

X – X-Ray Vision – The Board’s Need For  
Transparency

Building An Ethical Culture

## **Building an Ethical Culture in an Organization**

by Shirlene Courtis, Pollution Probe May 27, 1995 Canadian Fund Raiser

Poor moral behaviour seems rampant in society, witness recent insider trading scandals, The United Way; Covenant House, and political scandals ----all of them moral issues. In fact, says Neal Davis, Vice-president for Development and Public Affairs, Heidelberg College, Tiffin, Ohio, we often fail to communicate what ethics and moral behaviour is acceptable.

According to Dr. Davis, the high turnover of professional development staff, (the average tenure of a development director today is 18 months), is rarely due to poor performance or because they lack technical skills. Rather, due to ethical reasons; expectations from boards, or their own actions, these development executives are perceived to have negative impacts on donors, clients and trustees.

### ***Doing the right things***

Davis' prescription, no matter the time costs, keep your door open. You will be perceived as approachable. Include staff from all levels in discussions; have unscheduled and informal luncheons with staff and trustees; be involved in your church and community.

Dr. Davis cited a Guideline for Living created by Herbert J. Taylor, Vice-president of the Jewel Tea Company in Toronto, who was elected to head the near-bankrupt Club Aluminum Products Company. He told employees to ask these four questions related to all aspects of their dealings with customers, suppliers, and each other:

1. Is it the truth?
  
2. Is it fair to all concerned?

3. Will it build goodwill and better friendships?

4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Taylor went on to add other absolutes:

- People support what they help create.
- People should learn to treat people as people.
- If you do what you've always done, you will get what you've always got
- Our challenge is to be both ambitious and supportive

### **Our lifestyles set the tone**

The real secret to building an ethical culture in an organization and in managing the moral life in the workplace, is to focus only on one thing; development of trust. Dr. Paul Pribbenow, Vice-president for Institutional Advancement, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, stressed that a commitment from the top and specific policy guidance are essential in creating a moral culture. He agreed that we can lead by doing. Our life styles, both inside and outside of the workplace, develop the trust and set the moral tone which will be reflected by those around us.

We can shift attitudes by paying attention to those around us, encouraging independence, taking ownership of job tasks and thinking through solutions. We are now expected to do more with less. We must work at shifting attitudes from overcoming a perspective of scarcity to one of abundance. Rather than bemoaning the fact that we have fewer staff or technical resources, take stock of your existing resources. It may surprise you to see how abundant things are. Encourage this attitude among your staff.

Pribbenow urges development professionals to hone their language and education skills, and reward moral behaviour of staff. Write an Ethics Statement for your

organization, with input from staff and trustees. Read a book or an article together and discuss the moral issues. Establish an Ethics Committee. Use simulations or role plays to "practice" moral thinking and behaviour.