*

Hard Copy Deliverables:

- Final Draft
- Peer Review Worksheets

Electronic Deliverable:

- Electronic copy must be uploaded to Turnitin.com through BlackBoard before class begins.