

## **UNDERSTANDING ETHICAL CONDUCT BOTH IN AND OUT OF OFFICE**

It is a great delight to be invited to address this august gathering on the very serious subject of ethics. I thank the management for inviting me to make this presentation and to interact with the new staff of this new Federal Government Tribunal which has mandate for competition and consumer protection. I congratulate you all.

Today's interaction will focus on ethical conduct both in and out of office. Talking about work place ethics on a day like this is understandable; but some people will want to question why we going to talk about outside-work behavior in an induction training?

The interest on outside-work behavior is not new. At the beginning of the twentieth century, major American companies had entire departments staffed with hundreds of 'sociological specialists' who were charged with monitoring the private behavior of company employees – often in their homes – to make sure they did not act in a way that will bring embarrassment to their establishments.

As a country, at several times, efforts have been made to attack negative values and institutionalize ethics in our individual and national lives. There was, for example, the ethical regeneration initiative of President Shehu Shagari through the Ethical Revolution in 1981, General Buhari's War Against Indiscipline, General Babangida's MAMSER, General Abacha's WAI-C (C-for Corruption which has transformed to the National Orientation Agency); and President Jonathan even gone further to appoint a Special Adviser on National Ethics and Values. Above all, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution recognised the place and role of ethics in our national

life. Section II, sub section 23 provides that: “The national ethics shall be Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-reliance and Patriotism”.

However, we do not seem to have substantially succeeded in upholding the constitutional provision on national ethics in a great deal of our individual and corporate lives. A high level of unethical behaviour characterise our personal and official conducts. These include exhibition of inappropriate and unethical conducts that are intentionally aimed at subverting, undercutting and undermining proper and correct behaviour. Unethical behavior is visible at our homes, schools, roads, offices, markets, business practices, politics; mention any sector of our national life and you can easily point out aspects of unethical and indiscipline behaviour common to it. Unethical behaviour breeds immorality, impatience, deception, shamelessness, criminal tendencies, corruption, cutting of corners and institutionalization of mediocrity and degradation of values and bastardization of credibility, integrity and quality in personal and official affairs.

What is Ethics?

Ethics refer to the forms of behaviour and conduct that are socially correct based on core values cherished and upheld by the society. Strictly speaking, ethics is: the science and art of proper behaviour. It is the branch of philosophy that studies human actions in terms of being right or wrong, licit or illicit. In other words, it is the science of good and evil. The good is what is to be done and the evil is what is to be avoided. It is also the science of what is permitted and may be done or, what is forbidden and may not be done. In this perspective, ethics has to do with obligations and rightfulness in actions and indeed in decisions as well.

## What Is Work Ethic?

The meaning of work ethic refers to a set of behavioral rules that create a positive environment at work. A strong work ethic can lead to employees being fairly treated, which in turn motivates them and develops a sense of loyalty towards the organization.

On the other hand, office politics and a management that doesn't encourage ethical and fair behavior is bound to make employees depressed and disinterested.

Employees have to be made aware of whether they are doing the right things, and if they need any course correction. A strong work ethic ensures that there are adequate directives and correct work practices in place to mentor the employees properly. These practices lead to fair and equal treatment of all employees and a transparent appraisal system.

In organizations where a strong work ethic is missing, employees may find it difficult and uncomfortable to survive and work for the long term. Let's take a detailed look at the meaning and definition of work ethic to understand it better.

An ethical worker is loyal and committed to the goals of his organization by putting in their best efforts. Genuine effort and dedication towards company goals is appreciated and rewarded with remunerative and hierarchical growth by organizations that have a strong work ethic.

Hence, it won't be wrong to state that building an ethical employee-employer relationship is dependent upon both the stakeholders.

While organizations need to be impartial and supportive in their appraisal and performance review processes, employees also need to display certain traits that highlight their strong work ethic.

Let's Take A Look At These Traits:

Work ethic characteristics

Employees with a strong work ethic exhibit a particular set of values and behaviors. These characteristics make them stand out as highly coveted team members and praise-worthy employees.

### **Reliability**

Employees with a strong work ethic are very reliable. You can expect these individuals to be on time to work and meetings. They meet their deadlines and offer quality work. A reliable coworker makes an excellent teammate because they contribute fairly to projects.

### **Dedication**

Part of a good work ethic is commitment and dedication to the job. They know how to focus on tasks without being distracted. These employees usually work until they finish their duties. They stay with one company for long periods.

### **Discipline**

Discipline is an essential part of showing a good work ethic. Highly disciplined employees show determination and commitment to the job. They strive to meet or exceed expectations and seek opportunities to learn new skills and improve their performance.

