

## Social Issues in Management and Business Ethics: Exercises and Activities

Exercises/Activities Title:

### **Purpose of Life Essay**

Exercises/Activities Explanation (150 words or less):

Students compose a six-page "Purpose of Life" essay articulating their purpose of life based on their life experiences prior to taking the class and as a result of experiences they have had during class so far.

Assignment questions explore personal characteristics, response to an injustice, happy or meaningful experiences at various points in life, and other issues.

Assignment is on the following page.

Optional – Contact Information:

If interested in additional information, please contact Professor Denis Collins, School of Business, Edgewood College, Madison, WI; [dcollins@edgewood.edu](mailto:dcollins@edgewood.edu)

## Purpose of Life Essay

Denis Collins, Edgewood College, [dcollins@edgewood.edu](mailto:dcollins@edgewood.edu)

*"The unexamined life is not worth living."* – Socrates

*"This is the true joy in life – the 'being' used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the 'being' a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."* – George Bernard Shaw

Every day we recreate ourselves, though we tend to be a lot like the person we were the previous day. As Socrates suggests, personal reflection on our own lives is very important to our evolution as individuals, community members, and a species. As George Bernard Shaw suggests, a life of meaning generates tremendous joy as we travel through life's adventures.

The Dominican educational tradition consists of study, reflection and action. Throughout the semester we have studied, reflected and acted. Now it is time to study yourself and reflect on the data you gather about yourself.

**Part I:** Compose a 4 page, double-spaced, typed response to the following questions:

(1) What three characteristics best describe who you are? Assume a judge responds: "That's not true!" Defend each characteristic you listed with a real experience that exemplifies it is true.

(2) The five values at the heart of Edgewood College are: Truth, Justice, Compassion, Partnership and Community. Write five short paragraphs about whether people in your work organization (a) are truthful, (b) pursue justice [fairness for all], (c) are compassionate, (d) develop partnerships, and (e) engage others in the spirit of community, one short paragraph per value. Support your conclusions with examples.

(3) At some point in your life an injustice to someone else cried out to your heart and mind that led you to demand justice. Whether it was a news story, an article, a talk you attended, a call from a friend, or something you observed, it moved you to seek justice. What was it? What did you do?

(4) In class we have examined ethical dilemmas, critical incidents, business scandals, and community issues. Reflect on the positions you took in these discussions and journal entries.

Based on all this information about yourself, discuss your belief system about human beings, business, and society.

**Part II:** Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), considered by many to be one of the greatest philosophers ever, argued that the purpose of life is happiness. Most philosophers agree. Compose a 2 page, double-spaced, typed response to the following questions:

- (1) Think of a happy *childhood* memory or a *childhood* memory that changed the course of your life. What was it? Why was it meaningful to you? [one paragraph]
- (2) Think of a happy *teenage* memory or a *teenage* memory that changed the course of your life. What was it? Why was it meaningful to you? [one paragraph]
- (3) Think of a happy *young adult* [college undergraduate or shortly thereafter] memory or a *young adult* memory that changed the course of your life. What was it? Why was it meaningful to you? [one paragraph]
- (4) What currently makes you happy or feel meaningful? [one paragraph]
- (5) Think of someone really influential in your life who did something really amazing or important for you. Write a paragraph of gratitude to him/her about how s/he impacted your life. [one paragraph]
- (6) In society or your work environment, what is it that needs to be done, that you can do something about, and won't get done unless you do it? [one paragraph]
- (7) Assume that you have won the \$40 million lottery. Like most lottery winners, you quit your job, travel for a few years, give some money to family and friends, and then decide to re-enter the workforce. What type of work would you do since you now don't have to worry about money? Why?
- (8) Alas, you haven't won the lottery. Based on what makes you happy and your professional goals, outline a 5-year plan that will help you move in the direction of accomplishing your professional goals while ensuring that you experience happiness during the process.