

Excellence through Ethics™

Session 8

Ethical Decisions During Unexpected Events



Elementary School



Junior Achievement®



Excellence through Ethics

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Session 8

Ethical Decisions During Unexpected Events

Content: Ethics and Business Decisions

Methods: Scenarios and Group Work

JA Foundational Pillars: Ethics, Work Readiness, and Entrepreneurship

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Acknowledgements

Sponsorship

JA Worldwide® (Junior Achievement) gratefully acknowledges Deloitte & Touche USA LLP for its commitment to the development and implementation of the supplementary program *Excellence through Ethics*. JA Worldwide appreciates its relationship with Deloitte & Touche USA LLP to develop and implement vital and innovative programs designed to foster ethical decision-making skills.

Ethical Decisions During Unexpected Events

Overview

Students look at how various unexpected events can affect their business. Their responses to those events can have positive or negative consequences. They learn to distinguish ethical and unethical business decisions by asking themselves questions that guide the decision-making process.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Discuss how various unexpected events can have a positive or a negative effect on businesses.
- Distinguish ethical and unethical business decisions.
- Recognize short- and long-term effects of ethical and unethical business decisions.
- Determine that ethical conduct is the responsibility of business owners and employees.

Preparation

Review the activity. Prepare the necessary copies and session materials. Separate the sheet into What If? Events, cutting along the dotted lines.

Group work is incorporated into this session. You may consult with the teacher to determine how best to form the groups and assign group roles.

Post Key Terms and definitions in a visible place.

- **Ethics:** The standards that help determine what is good, right, and proper.
- **Ethical:** Acting upon the standards that help determine what is good, right, and proper.
- **Unethical:** Acting against the standards that help determine what is good, right, and proper.

Recommended Time

This session typically takes 45 minutes to complete. Ask the teacher to help you keep track of time.

Materials

- What If? Events (1 copy)
- Group Response Sheet (1 per group)
- Paper or plastic bags (1 per group)

Presentation

Introduction (5 minutes)

Greet the students.

Explain to students that usually businesses, like people, act in ways that are helpful and responsible. Write the word “ethical” on the board. Ask students if they can define the term. Ethical means acting upon the standards that help determine what is good, right, and proper.

Ask students to name some ethical actions they would expect from businesses. Write these examples on the board under “ethical”. Answers should include treating employees equally and fairly; preserving the environment; advertising goods and services honestly; and reporting profits and losses accurately.

Activity

Ethical Decision-Making (15 minutes)

Now, write the term “unethical” on the board. Define **unethical** as the opposite of ethical. It means **acting against the standards that help determine what is good, right, and proper**. Businesses that do not treat their employees fairly; waste resources; lie about their products and services; or lie about their profits and losses are considered unethical. Write these examples on the board under “unethical”.

Tell students that people must behave ethically for their business to succeed. Many businesses have ethics policies that guide employees in making the right decisions. When employees are faced with ethical dilemmas, they can ask themselves the following questions to help guide their decision-making:

- Is my action illegal or unethical?
- Am I being fair and honest?
- Will I be proud or embarrassed to tell my decision to my family, friends, or co-workers?
- Will I be able to sleep soundly tonight?
- Do I want to see my actions reported on the front page of a newspaper?
- Could someone’s life, health, or safety be endangered by my action?
- Does the intended action appear inappropriate?

It is important that owners, managers, and workers demonstrate ethical behavior if a business is to succeed.

Next, explain that sometimes unexpected events can have a profound effect on a business. These events could have short- or long-term effects. Even if the event is unexpected, how we react and the decisions we make are very important; our business could be affected for years to come.

Ask students to name some events that may affect a business. Possible answers include:

- You discover that one of your major suppliers uses “sweatshop” labor. If you stop buying from this supplier, how will it affect the price of your product?
- A needed component in your product skyrockets in price. Do you raise the price of your product proportionally, or find a cheaper substitute that may not be as safe?

Discuss with students the short- and long-term effects of these examples.

Activity

“What If?” Events (20 minutes)

Tell students that today they will discuss a series of unexpected business events. As part of this process, groups must make decisions that affect the success of their business. Explain that each group will receive a business scenario card to discuss. Each group must consider its situation and develop a written response to the question.

Separate the class into six groups. Distribute the Group Response Sheets. Ask each group to decide the name for its business; assign someone to be the recorder; and have the group recorder write the business name on the Group Response Sheet. Give each group a “What If?” Event. Tell students they will review their card and then, as a group, decide how to react to the scenario described.

