

# ACROSS THE BOARD

THE CONFERENCE BOARD MAGAZINE \$4.75 JUNE 1997

## Who Says Ethics Are "Nice"?

Many readers challenged the premise of April's cover story. "Ethics Are Nice, but Business Is Business."

Here, some responses.

**Elizabeth Howard:**

### **No Rewards for Good Deeds**

Blame for the "ethical void at the center of large business enterprise" can possibly be assigned, Krohe suggests, to an abdication by corporate leaders of what they have learned: "Do the ethics of home, the church, the community have nothing to do with business?"

There is the problem. The family, which develops and shares common values and beliefs, is struggling to maintain financial stability, working long hours in an intensely competitive marketplace. The church is a struggling and anachronistic institution; many churches are conducting focus groups to understand how to respond to the new problems of the global village and to understand their own role. And as for community: In the United States the mall has assumed the role, at least metaphorically, of the community center.

So where are ethics and good citizenship being taught? In Corporate America? General Electric, Johnson & Johnson, and The Body Shop try. Good citizenship and ethics could be taught in schools. But teachers, particularly those in public schools, are granted the same respect reserved for clothing-store sales associates.

In politics? Certainly not in Washington, D.C. Community leadership? Most people are too busy to care, or even to notice. It is assumed that all politicians blink and look the other way when it comes to ethical behavior, and this trickles down to union leaders, police commissioners, and others who may be in positions that allow them to abuse power.

Financial executives fiddle with financial statements because they are under the quarterly (if not daily) scrutiny of Wall Street. And while there are rewards for raising a company's stock price, there are not necessarily rewards for good deeds. Ask Body Shop founder Anita Roddick, Bruce Klatsky of Philips van Heusen, or Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerry's, who have all diligently worked to make a difference and have been, as a result, subjected to the forces of the media, looking for an incident to expose.

It is ironic that the corporation could provide the forum to open the discussions that have been confined to the university and to the church. In contemporary society, the corporation has more influence on society than most other institutions do. It is unfortunate that there are not more enlightened corporate leaders.

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