

## What is Business Ethics?

By Peter C. DeMarco

About thirty years ago, a hearty laugh would follow the combination of the words *military* and *intelligence*. “*That’s a contradiction in terms!*” was the reflexive reply, masking the scars that the atrocities of the Vietnam War had inflicted on the country.

No longer an option of last resort for young people, the military (according to surveys conducted by Harris and Forbes) is one of our most admired institutions. The modern warrior is a highly intelligent and effective ambassador of war *and* peace.

Today, the combination of the words *business* and *ethics* elicits more of a cry than a laugh. While the atrocities and stupidity of a few marred the reputation of the military in the past, the greed of many - consumers, bankers, politicians, and Wall Street titans to name a few - fueled the destructive forces of the Great Recession ravaging the country in the present.

Business, unlike the military, is not a profession. Anyone can go into business and participate in economic activity. To understand what business ethics really is, we need to explore this unique combination of words.

Business is economic activity and the science of economics is the study of how human beings actually behave in valuing and exchanging goods. Ethics, then, is the study of how human beings *ought* to behave in that same activity.

What a fascinating combination! Aligning what we *actually do* and what we *ought to do*. This is the essence of effective *ethical* leadership: getting your people to do what they ought to do.

Business ethics should be as powerful to your success as military intelligence is to victory on the battlefield today. You can’t win in the market without it!

Take our short four-question **EthicsPoll** and tell us what you think. Do your colleagues do what they ought to do? Your responses are completely anonymous and will remain so.

[Take our ethics poll here.](#)

Do you believe your colleagues *know the right thing* to do regardless of any type of training they have received on how things should be done?

- Yes
- No

Do you believe your colleagues are sufficiently trained to *do the right thing* in their work?

- Yes
- No

How often do your colleagues take *short-cuts or workarounds* that get the job done but do not comply with the company’s established procedures?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Never

Please state your level of agreement to the following statement: The leaders in my company set a clear and good example of *doing the right thing* for all employees to emulate.

- Agree
- Disagree

[See poll responses to-date here.](#)

To learn more about business ethics, join us for an exciting day on March 23rd, 2012 at St. John Fisher College for *Finding the Ethical Edge*. [Course details here](#)

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