



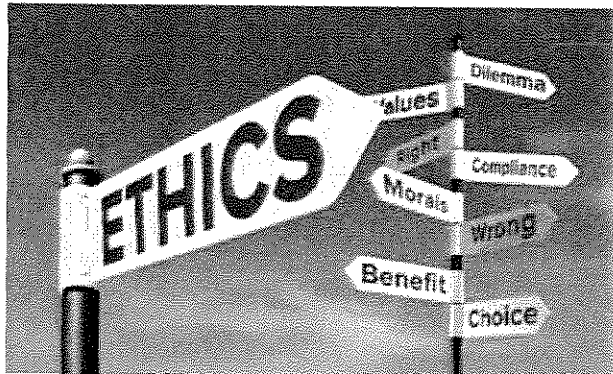
Our Ethics Affect Lives

By
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Ethics: *Moral principles that govern a person's or group's behavior.* Nowhere are ethics more significant than in our industry—the industry of making running water run. Our behavior affects our decisions; our ethics affect people's lives and livelihoods. What we do in the water quality industry is essential to life itself, as it affects everything we put on and into our bodies.

If you think about it, our moral compass is set before we ever enter the workplace. However, life and workplace experiences can affect how our ethics take shape. The ethics of the people above us invariably trickle down. The behavior of the person in the "top box" will set the stage. Are you directed to take shortcuts which could cost lives? Our ethics are reflected in the standards we set and the decisions we make.

I have traveled to many water systems this year and it is always interesting to observe some of the attitudes in the workplace. It is clear that some of the workers I meet are just punching a time clock without realizing the importance of their jobs. This leads me to ask:



- Do these workers believe they have value?
- Are they treated with respect?

These questions may seem basic, but they shed light on the ethics issue. Remember, everything trickles down from the top.

Educators within our industry must not only be knowledgeable, but well-prepared. When we are asked a question and we are not sure of the answer, we cannot simply say "I don't know" or "that's just how we've always done it". We must be willing to find the answer and get back to the person. Many times this means leaving our egos at the door.

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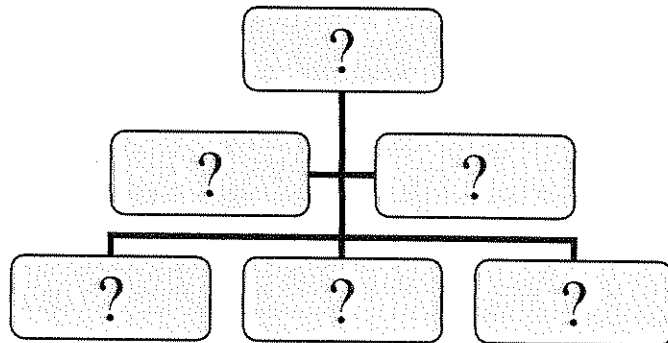
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Those of us in middle management must make solid decisions and communicate accurately and effectively. We cannot just say what we think people want to hear. Good middle management is essential for keeping a team together. Safety practices and procedures are often set at this level - but do they reflect the importance of each person's life? Are emergency response plans current and practiced? Do they take into account the health and safety of the people served?

Employees who go out into the field are extremely valuable; they are tasked with making it all work. Those in the field should be conscious of how their moral compass is reflected. Water quality is not a numbers game. It is not about how many inspections, installations or repairs you do; it is about public health. You are imperative to keeping water safe and flowing.

When we discuss ethics, we realize how big their impact is. Ethics overshadow so many other issues and principles. Our ethics sit in the "top box" and oversee who we are. They are the basic concepts and fundamental principles of decent human conduct. Good ethics are not about what society accepts--it is more personal than that. *They are what define us.*



You have chosen one of the most important and challenging jobs there is; there are no shortcuts, no easy road, no skirting the truth. However, the profession you have chosen is also an admirable one! From the "top box" to the representative in the field, we are all equally essential to making running water run. Our ethics, good or bad, affect lives.