Excellence through Ethics

Tell students that after they've decided how to respond to the scenario, they must develop a written response. Explain that the group recorder should record the group's response on the Group Response Sheet. Together with the class, review the questions at the top of the Group Response Sheet. Remind students to think about these questions as they decide how to respond to the "What If?" scenario. Tell students that they will have 15 minutes to complete their discussion and write their response. Begin the discussions.

Have the teacher assist you as you walk around the room to answer questions. Be prepared to discuss with students the short- and long-term effects of the unexpected events and the decisions the business owners are required to make. When time is called, ask the recorders to read aloud their group's (business's) response to the scenarios. Using the questions provided on the Group Response Sheet, determine as a class if each group's response is ethical or unethical. Provide groups the opportunity to defend their responses. Following each discussion, ask the class to vote if the response is ethical or unethical. Tell groups they will receive 10 points for an ethical response and zero points for an unethical response. Have recorders note the group score on the Group Response Sheet. Re-emphasize that in life, their decisions and actions have consequences. Would they have made any decisions differently in the scenarios after the scores were tallied?

Summary and Review (5 minutes)

Briefly review the vocabulary introduced in the session.

Ask students to consider how the responses to these unexpected events could have a positive or negative impact on a business.

Thank the students for their participation.

Session Outline

Introduction

- Greet the students.
- Tell them that during today’s session, they will learn how an individual or business’ response to unexpected events could have short- and long-term effects on the business.

Activity

- Explain how the “What If?” Events work.
- Separate the class into six groups. Explain that each group represents a business. Give each group a “What If?” Event.
- Have groups decide how to react to the situation described on the card and develop a written response. Each group should use ethical guidelines to make its decision.
- After time has expired, have each group discuss its response and, as a class, vote on whether the response is ethical or unethical.

Summary and Review

- Review the Key Terms for the session.
- Review how an individual or business’ response to unexpected events could have short- and long-term effects on the business.
- Stress that it is important that owners, managers, and workers demonstrate ethical behavior if a business is to succeed.
- Thank the students for their participation.

Group Response Sheet

Business Name: _____

Remember to keep the following questions in mind as your group decides how to react to each scenario:

- Is my action illegal or unethical?
- Am I being fair and honest?
- Will I be proud or embarrassed to tell my family, friends, or co-workers my decision?
- Will I be able to sleep soundly tonight?
- Do I want to see my action reported on the front page of the newspaper?
- Could someone's life, health, or safety be endangered by my action?
- Does the intended action appear appropriate?

Group response:

Group score: _____

“What If?” Events

Sometimes unexpected events occur over which a company has little or no control. However, good ethics should always guide our decision-making in response to these events.



1. The state has just issued new safety standards to help prevent accidents. Complying with the new standards will be expensive. What do you do?

2. A competitor opens a larger store near yours. How do you compete with the new store?

3. The Better Business Bureau catches your marketing manager using dishonest advertising. Sales drop sharply as customers buy elsewhere. How do you regain your customers' trust?

4. Your boss tells you to make sure that your financial reports are accurate. You hire an independent accounting firm to check your company's books. The firm uncovers mistakes that you made. How do you handle the mistakes?

5. Your supplier lied about the quality of his company's product, and your customers are angry. You complain to your supplier, but he does nothing to help you. How do you respond to your customers?

6. After several quarters of declining sales, profits now are up. As a business, what do you do with the additional money?

Appendix

Welcome to Junior Achievement's

Excellence through Ethics

As a Junior Achievement (JA) volunteer or teacher, you are joining other teachers and volunteers from across the United States in providing students with a unique educational experience. Junior Achievement's *Excellence through Ethics* offers students learning opportunities to share knowledge and information regarding ethics in business. JA strives to show students how business works, and to better evaluate organizations that conduct their operations in the right way.

Excellence through Ethics is designed to equip volunteers and teachers with supplemental, ethics-based activities for use with JA in-class programs for grades four through twelve. All these activities provide students with current and essential information about business ethics.

These activities are designed to reinforce students' knowledge and skills, teach them how to make ethical decisions, assist them in learning to think critically, and help them to be better problem-solvers. All the activities are hands-on, interactive, and group-focused to present the material to students with the best instructional methods.

