

You are about to begin a most important part of your business education, the study, discussion, and practice of business ethics. Business ethics comprises a few simple and rarely contested premises. These premises have their exceptions, to be sure, but there is little doubt that they hold up in general. First, ethics is essential to the functioning of the business world and the market. The opposite of ethics is corruption, and we know how badly corrupt countries and systems perform, insofar as they perform at all. Ethics is a fundamental part of business education, not an embellishment. The courses you take are not simply about learning the techniques of marketing, finance, accounting, and so forth, but also about how to practice them in the right way. Second, sound ethical practices are what make a business viable and adaptable to change over time. We do not claim that ethics always pays, but we do know how much ethical failure costs, not just in financial terms but also in terms of productivity, innovation, morale, and goodwill in organizations. The sheer weight of guilt and regret is hard to measure, but anyone who has ever done anything wrong (and that covers just about all of us) knows how much such feelings can take away from a happy life. Third, business ethics is everybody's business. Every business student, every businessperson, every employee, every manager, and every executive has as his or her primary responsibility, along with learning and doing his or her job, acting ethically and, on occasion, speaking up in the face of unethical behavior. On the downside, not being ethical—or even failing to speak up—can bring a career, no matter how successful, to a sudden, humiliating halt. Ethical failures invite bankruptcy, lawsuits, and even jail time.

We designed this text with the pervasiveness of ethics in business and the personal nature of everyone's responsibility regarding ethics in mind. It is made up of some of the best writing on business ethics along a broad spectrum of issues. But the readings are all directed toward one end, a practical end, and that is to provide you with the material to think about, discuss, and ultimately practice ethics in business. Some readings tackle huge questions about the nature of free enterprise and the new world of business in a globalized economy. Some readings concern the new technologies and the ethical questions they raise. Some readings focus on the details of your job—your rights, duties, and responsibilities as an employee or manager. In every reading, we want you to take it personally. Take each issue as your issue, and grapple with it as if it is up to you to decide, sitting there at or on your desk. These issues demand a decision and a solution. Someday soon, one or more of them may well be yours.