# Employee and Workplace Ethics: A Concise Checklist

Employee ethics have always been a subject of controversy, however it is gaining renewed prominence because of the need of technology based organizations to trust their employees, most notably in virtual workplaces. There are really two choices for employers: Either to run surveillance systems and checks that significantly cut into budgets and workforce morale, or depend as much as possible upon the integrity of employees and ensure that the staff has a clear understanding of employee ethics and what is expected of them.

Traditionally, employee ethics is called into question in situations where an employee faces, what is called, an ethical dilemma. However, in modern technology oriented organizations with networks and computers, more than personal ethical dilemmas, employee ethics determines budgets and the deployment of technological checks and balances.

Employee ethics are defined as "*standards and principles that guide the actions and decisions of employees and determine if they are "good" or "bad" in a moral sense. Ethical employee behavior, accordingly, is that which conforms not only to the dictates of law but also to a broader moral code common to society as a whole. An ethical dilemma is a situation in which a person must decide whether or not to do something that, although benefiting oneself or the organization or both, may be considered unethical."* (Sims 106)

Ethical integrity depends upon a value framework that views the workplace as an interactive society.

Values in the workplace are differentiated into societal values, organizational and institutional values, professional values and human service practice values. While societal values have a broader perspective applicable not only to the workplace, but life in general, workplace values and ethics that should be maintained with primary importance include:

**Organizational and Institutional Values**

1. The existence of and timely, adequate, unbiased, nondiscriminatory, and democratic performance by organizations and institutions of their charted, legislated, or otherwise sanctioned functions
2. Equal access for all persons and distinguishable groups of persons to information regarding available organizational and institutional services, programs, and opportunities
3. Equal access for all persons and distinguishable groups of persons to all available services, programs, and opportunities.
4. The adaptation of organizations and institutions to the changing needs and aspirations of all persons for which they have been created and designed, and are by charter or other sanction responsible to serve, as well as others in need of their services, programs, and opportunities
5. Fair, considerate, optimal, and creative use of organizational and institutional authority, resources, and opportunities
6. Considerate and respectful treatment of all persons
7. Maximum feasible participation and self-determination in all organizations and institutions for all persons served and affected by them
8. Opportunities for satisfying and productive participation in neighborhood and community affairs and developments
9. Organizational and institutional accountability for competent and ethical performance of sanctioned functions

## Professional Values

1. The focus on human service rather than money getting or aggrandizement
2. Fair, considerate, optimal, and creative use of professional power, authority, and opportunities in relation to clientele and others
3. Accountability for competent, considerate, and ethical performance of professional functions
4. Advocacy in relation to public and social policies concerned with or affecting their clienteles and their functions

## Human Service Practice Values

1. Full, fair, competent, considerate, and ethical performance of professional functions
2. Avoidance of personal abuse and exploitation of clients and others
3. Respect for the personal dignity of clients and others
4. Respect for the personal privacy of clients and others
5. Honesty and credibility
6. Maximum feasible participation and self-determination of clients in relation to their needs,

their problems, their interests, and their aspirations

7. Advocacy of public, social, organizational, and institutional policies in relation to the needs and aspirations of clients and others who share those needs and aspirations

(Reamer 25)

Ethical dilemmas are common in the workplace. Research, in fact, implies that employees come across such dilemmas in their working relationships with superiors, subordinates, customers, competitors, suppliers, and regulators. Common issues underlying the dilemmas involve honesty in communications and contracts, gifts and entertainment, kickbacks, pricing practices, and employee terminations. (Cullen, Victor, & Stephens, 1990)

As such, in workplaces and in **job interviews**, screening on the basis of employee ethics is regularly done and justified. Keeping this checklist in mind would help you to maintain your values in the workplace and also to answer questions related to ethics in interviews.

1. Ronald R. Sims, Ethics and Organizational Decision Making: A Call for Renewal (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1994) 127

2. Cullen J. B., Victor V., & Stephens C. 1990, Winter. "An ethical weather report: Assessing the organization's ethical climate". Organizational Dynamics, pp. 50-62.

3. Frederic G. Reamer, Social Work Values and Ethics, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 25