

Social Issues in Management and Business Ethics: Exercises and Activities

Exercise/Activity Title:

My Friend Morgan

Exercise/Activity Explanation (150 words or less):

This exercise uses a survey at the beginning of the term to identify students' ethical behaviors. A case scenario is then created using the composite scores from the surveys (the case scenario is customized based upon student responses). Much later in the semester (after students have forgotten about the survey), the students discuss the case scenario and unknowingly evaluate their own ethical behavior.

Assignment is on the following page.

Optional – Contact Information:

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My Friend Morgan: An Exercise in Ethics

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The objectives of this exercise are to:

- help students recognize opinions about ethical behavior,
- recognize the possible lax awareness of one's own ethical behavior and to become aware of and accountable for that behavior,
- encourage students to consider the implications of their behavior,
- provide an opportunity for discussing relationships between personal behavior and professional responsibility,
- provide a vehicle for discussing theories of ethical behavior.

STEP 1: EARLY IN THE SEMESTER – GIVING THE SURVEY (See Appendix A or use your own)

- Early in the semester have students anonymously complete and submit an ethics survey
- Tabulate the results into a frequency distribution

STEP 2: DEVELOPING YOUR CASE SCENARIO

Choose those questions answered affirmatively by most participants for inclusion in the case scenario you will develop. For example, in the accompanying sample survey and case, only those survey results answered affirmatively by 32% or more of the students were used.

A case scenario is then developed from the survey results (see Appendix B). As you develop your case scenario, it is important to distinguish between those behaviors that occurred during Morgan's lifetime (possibly a sign of misguided youth) and those behaviors that have occurred in the past year (possibly more representative of Morgan's current behavior). In addition, every effort should be made to create a positive image of Morgan at the current company so that Morgan is suitable for promotion if one was unaware of Morgan's personal behaviors. In developing your case scenario, you should make Morgan's character well balanced and try to avoid weighting Morgan's character in either a negative or positive direction. In addition, I have selected the name Morgan to be ambiguous, and I have avoided reference to gender. Be creative and have fun developing your case.

STEP 3: LATER IN THE SEMESTER— DISTRIBUTING THE CASE SCENARIO

After a suitable period of time has elapsed from taking the survey, distribute the My Friend Morgan case scenario that you created. I usually schedule this step near midterm, or approximately 6 weeks after the survey was given. Initially, it is important that participants do not know that this case was developed from their earlier survey results or that Morgan is a composite character based on their behaviors. The case scenario should be distributed and discussed.

STEP 4: THE CLASS DISCUSSION

Sample discussion questions that were used with the accompanying sample case are included in Appendix C. The questions often generate interesting discussion. To enhance discussion, the instructor can ask groups of students to argue the pros and cons of each question. The instructor can also develop his or her own questions unique to his or her own survey and case scenario. After discussing the questions, the instructor should refer back to the survey taken earlier in the semester but not yet disclose that Morgan's character was developed from the survey results. Show and discuss the results of the survey. Survey results can be displayed to the class on an overhead projector. I generally show the original survey and write in the raw score of positive responses to each question. Students are usually curious how others responded in comparison to themselves. In addition, I show a bar graph of those responses included in the survey that shows the comparison of current behavior versus lifetime behavior.

STEP 5: DEBRIEFING

Point out the similarities between your students' responses and Morgan's behavior. At this time you should tell participants that Morgan was created from their survey results and is in fact a reflection of their own ethical behavior. Students often find this fact interesting and are willing to engage in further discussion. I ask if they are surprised at the survey results or if they want to discuss any of the survey results in depth. Students may disclose their answers on items they view as less deviant but rarely disclose their answers on those items they view as more deviant. Similarly, students may disclose behaviors that occurred in their lifetime but may be less willing to disclose behaviors that occurred within the past year. Now that the case scenario is more personalized, you may want to reintroduce some of the discussion questions and see if responses vary from prior responses. In my experience, students still support their original decision and will not change their responses. In using the accompanying survey and case scenario in an MBA class, I observed a sharp demarcation between foreign and American students. In discussions of the case scenario, foreign students were more accepting of Morgan's behaviors, whereas American students were more critical of Morgan's behaviors.

