

BUS_INST 394 Ethics & Leadership
Northwestern University
Spring 2021
Thursdays, 4:00 – 6:50pm

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Office Hours: By appointment

Is it okay for technology companies to engineer their products in a way that enables them to leverage the built-in vulnerabilities of your brain so that you use their products more (increasing their bottom line)?

Is it okay for high-growth companies to take a no-holds-barred approach to growth, including flouting, bending and/or breaking “administrative” laws they believe are outdated—as long as no one gets physically hurt?

Is it acceptable for employees to be subjected to high-pressure work environments in order to motivate them to meet corporate sales targets?

Each of these questions has at least two things in common:

1. They each represent pressing questions of the day that have either led to corporate scandals and/or are leading to calls for regulation.
 - a. What is “Brain Hacking”? Tech Insiders on Why You Should Care:
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/brain-hacking-tech-insiders-60-minutes/>
 - b. How Uber Deceived the Authorities Worldwide:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/03/technology/uber-greyball-program-evade-authorities.html>
 - c. Wells Fargo uncovers up to 1.4 million more fake accounts:
<http://money.cnn.com/2017/08/31/investing/wells-fargo-fake-accounts/index.html>
2. Each of the problems can be tied to a narrow focus on solving business problems without regard for the ethical implications and the potential fallout resulting from the tactics employed.

Welcome to Ethics & Leadership. My goal in this course is to challenge you to think deeply about the responsibility you have as both a business leader and a subordinate to maintain ethics at the core of your decision-making and actions. During the quarter, we will examine ethical decision-making from a number of perspectives:

1. Your responsibility as a subordinate (which you will be upon graduation and entering the workforce).
2. Your responsibility as a leader (which you will be in short order, given the talent you have already demonstrated).

3. The problem with just solving problems rather than looking at the impact of each potential solution.
4. The bystander problem (see something, say something).

We will use real world, contemporary events as the backdrop for our discussions. We will examine ethical failures that place the lives and limbs of consumers at risk as well as ethical failures that lead to the defrauding of consumers. We will examine the direct impact on all involved—the decision makers, the decision implementors, customers, and society. We will examine truth, facts and lying to determine whether and how much what you say and how you say it matters; the extent to which spin and messaging are acceptable to protect the corporate entity.

By the end of this course, you will have defined your own personal code of conduct and developed a plan of action to stick to it when the stakes feel high and you are pressured to abandon it.

Course Requirements

- This course is about you. It is about determining where you stand on the issues presented and deciding how you will conduct yourself as a leader. Therefore, participation in class discussions is absolutely essential.
- Each of us will bring different life experiences to the discussion which will inform our perspectives. Disagreement is normal, natural. At all times, disagreements will be handled respectfully.
- Because the class will have a heavy focus on discussion, attendance will be counted as part of your grade.

Required Texts

1. **Blind Spots: Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do About It**, Max Bazerman and Ann E. Tenbrunsel, 1st Edition, ISBN: 978-0691156224 (Price: \$10.98)
2. **Ethics & Leadership Video CoursePack**, Helios Digital Learning, 1st Edition, (purchased online via <https://store.heliosdigital.com/product?catalog=cpacks-businst394-walker>) (Price \$34.00)

Grading

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| • Group Discussions | 35% |
| • Homework, Current Event Analysis | 30% |
| • Midterm Exam | 15% |
| • Final Paper | 20% |

Overview of Class Sessions

- Week 1
 - Course Overview (Synchronous)
 - Lecture – Ethics, Leadership & The Hero's Journey (**Asynchronous**)
 - Out-of-Class Viewing Before Next Class: The Push (Netflix)
 - DUE NEXT CLASS: Current Events Analysis

- Week 2
 - Group Discussion (The PUSH)
 - Lecture – Cognitive Biases, Conflicts of Interest & Decision-Making (Asynchronous)
 - Out-of-Class Viewing: All the Queen’s Horses (in coursepack)
 - DUE NEXT CLASS: Current Events Analysis

- Week 3
 - Group Discussion (All the Queen’s Horses)
 - Lecture – Willful Blindness, Social Confrontation & Power Dynamics (Asynchronous)
 - Out-of-Class Viewing: None
 - DUE NEXT CLASS: Robinhood eCase, Current Events Analysis

- Week 4
 - Group Discussion (Robinhood)
 - Lecture: Ethical Leadership & Government (Asynchronous)
 - Out-of-Class Viewing: None
 - DUE NEXT CLASS: Study for Midterm

- Week 5: Midterm
 - Due Next Class: The Social Dilemma (Netflix)

- Week 6
 - Group Discussion (The Social Dilemma)
 - Lecture – Ethics & Innovation (Part 1 – When YOU are the real product, Part 2 – Moving Fast and Breaking Things) (Asynchronous)
 - Out-of-Class Viewing: None
 - DUE NEXT CLASS: Blind Spots (Book)

- Week 7
 - Group Discussion (Blind Spots)
 - The Truth About Lying & Subtext (When Leaders Say One Thing but Do Another) (Asynchronous)
 - Out-of-Class Viewing: None
 - DUE NEXT CLASS: House of Cards, Current Events Analysis

- Week 8
 - Group Discussion (House of Cards)
 - Lecture – Silence & Whistleblowing (Asynchronous)
 - Out-of-Class Viewing: None
 - DUE NEXT CLASS: Whistling While You Work, Current Events Analysis

- Week 9:
 - Group Discussion (Whistling While You Work)
 - Lecture – Ethical Culture in Large and Small Organizations (Asynchronous)
 - Out-of-Class Viewing: None

- Week 10: No class (Final Paper Due)