

# **Beyond Product Sales: Considerations Other than the Bottom Line**

**Remarks made to:  
The Canadian Centre for Ethics & Corporate Policy  
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Ten years ago a far sighted group of business people came together to form the Canadian Centre for Ethics & Corporate Policy. At that time, sources for journalists or philanthropists would include under the alphabetical listings "economy, education, environment", etc. but not "ethics".

Today the word as well as the concept is well-known in business circles and almost every MBA program features at least one course on ethics. In the years that I have been associated with the Centre either as a member of the Board of Directors or later as Executive Director, the ethics field has grown to include corporate ethics officers and independent ethics consultants, as well as an increasing number of books and articles devoted to the subject.

The Canadian Centre for Ethics & Corporate Policy has had a hand in this growth as it has promoted business ethics and become increasingly recognized as an independent, knowledgeable and respected organization. Its broad volunteer base is to a large extent responsible for this achievement.

At the close of this year I will be retiring as Executive Director of the Centre. It has been more than seven years of challenge, learning and mutual growth. When asked what I do and why, I respond jokingly that my job is to help keep the words "business ethics" from being an oxymoron!

On a more serious note, however, the basis of any ethical system is values; including the way individually and corporately we treat one another on a micro and macro scale, the manner in which we support the larger community and the care with which we preserve or restore this fragile planet, our home.

The challenge to the Centre is to help make the ethical component of decision making central to all the dealings of business, government and other organizations. It is important at the same time, that we support corporate leaders and remain open and sensitive to the daily business needs of their organizations.

Part of the task is to seek new ways of doing business. Recently I was asked by a seven-year-old grandson for a soccer ball. Determined not to purchase one by a manufacturer who used child labour, I eventually located one which said in indelible ink, "not made

with child labor". Not bad, but on reflection not necessarily good. What is really needed is to seek imaginative solutions to such complex problems. It is the part of the task of the Centre to encourage companies to do this. It may involve supporting companies as they seek solutions. In this case the issue might be beyond simply hiring or refusing to hire children. For example it could be to develop a new solution by building a safe, healthy factory, hiring children in the morning, providing a nutritious lunch and keeping them for an afternoon of education and recreation while paying them for a full day. The gain for the children is obvious. The gain for the country is an educated and healthy population. Possible advantages to the company might be a competitive advantage arising from improved customer relations and improved employee moral and productivity. When they tell their story, as other companies have done, sales could increase. Good ethics may have an initial cost, but the result is often good business.

In a similar vein, seeking alternatives to downsizing while maintaining a profit presents a challenge. There might, for example, be value in emulating some of the European shorter work hours or offering part time work in lieu of total job losses. The point is to seek new, fresh, values-based policies with input, where appropriate, from employees themselves.

One of the highlights of my time with the Centre has been meeting CEOs to enlist their interest and commitment. They have been supportive and often provide not only material assistance but also have released top level staff to serve on our board. This has been invaluable.

I recall a lecture by a CEO whose business was skyrocketing. He provided a nursery for babies of workers, a preschool program, an after school group, high school age clubs and university scholarships. Later when we met for lunch and I asked him what the benefit was to him, he first spoke about his own values. Then he pointed out that seeking new workers was an expense line he did not have. He treated people so well that younger generations, who had in a sense grown up there, were ready, willing and able to take on new jobs. His competitors were making major expenditures for a budget item he never needed. This was clearly reflected, he maintained, in his profits, which may also have resulted from a highly productive and motivated workforce.

As the Centre moves into the next millennium, I hope that while it will continue to address business ethics, it will also find the ability to deal with other organizational groups such as government and unions as we together as a society grapple with the coming era which will require so much in the way of ethical analysis, new imaginative solutions and action.

These are some personal reflections as I think back over my years with the Centre. Thanks need to go to all who have been supportive, as directors, as staff and as individual or corporate contributors to my work and to that of the Centre. I have been invited to return to my original position as a volunteer director, which is where I first connected with this organization. In any event, I shall continue to have a keen interest in the Centre as it continues to help find new and effective ways of increasing the role of ethics in the decision making processes.