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IEEE Code of Ethics Essay

When people think of ethics, they don’t really understand the whole story behind the meaning or the need to have them. What people also don’t realize is that they are adhering to a code of ethics every day of their lives, whether they want to or not. Most ethics go unwritten throughout time, regardless of the size of the population that follows it or their dedication to it. Knowing this, it’s not hard to believe that certain companies or large organizations write a strict code of ethics for its members, employees, representatives, etc. to follow because without it, many unwanted issues, moral dilemmas, and other controversies will likely arise. In particular, the IEEE Code of Ethics, highlights all the major ethical norms and expectations, as well as more specific topics relating to specifically engineering and a company’s best interest.

In more personal situations, ethics designed for large-scale corporations may not fit into the situations, nor the circumstances that an individual might face. Needless to say, however, that when I read the IEEE Code of Ethics for the first, I could definitely relate to a few, if not most of the ten listed commitments. The first observation I made was that the topics might seem commonplace, expected, a moral absolute, but then I got to thinking…I’m a college student, living in Ames, Iowa. I have it pretty good, being around good people every day. However, this life is not the life I will be living in five, ten, fifteen years, but thinking about these ethics made me realize that a lot of these issues exist in the real world. There are people out there, working and living their lives, who pass off their work as better quality than it is, who discriminate against different people, and who will take the quickest way to the finish. That being said, on a day-to-day basis, I may not face the challenges that others often face, but I do have my fair share of handling ethical situations. As a teaching student for the university, I know that it is expected that I present myself as a good role model. Not only that, but I am continually working with students of many different skill levels, students with very different cultural backgrounds, and students who are new to the college experience. With such a large number of students, I am sometimes faced with having to deal with ethical situations. Most of the time, it is simple stuff like helping them along with their homework but not giving away the answer too easily and keeping my patience as the student attempts to learn at a different pace than I would expect. Other scenarios include academic dishonesty, in which case I analyze the situation and decide what to do from there. Most of the time, I will give the student the benefit of the doubt, and analyze the situation fairly. Some of the factors that come into play can affect me, the students, and other representatives of the university. One that is obviously not much of a problem, but still comes up in the back of my mind is “how will the students perceive me after I accuse them of academic dishonesty?” Other, more pressing issues would be the thought that maybe the students didn’t actually do anything wrong, in which case I would be putting a detrimental stress on their lives, as well as wasting the time of the faculty that works to analyze these types of situations. The final scenario is that the students are guilty, in which case the best course of action would be to analyze the situation fairly and report it to a faculty member with all the information I have.

When it comes to ethics, these sorts of situations are a big deal to certain people, but for the most part do not have quite the impact on society that some larger, more pressing situations would have. A good example of this was discussed briefly in our small group’s meeting and discussion over ethics. Our group decided to do something a little bit different that was a good exercise to expand our thinking on the subject of ethics. We each looked at the code of ethics and picked one point that we would then create a real-life scenario for. During the meeting, we each ran through our scenarios, and the Dr. Wong would expand on the conversation to include many different examples of ethics throughout history. One of the topics he touched on was the explosion of the Columbia space shuttle in 1986. We discussed the various ethical issues surrounding the situation. For example, safety waivers were approved by engineers who decided that fixing the defects was worth the time; furthermore, these engineers, little did they know, were also deciding the fate of the crew on board the shuttle. It seems that in a situation as crucial as keeping the crew and the shuttle in safe, working conditions, ethical standards need to be put strictly in place, so as to avoid such catastrophes as the Columbia. Some other ethical situations that arise from a huge mishap like this one is how to address the failure after the fact. “How does a company like NASA mess up this big? Isn’t it the engineers’ jobs to make sure things like this don’t happen?” are a few questions that were certainly in everyone’s mind at the time. NASA was faced with the ethical issue of telling the truth or covering up the truth and telling a believable lie. There were a number of factors that went into the decision, I’m sure, including their reputation, a great deal of money, and the support of the people. In these situations, it is best to come out to the public and reveal the situation as it is and how it happened. Revealing this shows the public that the company is willing to accept the consequences for their mistakes, and in the long run probably helped to maintain their reputation and support from the public. Based on the input given from the members of the group, we were all in accordance that this would be the right way to handle an ethical situation like this.

Three of the Virtue Ethics that relate to this case study in particular and that I mentioned briefly before are integrity, honesty, and responsibility. Integrity is what ethical behavior is all about. Integrity is described as following moral principles and ethical behavior in a field of practice and in life as well. Honesty, of course, is one of the most important ethics because it depends a lot on relationships and give-and-take agreements. Practicing an honest lifestyle and professional career will do more good in the end than any hiding, lying, or deceiving may seem to do right away. When someone is open about an uncomfortable situation, others will start to trust more, rather than question their honesty. The other Virtue Ethic is responsibility, which goes along well with the other two because it shows trustworthiness and reliability. To be responsible entails a strict adherence to moral behavior that it beneficial to all parties involved.

It’s not hard to see how these three Virtue Ethics relate to the case study because integrity and responsibility could have prevented the disaster in the first place. If NASA engineers had maintained integrity throughout development and testing of the space shuttle and all that went into it, the safety waivers might have been avoided and real issues might have been fixed. It was up to every member of the team to maintain integrity and fulfill every responsibility assigned to them. The other scenario is comprised mainly of honesty. Considering that NASA was open with the public about the situation, they understood the benefits of being honest and the benefits it would reap. Afterward, they maintained their reputation to the best of their ability and continued to carry out actions in ethical manners.

The three of the Virtue ethics that weren’t quite as relevant to this case study were fidelity, charity, and self-discipline. Each of these appeared to be more individual oriented, as in, how should an individual act for the benefit of himself, his colleagues, and those around him. It seems that the Columbia situation was more dependent on work ethic as not necessarily how individuals acted in the work place or at home. This is not to say that these ethics had no effect on the people or the company, but the other three were evidently more relevant, considering the occurrence, and how the company decided to handle it.