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When corporate enterprise found “raiding” another successful company was lucrative, we entered the modern era of separating activities that were traditional from its roots. We now separate making money from money generating activities; we separate owning assets and the resulting profit generation. Not that it is bad nor that it is good but this has encouraged ruthless business practices and encouraged business executives to cut the link between action and consequences and thus eliminating societal responsibility, which is of course in itself unethical. We became an asset-holding society, which eased into a new-age aspect of divorcing morals from discussions and consequences from responsibilities!

I had the honour to speak with many CEO’s, company owners, directors and other major stakeholders in a company’s health, their views are interspersed herein as well as academic underpinnings are presented. This meshes together the view from the trenches and an ideal world.

As a manager, Bernie Gross writing in *All Business* says, you have an ethical obligation to be a role model. A company often doesn’t see it that way; it is more to the tune of what the new-hire can do for the bottom line. Internally the corporations and small businesses should see the imperative to not just follow the large number of laws and regulations that are imposed unto them to ensure correct behaviour but also to adopt everyday ethics on a skin-level. The business world should not need a scandal to have, update or promote codes of ethics. It must mean living their code of ethics, checking that each and every level from doorman, mailroom or the top suite, live decent lives. As manager, director, boss or CEO, you ideally want people to emulate you and also to feel free to talk to you about the unethical behaviour they might observe. As a business person, you are doing yourself and society a great favour by setting high internal standards for life and not just for show, but a framed truth that hangs proudly in your hallway is what companies must head for.

Many businesses large and small have ethics classes, yet many businesses don’t live the daily ethics walk. When considering holding one, the class should be structured as an in-depth coverage of what ethics entails and how to live it; it forcibly must include ethics in an international context as some things change as we travel around the world and our workforces are increasing culturally mixed. The internal ethics should remain as the foundation rather than give the illusion to some that some parts of the ethics codes are negotiable.

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Some authors of ethics materials suggest that humans are intrinsically evil, having selfish tendencies and a willingness to commit evil. One might disagree so true or not they go on to prove it. As two sides of a coin, we can be good or bad at any given point. We make good and bad choices. In business we have many competing motivations to take our decisions with and thus one (either) side will and must prevail; the question is which side will prevail. Imagine the person who has been a wonderful character throughout his career may slip-up and accepts a small gift before retirement and then loses his job and reputation for taking a bribe (in his mind it wasn't). Good and bad are not true opposites but actually more similar to nuanced colours in a colour scale than black and white colour choices.

So how evil can a business be? A business cannot be evil but the people within will create this public image. It doesn't take much for the darkness in us to rise to the occasion; just by subtle cues that guide our behaviour, unaware of the cues, business leaders go down the right path or the one that if found out would destroy their career and company.

Ethical enterprise must balance two imperatives: actual financial results and core human values. As we grow into a seamless world, with interconnectedness, we literally grow together through technology and grow economically with trade treaties; allowing easier trading between countries and peoples thus becoming one market. This offers a great opportunity to rethink and start afresh, by asking the all-time favourite question about the spot we keep for moral values in corporate and economic activity. Do we have a spot for ethics? We get our economic information on tablets, smartphones, laptops and print media and it should be information that is sourced with ultra-high ethical standards from the media landscape. It is often lacking when we note personal opinions are used in stories, which will change the readers' opinion on the news story being reported; and in the methodologies used to get stories. The media can and does influence markets; the media has an enormous ethical responsibility which is sadly often lacking. One popular reason is that they are promoting their own political agenda, as well as the modern individualism, which requires the person to only follow what is good for him or her-self. Business leaders depend on news sources to make many strategic decisions. These decisions could and do affect jobs, national economic growth, and the companies survival. So with a smaller globe our ethics will be challenged even more.

