



Integrity Issues

This activity was created to be used primarily with:

4. Integrity

Secondary skills include:

2. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
5. Work Ethic
6. Conflict Resolution
8. Respect for Diversity
10. Teamwork
11. Big-Picture Thinking
14. Efficiency and Productivity
16. Information Security
17. Information Technology
22. Workplace Safety

1. Teacher will define Integrity as:

- **recognizing the importance of having integrity in the workplace**—If integrity is ethics or an agreed-to code, (note: different from "work ethic") then it is also the fabric that holds society together. If we are to count on others, to work well with them, to trust them, whether in personal areas, such as marriage or raising a family, or in the workplace where we work together to succeed, then it all depends on integrity. But integrity is a two-way street. Essentially it is the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would have them treat you. Of course, sometimes the decisions you make leading to actions might seem ethical to one person while at the same time completely betray another. Situational ethics leads to a good amount of gray area, where acting with integrity might not be so clear. That's why you need to trust your instincts and understand the consequences of your actions before you act. A little empathy comes in handy too.
- **complying with local, state, and federal laws**—Law itself might be understood as the formal representation of social norms, rules, and expectations. Therefore, to be a criminal is to be unethical and someone who defies social rules to serve the self at the injury of others. Do this and you risk losing your integrity. Our laws and governance is always in flux, but typically it tries to find a balance among ideals of equality, equity, personal freedom, and health and safety. The thought is that if we enforce integrity through law, the penalties of acting unethically will deter people from abusing their freedom and power, or acting with simple carelessness or negligence. All law aims at deciding not what is right, but what is wrong, and when someone or some organization or even government has violated the golden rule and crossed the ethical line.
- **adhering to workplace policies and procedures**—These can be independent of law, but they are the law of the workplace. Organizations typically have formal documentation of the policies (how to act in the workplace) and procedures (how to perform your work) on hand and many companies supply this documentation to new employees.



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- **exhibiting honesty, fairness, and respect toward self, others, and property—**
However, if you are an entrepreneur, you should create and stand by your own code of ethics and integrity. How long you work, how you treat others, how you handle finances, how you earn money—all of these are guided by personal integrity and ethics and sometimes governed by law.

2. Teacher will present various strategies students could use to resolve integrity issues.

Example: Argue (discuss) the basic principles of this Supreme Court case: *Vance v. Ball State University* (2013): Whether an employer is liable for harassment that an employee may suffer from a supervisor if that supervisor has no power to hire or fire that employee.

Problem: What is the integrity issue at stake? Harassment should not occur, granted, but the real question is whether a company could be sued by an employee harassed on the job by a coworker of higher status. Divide students to argue different sides by show of hand. If you have no sides, if all students agree, then the teacher should argue the other side. Be prepared to argue both sides, to help them form arguments based on the actual decisions. You might need to define harassment as well.

Note: Have students really think out these issues and try to see the difference between their personal code of ethics and integrity. They may only argue on behalf of the employee, but what if they were owners of this company? Would they risk getting sued for unethical behavior of one of their employees against another? Even perhaps without their knowing? What could a company do to protect itself?

Solutions:

The Court sided with the company in this case.

Court Opinion was written by Judge Alito, paraphrased: Because the harassed employee was not fired and because the company offered to correct the issue and the harassed employee refused, the company is not liable for the harassment.

"Under Title VII, an employer's liability for such harassment may depend on the status of the harasser. If the harassing employee is the victim's co-worker, the employer is liable only if it was negligent in controlling working conditions. In cases in which the harasser is a "supervisor," however, different rules apply. If the supervisor's harassment culminates in a tangible employment action, the employer is strictly liable. But if no tangible employment action is taken, the employer may escape liability by establishing, as an affirmative defense, that (1) the employer exercised reasonable care to prevent and correct any harassing behavior and (2) that the plaintiff unreasonably failed to take advantage of the preventive or corrective opportunities that the employer provided. *Id.*, at 807; *Ellerth, supra*, at 765."

Dissent: Judge RBG, paraphrased: The term supervisor, though they are not in a position to fire employees are nevertheless in positions of power and may recommend firing. Companies should not be allowed to hide behind the nuance of job title responsibilities, because they will if they can get away with it.



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"In *Faragher v. Boca Raton*, 524 U. S. 775 (1998), and *Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth*, 524 U. S. 742 (1998), this Court held that an employer can be vicariously liable under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for harassment by an employee given supervisory authority over subordinates. In line with those decisions, in 1999, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provided enforcement guidance “regarding employer liability for harassment by supervisors based on sex, race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or protected activity.”

Note: One can see by the Court's 5-4 decision, and by strong dissent and opposition, that many ethical issues can go one way or another. In this case, judges are influenced by precedent or former cases previously decided to support their opinions. But it is always somewhat guided by personal opinion and one's relationship to ethics, integrity, decency, and belief system. The Court protected the rights of the company over the injury to one of its employees, yet the protection was an ethical position even if you think it was incorrect. Companies have rights and deserve protections too, otherwise most companies could not exist. In the workplace, one must establish and hold to an ethical position of decency and fairness even when compromised by the behavior of others. Competition is healthy as long as you don't play dirty. Because what happens when you do? What does it do to your reputation?

Assignment: Please create another workplace ethics-type issue based on your specific area of expertise, even teaching. Also, the teacher could work with stories in the news or industry partners (or other CTE instructors) to present real-world problems to students. (Students work in teams to choose the issue, define the ethical violation, and create a better solution, describing how having integrity would have helped the workplace and potentially would have advanced the real work of the company rather than hindered it.) A simple examination of integrity stories in the workplace are also valuable. The teacher may also ask students why employees demonstrate a lack of integrity in the workplace and what the consequences are for this behavior.

Note: Situational ethics offers a more complex dilemma, and yet we experience it all the time. It occurs when there is not a completely ethical position available. In these, it is hoped that we will choose the greater good. But there are consequences to these situations too.

Additional resources:

Supreme Court decisions: <https://www.supremecourt.gov/>

Work Matters. The Consequences of Having No Integrity:

<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2020/03/572105/work-matters-consequence-having-no-integrity>



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