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Ethics Essay

Ethics are very important in a business setting. Without them, companies could practically get away with murder if the government regulations allow them to. This is the reason that our mentor, Prof. Jones, had us read and discuss the Ford Pinto case. Initially, once you read the court case, all of the blame gets placed onto Ford for the deaths of 27 people who were engulfed in flames after being rear-ended. The case explains that Ford was only concerned with the money, and that they were willing to sell their corporate souls for the low, low cost of \$11 per car to fix the fuel tank problem. Presented with this evidence, it is very difficult to not come to a “guilty” verdict.

However, once we started talking with our mentor, other things started to become clear. This was the 1970’s, and car crash technology is nowhere near where it is now. Ford followed all of the government regulations that were applicable to this car. The crash specification that the court case mentions includes the key-word “proposed” in the phrase “The crash tests revealed that the Pinto’s fuel system could not meet the 20-mile-per-hour **proposed** crash test”. And, perhaps most interesting about these crash test findings is that the court case is filed on behalf of a couple that was rear-ended at “28 to 37 miles per hour”, so meeting this proposed 20 mile per hour crash test wouldn’t have helped this couple anyway. Other things, such as the fact that the document that declared that Ford didn’t want to spend \$11 per car to make them safer was ruled inadmissible in court and that the Pinto also had a transmission defect that killed more people than the fuel tank makes this case seem like it was overhyped and/or incredibly sensationalized.

Ethical decisions for me involve taking a long, hard look at the evidence before coming to a conclusion. There are always two sides to every story, and always people looking to make great personal gain from presenting their side. Therefore, it is extremely important to me to find the whole truth and nothing but the truth to come to a decision. Secondly, I realize that nothing in this world is black and white. I decide, from the information gathered above, if the company walks over that line into a territory I'm not comfortable with. This territory is largely dependant on if somebody makes an honest mistake or was wilfully negligent.

Ultimately, we were able to come to a conclusion as a group that Ford wasn't actually acting completely unethically. One person in our group still thought that Ford should have strived for that 20 miles per hour test and that they were unethical for not doing so, but I believe that cars are inherently dangerous and that if you die in one, it isn't the company's fault, as long as they follow government standards.

The three virtues that I think most closely follow this discussion are integrity, honesty and responsibility. Integrity fits into this case because I think Ford did all that they were legally required to create the Pinto. They didn't compromise their integrity by trying to sneak under the crash regulations that the government set. Honesty is one of the big ones for the court case, since the prosecution produced the supposed for-internal-use-only document that said that they didn't want to spend the \$11 on a gas tank. This document was ruled inadmissible in court since it wasn't a secret or hidden document, it was stapled to the back of a NHTSA correspondence about proposed regulation. Finally, Ford showed a good deal of responsibility by voluntarily issuing a recall in 1978 that, at expense to themselves for something that they had been declared "not guilty" on, fixed the problems with the gas tank design. The other values I feel are less relevant since fidelity, charity and self-discipline weren't shown in such an appreciable way in this case study.