Sadly we can see, time and time again, that there are economic enterprises that separate out moral values and to some extent religious beliefs (I maintain that we all believe in something somehow) from the corporate values. We cannot say that these values are separate if you are agreeing on the premise that ethical values are important so on that basis a business is less than good if it sees ethics as a single issue rather than incorporated within all aspects of doing good business, one that is profitable in all senses. How can a place where we spend most of our days and waking hours, be ethics-free zones? How can they be values-free zones, or even dead of any form of religion at all? Management and staff believe in something and will act based on those values. You, the business leader,

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must ensure that the business values you hold dear are clear and thus ethics, morals and religion will roost together, for the duration of the daily work contract business has with its employees. When these no longer work in harmony with the employees that are your valued capital, they will simply walk out the door to an environment where they feel consciously or subconsciously that their values fit with the corporate ones you declare. Business must have ethics; there isn't an oxymoron there. Business needs ethics to maintain vital relationships from top to bottom even stretching to external structures. Corporate business ethics includes a few principles: striving for goodness, avoid the negative, value of life itself, fair distribution of good and bad, honesty in transactions and conversations as well as with individual freedom.

In conversations with many CEO's and leaders, I keep finding a sharpening sense of greater understanding that ethics must and does play a significant role in their daily lives. In one of those conversations, I spoke with Hugues Delcourt, CEO of the BIL Group in Luxembourg and others. When an executive believes that pride, not to be confused with arrogance, is a way of living life then one can easily see that if the executive is proud of what he is doing, he will tend not to engage in unethical behaviour. A beautiful point because what happens in our children's' school and home education when we take out the classes that will qualify them for life rather than monetary success alone?

Yvon Chouinard, the son of a French-Canadian, born in the USA and the owner of Patagonia (the 3rd largest producer of outdoor goods in the world), and who lives the epitome of a socially ethical lifestyle. We can learn from some of his thoughts and one of them is the goals is not to sell clothes and neither to make money but it is about inspiring others by showing them that you can do great business with a "clean conscience" as he puts it. Ethics is certainly proven to be able to make better profits and longer term success for all involved. That is powerful. When the media says it's an unusual attitude (Chouinard) it clearly indicates that the market doesn't look for good business ethics!

Though ethics is the latest trend, there is no doubt that officially having a code doesn't make your company automatically have a clean conscience but it allows your business to live it, feel it and breathe ethics every day. The list is long of the enterprises that had great written ethics credos and zero ethics in the boardroom! By his own account, Yvon Chouinard is "the least networked person on earth," who doesn't have neither a bank account nor own a cell phone or a computer; now that doesn't have to be emulated to the detail but it certainly distinguishes him as a man with strong principles of wanting to stay pure. As said earlier in this paper, we are fed news and few realise that we must try to distil our own thoughts to be able to make economically healthy decisions for ourselves and our communities. His principle of being away and unconnected means he is unreachable when he needs his silence or peace. Shouldn't we all try that sometimes?

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Being unconnected can hone our senses and clear our thoughts of all the business noise so we can effectively live a healthy life. I'm sure he's no saint but this is good news none the less. A recent study from Columbia University discovered that we're bogged down by more than 70 decisions a day; leading to the phenomenon called decision fatigue (your brain just can't process decisions anymore). With turbulent markets as we have today, a clear head is a great necessity!

Being sometimes disconnected allows you to read about good things people do and how to emulate it, and through clarity of mind business leaders can have better family lives, giving time to the future generation through their very own example of daily practice of a harmonious professional life. There's no point in keeping such things as secondary when if we were honest, the future generations would think our work life fabulous if we had only told them that living in harmony with our jobs and family is ethical and thus also great for our business of being on this planet!

Business stakeholders don't have to be angels to be ethical. As executives rise in power one feels "above" good conduct, by paying less attention to the crucial ethical view, and takes on risky attitudes, which lead from being lucky to the next level of wrongful conduct. Some of the CEO's I spoke to felt that they are ethical. In context for sure historically leaders have gotten away with ruthless behaviour. It was even expected of them. Leaders today must keep up with the fast paced business world and keep things running smoothly but must also cleanout bad habits and any wrong doers in their midst. Keeping tabs on what's going on is vital but at times there's the limit; keep the mind lucid, the heart in the right place, the ethics above board, the decisions equitable and good and so as a leader you'll find that you won't find your picture on the famous front page for the wrong reasons.

