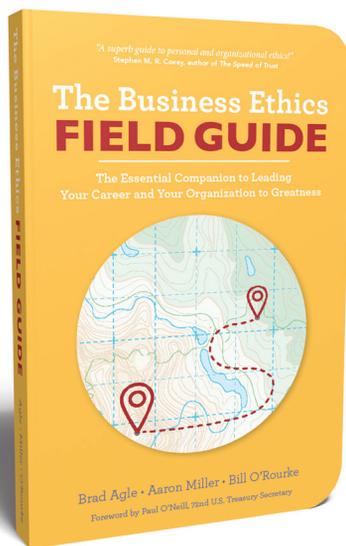




THE BUSINESS ETHICS FIELD GUIDE

An Epilogue



BY BRAD YARBROUGH

For over two years, the readers of this column have learned important survival tools vital to being an ethical person. “The Business Ethics Field Guide,” with its outstanding treatment of thirteen challenges, has been the basis of relevant and revealing ethics articles.

I’ll always be grateful for the privilege of meeting Dr. Brad Agle and Bill O’Rourke at a meeting in Oklahoma City where a handful of individuals discussed their book. I knew what they had published was thoughtful, true and timely. I shared their conviction that ethics increasingly should be taught to those



13 ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Upcoming articles in this series will take a closer look at each dilemma.

challenged to do the right thing the right way. I asked Dr. Agle a probing question, “Where does the desire to be ethical begin?” He answered, “Ethics is rooted in one’s care for others.”

By including the Ethics column in its magazine (and teaching the subject to its members), the IRWA presumes that its readers care about making the correct choices and doing those things that demonstrate good character, which promotes a healthy society.

It’s been an honor and privilege to partner with the IRWA and the authors of “The Business Ethics Field Guide” to increase your awareness of the most common ethical dilemmas you’ll encounter and help strengthen your ability to successfully overcome them. Mr. O’Rourke’s summary below is an ideal ending to an excellent series.

Epilogue by Bill O’Rourke

Why do people, often “good” people, act in unethical ways? There are many influences that sometimes inhibit individuals’ abilities to make sound, ethical choices. Let’s provide an illustration. Fire comes from a combination of heat, fuel and oxygen. Put these three elements together and combustion occurs. Similarly, bad behavior can result when faced with (1) the pressure to do something wrong, (2) the opportunity to do it, and (3) rationalizing that behavior. If that is true, then “rationalization” becomes a key factor in one’s misconduct. So, if you find yourself rationalizing, be careful because you might be on the brink of doing something that’s wrong.

We thought that listing these rationalization techniques could serve as a meaningful final lesson, or epilogue, for this series of ethics articles. These can include various attempts used to convince ourselves that our unethical action is justified. This allows us to make

1 STANDING UP TO POWER

Someone in power is asking you to do something unethical.

2 MADE A PROMISE

Conflicting commitments force you to choose.

3 INTERVENTION

You see something wrong. How do you proceed?

4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Multiple roles put you at cross purposes.

5 SUSPICIONS WITHOUT ENOUGH EVIDENCE

You believe something is going on, but you’re not sure.

6 PLAYING DIRTY

Achieving justice but by doing something unethical.

7 SKIRTING THE RULES

Bending a rule for a better outcome.

8 DISSEMBLANCE

Misrepresenting the truth for better outcome.

9 LOYALTY

Giving up ethical stance to protect valued relationship.

10 SACRIFICING PERSONAL VALUES

Living ethically might put burden on others.

11 UNFAIR ADVANTAGE

When opportunity exists to wield an unfair upper hand.

12 REPAIR

When you are responsible for a mistake.

13 SHOWING MERCY

You could grant forgiveness, but you don’t know if you should.



unethical decisions while believing we are still an ethical person.

These techniques include:

- 1. Denial of Responsibility** — an attempt to place responsibility for our actions on someone or something else (e.g., “it’s her fault,” “he made me do it,” or “the instructions were unclear”).
- 2. Denial of Injury** — telling ourselves that nobody will be hurt (e.g., “they are a big company that can surely afford the loss if I take this small product without paying”).
- 3. Denial of the Victim** — trying to convince ourselves that the wounded party is really the one to blame (e.g., “they should have known better” or “they had it coming”).
- 4. Condemning the Condemners** — an attempt to find fault in the people who may criticize our actions.
- 5. The End Justifies the Means** — trying to explain that your bad behavior is justified because the bigger picture is being served.
- 6. Moral Ledger** — like “cheat day” on a diet, the moral ledger attempts to justify a wrong action because of all the many good deeds you have done over time.
- 7. Defense of Necessity** — sometimes there is a compelling reason for our actions but more often, our brains invent or exaggerate the necessity to help us feel better about what we are about to do.

8. Claim of Normalcy — this is the “everybody does it” excuse but, most often, everybody is not doing it.

9. Denial of Negative Intent — although you admit that your actions hurt people, you tell yourself it’s okay because you didn’t mean to hurt them.

10. Claims of Relative Acceptability — although you know you have done wrong, your brain feeds you examples of where people have done far worse.

11. Postponement — an action is needed but you stall and reason that if you don’t make any decision, you can’t be responsible for the consequences. Remember that choosing not to act is an act.

12. Use of Euphemisms — instead of being forthright, you attempt to disguise your action by calling it something much softer (e.g., “restructuring” sounds better than “firing”).

By increasing our awareness of these rationalization techniques, we can better prepare ourselves to reject improper actions. Additionally, we become a more effective leader by being able to recognize these approaches in ourselves and in others. Awareness of ethical pitfalls does not guarantee immunity from them. Constant vigilance is required. Being morally disciplined as a result of knowledge and practice helps hone our character and integrity. With diligence and practice, ethical behavior will become a habitual manifestation of the heart, not just the head.

Finally, we urge you to be **ethically proactive**:

- ✓ Identify your values. Articulate what is truly important to you.
- ✓ Commit to living those values.
- ✓ Build a social structure that facilitates ethical behavior.
- ✓ Join organizations that share your values.
- ✓ Connect with honorable people.
- ✓ Stay out of debt and save. Financial security can sometimes provide a backstop for adverse reactions that may result from your taking a moral stance in life.
- ✓ Develop a reputation as an honest and ethical person.
- ✓ Work diligently.
- ✓ Act to benefit others.
- ✓ Use inspiring stories to teach and explain virtuous conduct.
- ✓ Avoid judging others.

Finally, we thank the leaders of the IRWA, the Right of Way Magazine and Brad Yarbrough for giving us the opportunity to speak to you on the subject of ethics. We hope you enjoyed the series of articles which were based on the thirteen common dilemmas outlined in The Business Ethics Field Guide. It’s been our privilege. 🙏



Brad Yarbrough is the Owner and CEO of Pilgrim Land Services, a right of way services company in Oklahoma City. With over 35 years experience in oil and gas, he has clients nationwide and an extensive network of landmen and agents.