Within these supplements, you will find sections to help you effectively implement the activities in your volunteer experience. Materials include: (a) an introductory discussion of business ethics, marketplace integrity, and the growing capacity of students for ethical decision-making; (b) activities and student materials that connect to and expand current classroom-based Junior Achievement programs; and (c) a functional glossary of terms relating to a wide spectrum of ethics, quality, service, and social responsibility considerations in business.

JA greatly appreciates your support of these important and exciting activities. If you have comments about the *Excellence through Ethics* program content, curriculum, and/or instruction, please access <http://studentcenter.ja.org.aspx/LearnEthics/> and choose the "*Excellence through Ethics* Survey" link located in the middle of the page.

Appendix

Introduction and Overview

- *How do I do the right thing in this situation?*
- *Should I be completely honest, even if it puts others in jeopardy?*
- *What kind of community do we want to be?*
- *How do we do what's best for the long term?*
- *Who should cover the cost of "doing the right thing"?*

These are all questions having to do with business ethics. They are valid and necessary questions, and good business people have asked them for generations. They form the backdrop of vital discussions as business, community, and political leaders grapple with significant issues. Many students would ask these questions, even if Junior Achievement hadn't developed this ethics curriculum.

Business Ethics Discussions Are Here To Stay

Business ethics has been in the spotlight for much of the past decade, especially as examples of wrongdoing come to light in the media. New technologies and international competitive pressures cause a steady focus on the question, "Is it possible to be competitively successful in business today and still operate in an honest and ethical manner?" The past decade has seen individuals search for deeper personal meaning in the workplace, which has contributed to lively ethics discussions in the business realm. For these reasons, the discussion of business ethics is not a passing fad; it's here to stay.

Many graduate schools of business have either required ethics coursework or integrated ethics principles throughout all areas of study. That is commendable. We believe this vital area of exposure and instruction also should happen at earlier ages and continue throughout the students' educational journey. Many of today's students haven't had access to a well-rounded education in economics and free enterprise or have come to see these in a very negative light. They have limited awareness of the extent to which good business leaders engage in the challenging exercises of ethical decision-making amid heavy competitive pressures. As students learn the general principles of economics and business, it's critical that these be underpinned with a strong foundation in ethics. This will accentuate the best in American business traditions, while laying the groundwork for students' continued evolution into future generations of leaders.

Integrity in the Marketplace?

Many adults and young people choose to believe that the marketplace is driven only by greed. They view it as bringing out only the worst in human behavior, demoralizing the human spirit, and driving out any sense of idealism. While elements of greed and extreme self-interest among some individuals cannot be denied, solid research has shown time and again that companies with a long-term focus on ethics and a broad consideration of stakeholders' interests are much more profitable than those lacking such a focus.

James A. Autry, in his book *Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership*, said it well: "I do not doubt the presence of greed in the marketplace because I do not doubt the presence of greed in people. But, I also do not doubt the ennobling aspects of work, of the workplace, of the community, of endeavor, of

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the marketplace. So I choose to believe that most of the marketplace is driven by people who want to do good work for others and for themselves.”

Excellence through Ethics accepts the challenge of educating youth in the basics of economics and business while establishing a positive balance on the side of well-informed, ethical business practice. This may appear to place a heavy burden on Junior Achievement volunteers, who are not trained ethics experts. The following informational pages will not turn you into an ethics expert. That’s not what we’re striving for here. What students need most is meaningful interaction with people who are willing to engage in a discussion of these vital issues.

Lively Practitioners Rather Than Dry Theorists

This program is more about day-to-day ethics practice than the nuances of ethics theory. Some believe that working in business requires a disconnect from one’s personal ethics. We do not believe this is the case. Students need to know that what they learn about fairness and honesty in general also applies to business. While business ethics may address some specific areas of business practice, it’s not a separate and distinct specialty to be set apart from the general ethical principles that apply in other areas of life. Young people need to encounter the wisdom of age and experience that volunteers bring to the classroom.

Students’ Growing Capacity for Ethical Decision-Making

Excellence through Ethics is designed to foster discussions at the appropriate level for each age group. The curriculum developers have designed the ethics activities with sensitivity to student’s mental maturity. At the late elementary and middle-grades levels, students’ capacities for ethical reasoning tend toward good personal behavior as determined by adult rules and authority. In relationships, personal trust, loyalty, and respect are of paramount importance. For these students, corporate ethical behavior is viewed in much the same light as their own personal behavior: it’s governed by rules.

