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Ethics Essay

What is the purpose of a code of ethics? As engineers, the technology we design play a major role in everyday lives and a code of ethics is what we use to keep our technology safe for public use. Since there are so many engineers in the world a common code of ethics needs to be established in order to reduce corruption in our field and ensure quality among the products we produce.

Conflict of interests are the most common ethical problem that occur in a situation. In order to resolve a conflict of interests I feel the first step is to understand both sides of the argument. Let’s say for example I am developing a new type of car. I have finished everything and am just installing the finishing touches to the radio. My boss comes in and tells me that we need to ship it out right now or else I am fired. I would like to finish the radio, but I also want to keep my job. In this situation, I would try to understand why our interests cannot both be met and attempt to come up with a solution that works for all parties involved. If no solution can be found, I would side with my interests and consider what effects my actions would have on people.

In our class discussion we talked about the Volkswagen scandal. We discussed the ethical issues in this case mainly the fact that Volkswagen have lied about their emissions tests and put the safety of the public at risk. This clearly violates our first code of ethics which is to uphold the safety, health, and welfare of the public. We also discussed what Volkswagen could do to fix their and came to the conclusion that the best course of action would be for the company to sponsor clean energy research or help build clean energy devices.

After discussing the scandal at Volkswagen, we decided to put ourselves in the shoes of the engineers who work there and how we would go about with our actions. We all agreed that the best solution would be to just quit the company. We all came to the conclusion that the conflict of interest and risk they were putting the public health in was not worth our integrity.

Of the 6 virtues of ethics, I felt the three that most relate to the case we studied were integrity, honesty, and responsibility. The virtue of integrity comes from the fact that releasing this car would violate my personal morals as well as the code of ethics which is to uphold the public’s health and safety. The virtue of honesty comes from the fact that I would be betraying the public’s trust by releasing a product that is not safe. When someone purchases a product, they expect it to be safe for consumption. By releasing a product that is not safe, I would be violating the trust that the public put in me to product quality products. The virtue of responsibility comes from the fact that I would be the one responsible for the people who got hurt by this product. If someone died as a result of the fumes emitted from the vehicle, I would feel responsible for their death since I was the one who allowed the car to pass inspection.

The other 3 virtues of ethics are not necessary unimportant to the case we studied, but I do feel that they are less relevant. The virtue of fidelity I feel, can fall under the honesty category. This is because the way I see it, being honest with the public is the same as staying faithful to them. Only when you lie to them do you start to become unfaithful. The virtue of charity I feel can fall under the category of integrity. My morals include helping the public and looking out for their safety. Since my morals line up with charity, I felt I did not need to include it. I felt that the virtue of self-discipline could be applied to this case, however the other virtues seem to cover it already. In this case we could say that Volkswagen acted in a deficient manner by skimping on their emission tests. However I feel that if they followed the virtue of responsibility they would not need to cheat on their tests. I feel that one virtue that could apply to this situation that is not included in the list is temperance. If the company had shown a little restrain in their attempt to gain more money, they would not have put the lives of the public at risk.