

January 30th, 2023

Ethics: A Conveniently Used Word.

As a child growing up, I learned at a tender age that ethics is important because it helps individuals and society as a whole to determine what is right and wrong behavior. It provides a framework for making moral decisions and determining how to act in various situations. Without a clear understanding of ethics, we often tend to make decisions that harm others or are detrimental to society. Before having an educational understanding of ethics, I had a basic knowledge of what felt right and what felt wrong and responded accordingly. Due to a religious upbringing, my siblings and I were often told to be honest and upstanding because “God is watching.” My fear of a supreme being watching my every move prompted me to engage in ethical behaviors and practices. We were also often told to be honest and upstanding because God would not welcome us into heaven. As I grew up, I became more aware of how ethics contributes to building trust and establishing positive relationships between individuals and groups. When people and organizations act ethically, they are more likely to be viewed positively by others and to have solid and stable relationships. Moreover, I found that people gravitated to me because of my reputation for fairness and integrity; so, whenever a dispute arises between family or friends, I'm usually the one to provide honest feedback. Furthermore, having a solid ethical foundation helps in promoting a sense of personal and professional integrity. It allows people to understand their values and make decisions that align with those values.

Ethics, in my view, means doing the right thing when everyone around me feels comfortable doing what is wrong. I've always encountered situations that raised questions of

ethics and the right choices that should be made in these challenging encounters. One ethical issue I faced that stuck with me was my encounter with the question of privacy and data security in the context of using and safeguarding sensitive information. When I lived in Trinidad and Tobago, I worked in the optical industry and trained on a vast amount of data, including personal information such as names, addresses, and private medical history. While working at this establishment, the estranged wife of a man who was a customer at our office came to me asking for personal information on her husband. Amid a bitter divorce, she wanted to know where he lived to get in touch with him. In her attempt to appeal to my womanly emotions, the wife sat me down and told me everything horrible her husband had done to her. It was her way of justifying why I should give her the confidential information that her husband had entrusted me and the organization I represented.

Author Simon Blackburn, in his book entitled, *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, states that ethics “determines our conception of what is due to us, and what is due from us as we relate to others. It shapes our emotional responses determining what is a cause of pride or shame, or anger or gratitude, or what can be forgiven or what cannot.” This request raised important ethical questions about emotional responses and the responsible use of personal data and the potential for it to be misused. Acting on emotions could have allowed me to give sensitive pieces of information that are included in our data systems, and anyone gaining free access to it can exploit someone with malicious intent. In this case, it was a man’s wife trying to gather information on her soon-to-be ex-husband to have “one up” on him in a court battle. The wife pleaded with me, using the “women must stick together” tactics because “many women go through these similar experiences.” By appealing to my emotions, she hoped to elicit my agreement and provide her with the information she needed. The experiences she told me about

made me want to help her. When you have family and friends who went through similar encounters, you know how extremely triggering receiving information as this can be.

Ethics, in my opinion, goes hand-in-glove with morals. As mentioned earlier, I've been raised in a religious household where my religious beliefs aid in determining what is right and wrong or good and bad. We often separate the two, however; I see morals and ethics serving as our personal guide to navigating us in the right direction when situations seem complex. Though I understood where the wife's situation after she explained what she went through with her husband, I stopped and wondered what is the ethical thing to do. Do I give her the information she needed because I had gone through similar situations, as well as many women I know? Or do I maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the husband's data in the system? I thought about it, and I knew that with a simple click of a button, the wife could have all the information she needed, and no one would know that I was the one who provided her with the information.

It is easy to act unethically when you are 99 % sure you can get away with the act without anyone knowing it was you. In my thoughts, this woman has gone through enough, and the least I can do is make her divorce experience easier than what other women have gone through in court battles. Providing her with his confidential information guaranteed her a positive outcome in court and according to her, I would also be "handsomely compensated for my services." Anyone who is struggling financially and faced with this situation knows that this is like hitting the jackpot, especially when you need financial relief from outstanding debt. The 'handsome compensation' would pay off the outstanding bills I had, as I didn't see any other way to obtain finance to pay them off. This incident is where my ethical dilemma arose. I stopped and thought about it for a minute. But, amid my thinking, I remembered the ethical upbringing I received growing up. I knew that it would be a 'win' for one woman if I gave her the

information, while additionally being a win for me because I can have my outstanding bills covered. On the other hand, the husband entrusted me and the organization I worked at, with the security of his information. As much as I understood the wife's issues and I was on the fence about what decision I should make, I decided not to provide her with the information she sought. Though I got a tongue lashing from her, I knew I made the right decision even when I knew I could have gotten away with it.

