



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Communicating Ethics

What goes up ultimately comes back down! Life is cyclical in nature and intent. Checking in on ethic-related beliefs and behaviors can be enriching to an organization. The following tips can help incorporate organizational ethics into day-to-day business or departmental activities:

Scrutinize. The underlying intention for establishing organizational ethics has to be examined. This will help resolve how and why to communicate ethical messages to employees.

Emphasize. Every organization has stories that demonstrate its ethics. For example, Nordstrom made a full refund to a man who returned his car tires. The organization does not even sell them. Ethics should be a part of the organizational mainstream. The positive effects of ethical behavior have to be communicated. The best way to do this is by modeling another person's rewarded behavior.

Demonstrate. Actions speak. Top management must demonstrate ethical behavior to inculcate ethics in their employees.

Standardize. Devise and develop guidelines and strategies that support ethical behavior. Ethics need to be translated into comprehensible actions, and these expectations have to be communicated to employees consistently.

Confer. Group discussions help find new ways of incorporating ethics effectively into the organizational mainstream. 'Dialogue' allows participants to share ideas and beliefs free of judgment and suppositions. Such discussions demonstrate respect for employees' differences and insecurities about the subject matter. They also throw light on the source of their beliefs around ethics. Engaging a skilled and objective facilitator for such discussions is a good idea.

Integrate. Ethics need to become an integral part of the business. Organizations need to "use ethics" in all their activities, including hiring, pricing products, providing service, and choosing clients.

Measure. Why should any employee comply with the organizational code of ethics? Link the behavior to performance, and change is not far.

Safe feedback. Unethical behavior has to be reported immediately. However, a safe feedback mechanism is required for this. Anonymous hotlines, suggestion boxes, or one-on-one meetings allow employees to provide such feedback without feeling threatened.

The above tips for communicating ethics are not customized. Any organizational communication program can be successful provided it is tailored to meet the unique needs of the organization