QUICK TIPS – *ETHICS*

I have been invited to deliver the Keynote Speech at the eighth annual Dalhousie Business Ethics Case Competition in Halifax on November 12. The competition this year will involve teams of four business students from:

- Bishops University
- Dalhousie University
- Kwatlen Polytechnic University
- Purdue University
- Queen's University
- Ryerson University

- Simon Fraser University
- Trent University
- University of Arizona
- University of Prince Edward Island
- Wilfred Laurier University

As I started outlining the speech, I recognized that in the business environment, personal ethics and organizational ethics are intertwined. When personal and organizational ethics are in harmony, the work environment will be comfortable and satisfying. Conversely, if these are misaligned, it will be painful for people.

We intuitively know what is ethical and what is not. And yet, most of us have acted unethically at some time. The fear of getting caught, however, probably helps to keep our behaviours ethical. But if ethical behaviour slides without consequences, then one might start to feel a sense of entitlement and invincibility.

Recall Dennis Kowalski's $7,000 shower curtain that he expensed. Contemplate how his unethical personal behaviour permeated the corporate culture at Tyco, ultimately leading to its bankruptcy and to Kowalski's imprisonment. A leader has an incredible impact on an organization – either good or bad.

Organizations can create a rules-based regime regarding ethical behaviour. This approach is very prescriptive and requires policing to ensure adherence to the standards. Another approach is to nurture an ethical culture through articulating values and engaging employees in conversations about them, and then implementing policies and procedures that will support that desired culture. Remember, ethics is derived from the Greek work *"ethos"* which means culture.

One of my clients has done this. The employees feel a strong compatibility to the company's values and this is reflected in their satisfaction ratings. One outcome is that their staff turn-over rate is about half the industry norm. This results in a significant bottom-line cost-saving related to recruitment, training and disruption.

Consider the culture of your organization or department. Does it emphasize and encourage ethical behaviour? Do employees clearly understand what constitutes acceptable behaviour? Does the governance structure support this?

If there's a gap, we can assist you in cultivating a sustainable ethical culture.

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