A few months later, after deciding not to provide the wife with the information she requested, I was promoted to 'manager of the branch' and got a raise in salary that helped me pay all my bills with ease and still had money left over for shopping. Who knows, if I had taken the compensation from the wife, I would probably only obtained the finances to pay my bills for that moment alone. However, making an ethical decision allowed me to not only pay my bills for one moment in time but to comfortably pay my bills every month in the future of my employment with the company. Sometimes, out of desperation, we make rushed decisions because at that moment in time, it would have facilitated our needs for 'right now.' Doing the ethical thing tends to be a challenge for many people due to quick gratification or someone believing they have no other options available to them. I believe the universe orchestrates things in our favor when we do good in society. We may not all believe in a supreme being, but I believe that when you put good energy out into the atmosphere, it returns ten times more than we can ever imagine. Ethics is the fundamental aspect of human life, and it is the roadmap that guides our interactions with each other daily.

I've often heard the saying "politics have its morals and ethics of its own," and I've noticed that some politicians often get away with unethical practices. In a 2021 news article by CNN entitled "*Chronicling Trump's 10 worst abuses of power,*" the news site listed the top 10

worse unethical behaviors that the 45th President had engaged in. The article states that the former president subverted the 2020 election, incited an insurrection, politicized the justice department, obstructed the Mueller investigation, and fired whistleblowers and truth-tellers just to name a few. All of these accusations are filled with unethical practices that the world gets to see on display. The image of the entire cabinet has been tarnished by one person who had one of the highest esteems of being president. The same article states, “there has been real damage to expertise across the government. The civil servants have to be able to speak honestly without fear of being fired unless they’ve done something wrong,” said Kim Scheppele, a professor at Princeton University whose research focuses on the collapse of constitutional governments. “Why would anyone want to go into the public sector anymore?” This quote reiterates my point that one person’s unethical behavior can bring the entire organization’s ethics into question. Citizens are more inclined to believe information delivered by the government because there is trust that they will put the country first. People lose trust in individuals whose names are constantly brought up in unethical practices, raising the question of whether they are telling the truth or lying.

Unethical behavior does not only happen in America; worldwide we have seen large and small countries make headlines for unethical governance. The cause for concern is the rampant way unethical behavior is taking place in governmental offices. In 2014, back in my home country of Trinidad and Tobago, a big scandal erupted after an audit revealed that corruption was evident within a government-funded program. In one of Trinidad and Tobago’s local newspapers, “Trinidad Express,” an article dated January 18th, 2020, states, “...a number of persons from the Ministry of Sport, the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago and contractor companies associated with the delivery of the LifeSport Programme were involved in various conspiracies

to misappropriate funds allocated to the programme for their own use and benefit.” It further went on to say that “a significant portion of those funds are alleged to have been misappropriated by many individuals at all levels of the programme. This includes a number of high-ranking public officials allegedly tunnelling millions of dollars out of the programme to purchase real estate, boats, vehicles, and to fund weddings, amongst other things.” A total amounting to 34 million Trinidad and Tobago dollars has been unaccounted for, and to date, no government minister has been arrested for the crime. How appalling can this be; it proves that unethical behavior becomes easier to engage in when people know they can get away with it. In the world’s corruption index, a small country such as Trinidad and Tobago ranked 40th most corrupt in 2020 and 41st in 2021.

Reflecting on these issues has taught me that ethical considerations are important and regardless of how relatable a situation can seem, doing the right thing is paramount. It is easy to act unethically if the effects of that decision are not directly affecting you or if you are aware that you can get away with it. It has also reminded me of the importance of being transparent about the data used and taking steps to protect individuals' privacy and security. As much as I wanted to help and support another woman like myself, ethics trumps scoring winning points in the battle between men and women. In addition, it has taught me to be aware of the potential consequences of my actions, and to consider how my work could impact society. Oftentimes we make impulse decisions when we know we are not directly affected by it or we justify the action by solidifying that ‘everyone is doing it.’ It has also made me think about how easy it is to make a ‘simple’ decision that can change the dynamics of a situation, and how the ethical implications of that change are considered. If I had subjected myself to the wife’s request, maybe the man

could have found out that the information was released from my company and this would have put the entire organization's image and reputation into disrepute.