As students advance into high school, their ethical decision-making moves into the larger arena of social contracts and systems that guide and govern societal and group behavior. Here the rationality and utility of laws are scrutinized, as students become more capable of higher-ordered, principled thinking. Students are increasingly aware of the diversity of values among different cultures and communities. At this level, students’ capacities for processing the complex, ethical dilemmas that may be encountered in business are greatly enhanced.

You will gain confidence as you come to realize that conducting a robust, provocative discussion with students is more important than “having the right answer.” The activities have been designed to leave room for lively discussion and multiple points of view. Having the courage to share your own experiences is very valuable to students.

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You don't have to apologize for the excesses students may see in business. Don't assume responsibility for actions that are not your own, and do not try to defend the indefensible. While accentuating the fact that most businesses operate ethically, it's okay to scrutinize the unethical players in the marketplace who give business in general a bad name.

Continuing Education

Teaching this material to students will no doubt strengthen and enhance your own ethics awareness and continuing education. Some students will challenge your best reasoning capacities. Having your own support network of professional colleagues with whom you can share and discuss some of these issues is very valuable. It's also helpful to seek out colleagues with philosophical views that differ from your own. This serves as a valuable "cross-pollination" function because you will be able to understand and discuss a variety of views with students, as well as share students' perspectives with your colleagues. In this way, everyone learns.

Finally, please be assured that your contributions here have tremendous value to students and will serve to upgrade business ethics in the future. We're dealing with the future generation of leaders in their formative years. We can take pride in the fact that we've had a hand in shaping the very people who will be responsible for business ethics and social responsibility in the future.

Appendix

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Many educators, economists, businesspeople, and consultants have contributed to the development of *Excellence through Ethics*. We would like to acknowledge the following individuals and groups for their efforts, creative talents, and support in creating these materials:

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Appendix

Excellence through Ethics Evaluation

Junior Achievement has discontinued all paper versions of program surveys. However, we greatly appreciate your comments and feedback about *Excellence through Ethics*. Please help us improve the quality of *Excellence through Ethics* by sharing your comments through our new online survey process. The online survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

If you have comments about the *Excellence through Ethics* program content, curriculum, and/or instruction, please access <http://studentcenter.ja.org/asp/LearnEthics/> and choose the *Excellence through Ethics* Survey link located in the middle of the page.

Thank you for participating in JA!



Excellence through Ethics Volunteer Survey

1. Including this session, how many individual sessions of Excellence through Ethics have you presented? _____

2. Do you feel that the students were engaged through this session?
 - A. Not at all
 - B. Somewhat engaged
 - C. Engaged
 - D. Very Engaged
 - E. Unsure

3. Do you feel the session was relevant to students?
 - A. Not relevant
 - B. Somewhat relevant
 - C. Relevant
 - D. Very relevant
 - E. Unsure

4. Do you feel students are more prepared to make ethical decisions after participating in this session?
 - A. Significantly more prepared
 - B. Somewhat more prepared
 - C. Somewhat less prepared
 - D. Significantly less prepared
 - E. Unsure

5. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being excellent), how would you rate the overall quality of the Excellence through Ethics session? _____

6. After this JA experience, how likely are you to volunteer for JA again?
 - A. More likely to volunteer
 - B. Less likely to volunteer
 - C. No more or less likely to volunteer
 - D. Unsure

7. What comments or suggestions do you have regarding the overall session (including format, content, etc.)?

Optional: City _____

State _____ Country _____

Email _____

Excellence through Ethics Student Survey

1. What grade are you in? _____

2. Please fill in the circle that best describes how you feel about the following statements.
There is no right or wrong answer.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| This topic is very important. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am able to apply what I learned in this session to the real world. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The activities were interesting. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I learned something about ethics from this session. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

3. Do you feel more prepared to make ethical decisions after participating in this session?

- A. Significantly more prepared
- B. Somewhat more prepared
- C. Somewhat less prepared
- D. Significantly less prepared
- E. Unsure

4. I saw someone at my job taking money from the cash register, I would:

- A. Ask someone I trust what I should
- B. Tell a supervisor
- C. Talk to the person taking the money
- D. Do nothing
- E. Not sure

5. To help us better understand who you are, please answer the following questions: How do you describe your ethnicity (family background)? (Fill in all that apply)

- A. African American
- B. Asian American
- C. Latino (a) or Chicano (a)
- D. European American (white)
- E. Native American
- F. Other – how do you identify yourself? _____

6. Do you have any additional comments regarding this session?

Optional: City _____ State _____ Country _____