Since I can remember, the term 'ethical' had no greater significance for me personally than understanding the distinction between right and wrong. As children we are told to treat others the way you wish to be treated because it's the right thing to do. You're taught not to lie because lying is wrong. And, you're praised for being honest because honesty is the right thing to do. Reflecting on my earliest experiences with ethicality, irony appears to reign in the way ethical behavior is initially introduced and fashioned. Today, I know that the simplicity depicted through the façade of knowing right versus wrong is merely a poor representation of the multifaceted and highly intricate reality of grasping moral character.

By way of exposure and personal reflection, I have consistently found integrity to be the chief attribute assigned to the individual possessing a strong moral compass. Traits such as honesty, forthrightness, candor, courage, wisdom, trust, selflessness, and doing what is right have at some point been conveyed as constituents of integrity. Regrettably, however, a universal standard for the evaluation of ethical behavior remains nonexistent. Thus, how would you know it, if you saw it? When confronted with the same scenario, what I believe to be right might conflict with the beliefs of another; in which case my belief of right may be another's belief of wrong. Consequently, determining which individual's right decision is actually the right decision, appears to be an impossible endeavor. Resolution of this predicament has bewildered me for some time. Fortunately, I have encountered some consistencies in my own development of core values. Personal values now serve as the basis for which I can evaluate each of my decisions, from the minute to the life directing, to the daily decisions confronted under varying emotions, across diverse environments, and through situational contexts. Understanding my values will remain a life-long process: perceived as essential, despite the unremitting effort required in order to do so.

In a similar manner, supplementary insights have allowed me to better hone my understanding of ethics and its relation to the workforce. Initially, I was perplexed upon learning that my graduate level Business Ethics course at Nazareth College would not include the customary course textbook requirement. Nonetheless, as the course progressed I gained access to myriads of distinctive moral theories, case studies, and varying bits of wisdom from different individuals, a few of which have personally resonated to a greater degree than the rest. One literary piece suggests that integrity, requires three components: "(1) *discerning* what is right and what is wrong; (2) *acting* on what you have discerned, even at a personal cost; and (3) *saying openly* that you are acting on your understanding of right from wrong" (Carter, p. 7, 1996). This depiction of integrity has become invaluable to my own decision-making. Something I continue to struggle with is communicating why I have already chosen, or am currently choosing, to make a decision when a scenario involves a right versus right dilemma rather than a right versus wrong. When a situation calls for compromise between two cherished values, the process of moral reflection is much more convoluted, and the ultimate decision is never easily attained. Nevertheless, I am now at a point in my life where I can say with confidence that having to make compromises between two rights does not mean that I have not lived up to a value and must exclude it from my beliefs. It simply means that I am aware of the challenges that many individuals will face throughout their lives. The process of moral reflection must be taken with the utmost care, and I must have the courage not to be ashamed of voicing that I have made a decision based upon my understanding of right from wrong.

Ultimately, there is no difference between individual ethics and business ethics. As in any prevailing relationship, trust is the currency of exchange, built overtime and as something earned not taken. The highest level of trust is created through acts of caring,

commitment, clarity, and consistency; and it is as difficult, if not more difficult, to regain than it is to sustain after having been established in the first place. Great leaders know that they are being evaluated not only by everything they do and say, but also by what the fail to do and say. Trust, as a product of ethical behavior, becomes essential to organizational leadership because, as was inferred above, even the most consistently moral individuals will face situations in which a decision requires a compromise between values.

I now understand why my Business Ethics course required no specific textbook. Ethics is not something that can be forced upon anyone. Moral character is not something that can be taught by the words and practices of a singular text, it is something learned that is continuously evolving throughout the duration of one's life. You cannot simply teach someone what they ought to believe; this is a personal journey, a life-long endeavor, and one that has no distinct finish line. This is not something to be discouraged by, this is something we can all grow from, by providing one another with our own unique insight, helping each other prosper as we gain access to decision processes that are distinct to the individual. Offering others with the awareness of, and exposure to, the myriads of discrete moral practices, including scenarios encountered in the workforce, allows each individual to further explore and evaluate their own beliefs and values. Just as a poor work ethic has the ability to rub off on those around us, a great work ethic is contagious too and has the ability to create results far above and beyond the deep trenches formed by a poor working climate.

A unique component of ethical behavior is that it requires courage, and it has the ability to foster a catalytic reaction in those around it. In a world where conformity and displaced blame are constantly available to modify ones decisions, creating an atmosphere infused by ethical behavior can significantly alter organizational performance.

History has shown that conformity can foster detrimental results; however, when the desired behavior begins at the top, with the ethical behavior of leadership, conforming no longer requires one to follow the crowd. It requires one to act in accordance with strong values, bearing mind that, even in the midst of adversity, one always has a choice; and the right choice may not be the same as that of the person sitting in the cubicle next to you. Furthermore, when voicing your own beliefs and standing strong in your convictions, a stronger type of conformity is created, a conformity that is woven tightly together by trust, courage, respect, selflessness, and candor, rather then that which is knit together by threads of fear, cowardliness, disdain, egocentrism, and insincerity. The organization that maintains conventionality through consistent ethical behavior is the organization that nurtures a diverse environment of disciplined thought and action by way of moral reflection, which in turn produces unparalleled greatness.