There may also be cultural or religious differences that could affect responses. It is interesting to point out to students their own ethical behavior (from the survey) and

that often there can be inconsistencies between our self-concept and our actual behavior. This provides a lead-in to a discussion of Argyris and Schon's (1974) theory, which is elaborated in the following discussion. During the case discussion and debriefing, the instructor should ask students to explain why they would or would not recommend Morgan (Discussion Question 8 in Appendix C). This discussion can then transition into theories of ethical reasoning and decision making. A brief review of theories that could be incorporated into the discussion follows

Appendix A My Friend Morgan

Survey Please use a checkmark to indicate a yes or true answer. Please leave the line blank to signify a no or false answer.		
During your <u>lifetime</u> , have you ever:	In the <u>past year</u> , have you:	
		Stolen something from work, a friend, a family member, etc.?
		Shoplifted?
		Lied or not told the truth?
		Cheated on your spouse or significant other?
		Kept merchandise or money when the sales clerk or company made a mistake in your favor?
		Lied on employment application?
		Used illegal drugs?
		Cheated on a test or exam?
		Broken the law or committed a crime not already mentioned in this survey (excluding speeding)?
		Plagiarized another person's work?
		Compromised your personal ethics to do something required for your job?
		Switched the price tag on merchandise
		Knowingly bought merchandise (perhaps for a special event of occasion), used it, then returned it?
		Unhooked or tampered with the car's odometer?
		Falsified work-related expense, travel, or time records?
		Charged personal items to the company (copies, etc.) and didn't pay for them?
		Falsified a subordinate's performance evaluation?

Appendix B Case Scenario

You have just hung up from speaking with your friend Morgan and your supervisor is due in your office any time now.

You have known Morgan for many years. You attended the same high school and knew Morgan as an acquaintance but wouldn't say the two of you were friends. Whereas you enjoyed academic and athletic pursuits, Morgan was rebellious and often in trouble. During high school, it was a known fact that Morgan had been caught shoplifting but didn't suffer any real consequences. You had also seen Morgan cheat on exams in high school on more than one occasion. You also know that Morgan had confessed to often stealing money from his or her parents and would arrive late and leave early from a part-time job at the local McDonald's but would write in the full shift on time sheets.

You and Morgan both attended the same college nearly 500 miles away. You each majored in business, had a couple of classes together, and began sharing rides home. You got to know Morgan, and you were even glad to see a familiar face while you were so far from home. You were both accepted into the college's MBA program, and over the course of these college years, you became very good friends with Morgan; you were even in Morgan's wedding following graduation. Coincidentally, you both received attractive job offers (in separate departments) from the major employer in your hometown; you both accepted the offers and returned home.

Morgan and his or her spouse frequently socialize with you and your spouse. They often come over on weekends, and you usually meet for lunch at least once a week. Although Morgan has matured and "straightened out" for the most part, you believe that Morgan's ethical and moral standards are sometimes questionable. For example, last fall Morgan was caught being unfaithful to his or her spouse. Thankfully, they were able to repair their marriage, and this has never happened again. Morgan has also confessed to you that he or she recently lied to a supervisor to gain additional time to finish an assignment. Morgan often copies and mails personal items at the company's expense and even failed to report to payroll that a personal expenditure had not been deducted from the last paycheck.

Furthermore, Morgan cheated on income taxes a few years ago and continues to smoke marijuana on occasion. You don't mean to be keeping an ethics balance sheet on Morgan, but you have had several private discussions with Morgan regarding the questionable nature of these types of behaviors. You believe that these conversations have helped Morgan to see things in a new light and have positively impacted his or her behavior.

You've recently been promoted to District 4 manager. Your regional manager is on her way to meet with you to get your recommendation for filling the District 3 manager position. Morgan has just phoned to ask for your support and recommendation for this position. To Morgan's benefit, he or she has been a hard worker for this company, has always had positive evaluations, and is well liked. Although you feel loyalty to Morgan and know that Morgan is a good employee, you also want to make a good impression in your new position and wonder if Morgan is really the best (and safest) person to recommend for the job.

Your regional manager has just arrived at your office. She gets right to the point, asking if you have any recommendations for the District 3 manager's position. Do you recommend Morgan?

Appendix C

Discussion Questions

- What responsibilities or obligations do the reader and Morgan owe to themselves, the organization, their profession, their peers, and the business community?
- What are the implications of their behavior and decisions?
- Does a company have the right to be interested in employees' off-work behavior? At what point does personal life spill over into work life?
- Would the type of job make a difference in your recommendation (i.e., an international assignment)?
- Should those in leadership positions be role models for subordinates?
- Should friendships in the workplace influence decision making? Should Morgan have asked for the recommendation?
- How is Morgan any different from you or me or the person sitting next to you? (Note to instructor: Remind students that Morgan is a compilation of all of us.) What is the implication in judging others when we may be guilty, too?
- Finally, would you or would you not recommend Morgan? Why?
- Would it make a difference if Morgan were male or female? Why?