



High-Performing Organizations Must Be Ethical

To transform your organization, you need to translate ethical theory into action.

By Terrence Fernsler

Ethics In the Workplace: Tools and Tactics for Organizational Transformation

By Craig E. Johnson. 363 pages. Softcover. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, www.sagepub.com.

Most organizations have ethics policies, because they recognize that ethical values in the workplace are tied to organizational health. However, those policies are too frequently ignored. Reasons include the following:

- the belief that changing ethical performance is easy
- the idea that trying to enforce ethical behavior won't do any good
- the conception that ethical values are already set in childhood
- the impression that the current interest in ethics is just a fad
- the feeling that implementing high ethical standards is too expensive.

Usually these reasons are erroneous, and in his illuminating book Craig E. Johnson responds to each. But reasons (legitimate or not) aside, moral standards and performance do go hand in hand. Practicing ethical behavior takes a desire to improve, the drive to follow through, and the determination to engage in constant monitoring.

Before explaining how ethical organizations function, Johnson first looks at five widely-used ethical theories and encourages us to look at problems from each. He

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helps by explaining the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

Both individual and contextual factors contribute to ethical behavior, but before addressing the context, Johnson explains personal motivations, character, and reasoning. He identifies the elements of personal ethical development and explains how to cultivate communication skills to foster ethical interactions and decisions.

Johnson explores ethically destructive behavior and ways to prevent it or respond to it. Then he looks at the behaviors that should become ingrained and practiced to build highly ethical workplaces. In addition, he considers how organizations themselves can become more socially responsible.

At the end of each chapter, Johnson presents problems to practice ethical thinking. Practice keeps us ethical as individuals and organizations. That will lead to high performance. Following Johnson's guidelines is good practice for us individually and for our organizations. ■

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How to Build an Ethical Workplace

A few of the tactics Craig E. Johnson describes in his book:

- **Communicate your expectation** that people will act ethically. People tend to live up to the expectancies placed on them.
- **Clearly identify** your organization's core values. Be sure you reinforce and model those values.
- **Develop a warm emotional climate** in your organization, giving people opportunities to express their opinions and offering frequent feedback.
- **Create** a powerful mission statement that inspires ethical behavior.
- **Encourage people** to live up to their full potential.
- **Use moral vocabulary** even when making routine decisions. Avoid euphemisms that hide the ethical implications of your choices.
- **Recognize** that high concentrations of power and an emphasis on status tend to produce unethical behavior.
- **Monitor your behavior** to reduce inequalities – especially subtle ones – in the ways you treat others.
- **Make sure** your organization has a code of ethics that's consistently enforced.