Business can agree that it has an obligation to be loyal towards employees, shareholders, stakeholders and clients within reasonable limits, to be honest when executing contracts, to be trustworthy with agreements and to keep promises and agreements whether verbal or written. Just as we are ethical or not, no matter where we live or what culture we have. To understand why ethics is applicable to each person is to understand that the underlying principles are the foundation of good character and in the business world ethics does not change by sector, industry or level of employment but do require a different application. The way in which ethics is applied will differ slightly and yet the similarities and underlying points will remain the same such as an expression of trust and mutual consensus (benefit) with a contract.

An enterprise, whether it is financial services, service provider or intellectual services, private sector or public sector, it needs to be managed by managers and leaders who understand the moral implications of their decisions. That all their decisions whether professional or private, will definitely impact their companies, the shareholders and stakeholders, wives, husbands, children and jobs. Morals are not for "other types of people"

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or only at work but really living a decent life should be normal; walking the talk so to speak within an ethical template. With technology following us all, business closets must be truly clean. If hacked what would your accounts show?

I hear so many executives say that morals and ethics are not easily compatible with everyday business. Some reasons are that it slows them down, they feel they have to be ruthless or even their own rules are just on paper. Still others have squinted eyes as they sit in my lectures and a light bulb goes on as they see that it is truly possible and very easy to have mechanisms in place to make automatic ethical reflections at decision time and at any time. Taking ethical actions all the time sets a wonderful example, which is so rewarding for colleagues on many levels, and allows the CEO to be confident that his / her company is in good hands even in the furthest corner away from his supervision. Those employees who have expressed second thoughts about their organisations' behaviour (in reality the people making decisions) not just a logo without a face, they find an inner discord. They decide to take things in their own hands and act on their own ethical credo as unofficial as a CEO might think, it's still very real. Others simply change organisations to another employer in the hope of finding inner peace. This peace simply means that the work world shares their values and they happily work for a boss where this is the case.

Our ethics follow us home as well as at work. How can employees emulate seniors when as a director one had an account on such sites as "Ashley Madison" (lately in the news for encouraging unethical behaviour) which has recently had their client list made public or drink heavily after work.... To quote an article "aside from disgracing an already disgraced..." speaks loudly in a world that tries to hush up such activity by allowing free trade for even the most disgraceful behaviours; the world still expects its leaders to have mores (morals, scruples and integrity) of excellent quality with no consideration to trends of lax mores.

The CEO of Gallup Jim Clifton, firmly believes that what the boss does equal the ethical values of the company now that is very fascinating. The leader of an organisation cannot divorce himself from his attitudes and company, and it makes perfect sense that he's thus forced to take responsibility that he is a public person even in private. His online profile must match his principles; his private life must be ready to be dissected on the boardroom discussion table. Sadly research by Gallup Research and Ethics Center shows that employees do not believe their boss is ethical and thus employees decrease their own ethical work standards, this does not augur well for the corporate and SME's of our time; all sectors should set new heights of standards. Now you see how important it is that the Chief Officer has to have impeccable ethics, his directors too, the managers below must also be truly carefully chosen because that is the difference between profitability and client recruitment and set the tone for the daily operations. In a fairly recent survey The National Business Ethics Survey found that if employees reported misconduct they feared retaliation, so who are they to report to besides the people who can make change happen?

The employee has a right to expect high ethics from his senior management team, and to be treated respectfully therein. The management team has the obligation to create an

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environment that does justice to all stakeholders and thus ensure the many benefits of an ethical activity leading to profitability but also employee retention, and to ensure that employees feel engaged in your beliefs. Business is aware, now is the time to spread the word that it is required and desired to be ethical within your “four walls.”

I appreciate any comments or expansion on the topic: march@internet.lu