These ethical issues have highlighted the importance of taking a broader societal perspective when utilizing advanced data technologies as well as taking an oath of office. When we observe government organizations and how easily confidential data disseminates across social media platforms, it is a cause for concern about the ethical practices of people we put in authority. Furthermore, it reminds me that ethical considerations are a continuous process that needs monitoring regularly. Notwithstanding that integrity and the client's well-being are all ensured by professional ethics. For example, in the medical field, ethics ensure that the well-being of the patient is put above any financial gain for the provider. In the medical field ethics also ensure that you treat every patient fairly regardless of race, creed, and color. Oftentimes medical institutions are 'called-out' on the News and other social media platforms for biases against patients. Numerous times I have seen people on social media complaining about the different levels of treatment they would receive as opposed to someone of a different race or financial status. Lately, too many business organizations are having to make PR statements when their company is highlighted for engaging in unethical practices. Only when this occurs, businesses then decide that they will train, or depending on the severity of the incident, terminate the staff to act as though they have zero tolerance for unethical behaviors. In business, ethics also ensure the fair treatment of all employees and fair business practices throughout all organizations.

When making an ethical decision, it is important to consider the potential consequences of our actions and how they will affect everyone involved. Furthermore, we must also take into consideration these moral principles it is important to consider values, such as autonomy,

nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice. Unethical practices can also lead to a loss of trust and credibility, personally and for the organization or group with which one is affiliated. Furthermore, seeking out the perspectives of others and considering any relevant legal or professional guidelines can be beneficial. It is also important to reflect on your own biases or values that might influence your decision. The short-term gain made from unethical practices is not worth tarnishing one's character and moral upbringing. Things may seem simple in our own eyes but we barely touch the surface of the implications and effects they can have on others.

One important aspect of ethics is the concept of moral responsibility. The consequences of one's actions should be considered and acted upon in a manner consistent with one's values and beliefs. This often involves weighing the potential benefits and harms of a particular course of action and making decisions that will cause the least harm or the greater good. Another key aspect of ethics is the idea of integrity. This idea means that individuals and organizations should be honest and transparent in their actions and be held accountable for their behavior. This includes being truthful in communication and being willing to admit their mistakes when they occur. Further to this, ethics is also about fairness and justice. It requires treating others with respect and kindness and avoiding discrimination, bias, and prejudice. It also encompasses the idea of reciprocity, which is about treating others how we would like to be treated. It is, however, important to note that ethics is not always a straightforward process. There are often competing values and perspectives, and ethical dilemmas can be complex and challenging to navigate. In these situations, individuals and organizations may need to seek guidance from experts, such as ethicists or legal professionals, to make the best possible decision.

In conclusion, ethics is important because it helps individuals, organizations, and society to make decisions that are in the best interest of all involved. It helps to build trust, establish

positive relationships and promote integrity. It also helps to ensure that the industry and its clients are treated fairly and with respect. Many of us face ethical dilemmas daily and it is important to note that engaging in unethical practices for personal or professional gain does not always result in a better situation. I am not going to sit here and act like being ethical is easy because it is not. We are often faced daily with ethical dilemmas that sometimes get the best of us. There were instances where I faced situations and chose not to be ethical about them because I allowed my emotions to get the better of me. However, by acknowledging that there are areas in ourselves that need improvement, dealing with issues becomes easier. I vividly recall my high school teacher saying, "be ethical, even if your body shakes while doing it." Ethics has always been a crucial aspect of human behavior and decision-making. It guides individuals and organizations to act in ways that are responsible, fair, and just, and to strive for the greater good. It is an ever-evolving concept that is constantly redefining as a society and the world at large continue to change. In the words of Potter Stewart, the former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, "ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do."

Works Cited

Blackburn, Simon. *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Cohen, Marshall, and Alberto Mier. "Chronicling Trump's 10 worst abuses of power." *CNN*, 24

January 2021,

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/24/politics/trump-worst-abuses-of-power/index.html>.

Accessed 22 January 2023.

"LifeSport probe: Cops looking at ex-govt officials." *Trinidad Express*, 19 July 2020,

https://trinidadexpress.com/news/local/lifesport-probe-cops-looking-at-ex-govt-officials/article_2a61d7d8-c95e-11ea-a041-53462683ec58.html. Accessed 22 January 2023.

"Most Corrupt Countries 2023." *World Population Review*,

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-corrupt-countries>. Accessed

22 January 2023.