## **Honesty**

Being an honest individual means you do not deceive others by giving out misleading information. This includes the truthful way of conduct that is usually without the intention of lying, cheating or any form of falsification.

## **Productivity**

A strong work ethic translates to outstanding productivity. Productive employees often have a higher output than their counterparts. They complete projects early and do more than the minimum requirements.

## **Cooperation**

A good work ethic is something that employees often spread to those around them by cooperating willingly on projects. They show good teamwork and readily assist others when needed. Achieving an ethically strong workplace involves the cooperation of every employee. No matter which level you are at, you need to ensure that all your actions are fair and just, particularly if you are entrusted with a position to lead.

## **Integrity**

Professional integrity means holding oneself to high moral principles. Those with a strong work ethic also have outstanding integrity. They're honest, polite and fair to others.

## **Responsibility**

Demonstrating a strong work ethic requires a keen sense of responsibility. Those who are ethical and responsible hold themselves accountable for their actions. They will accept the blame for errors they've contributed to and proactively work to fix these issues.

## **Professionalism**

Employees with a good work ethic almost always maintain their professionalism. They exhibit a professional attitude clear in the way they dress, speak and carry themselves. They're respectful, focused, organized and neat.

## **How to improve work ethic skills**

You can exhibit notable work ethic skills by acting professionally and dedicating yourself to the job. Try these tips to demonstrate your work ethic:

### **1. Act as an ambassador of the company**

Maintain a positive attitude toward the company in both professional and personal interactions. Seek ways to further the business even if they're outside the scope of your job. For example, a finance professional may pass a potential lead along to a sales representative.

## **2. Prioritize your professional responsibilities**

Maintain good attendance, return promptly from lunch and arrive for meetings early. Strive to make personal appointments that don't interfere with your work schedule and only take personal calls on your cell phone when you're at lunch.

## **3. Seek professional development**

Independently seek ways to improve your work performance, such as taking night classes, attending weekend seminars or reading industry publications.

## **4. Review your work**

Submit thorough work that you have double-checked for quality and consistency. Manage your time properly so you can deliver projects early and give each task the time and attention it requires.

## **5. Show respect to others**

Speak politely to and about others in the workplace. Keep your interactions professional to show your respect for others.

## **SUMMARY OF NIGERIA NATIONAL ETHICS**

### **DISCIPLINE**

Success at your endeavor is practically impossible without discipline. All successful people, and prosperous nations, have discipline. You have no chance of achieving anything worthwhile without discipline. Great goals demand persistent effort, day in, day out.

Human growth requires constant diligence that will ensure steady progress towards worthy goals. Discipline is necessary to ensure that

things get done and ensure that systems are maintained and continually improved upon. For instance, we need to keep our body through fitness programmes to push ourselves to do the hard work required to succeed, and that takes discipline. We need to meet crucial deadlines. That takes discipline. We need to maintain high quality in our work output. That means discipline. Discipline also incorporates integrity and honesty. We need to be disciplined to keep appointments, support networks and relationships, do what we say we will do, and be honest with ourselves and those who work for us. We need discipline to keep our focus on servicing the people who elevate us in the world. We only really achieve great success by providing value to others, and it takes discipline for us to focus on that and forget the temptations of greed, laziness and inappropriate indulgence. True success is not and can never be a short-term game. It needs discipline to maintain the energy and to do the right things that ensure that success.

## **INTEGRITY**

*"The foundation stones for a balanced success are honesty, character, integrity, faith, love and loyalty." – Zig Ziglar.*

Character constitutes the moral core of personhood. The only thing that can guide us as a people with a shared national identity shared national destiny, shared cultural values as Africans, and no less significantly, a shared geographical location on Earth, and then keep us on a proper evolutionary course, his impeccable character.

Self-control is the ability to choose to do the things we should and refrain from doing the things we shouldn't. When we exhibit self-control, we build trust in other people. They respect us and are perfectly willing to collaborate with us. Self-control is what allows us to curb any tendency towards greed. Self-control is what will enable us to keep our fingers away from the national till. Self-control is what dissuades us from clandestinely and fraudulently, adding that extra zero to the figure we write on a cheque.

### **The Dignity of Labour**

"All labour that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence." - Martin Luther King Jr ('Strength to Love' 1963)

The dignity of labour is the philosophy that teaches that all types of jobs deserve equal respect and that no occupation should suffer the indignity of being considered inferior, while none should wear the toga of superiority, and greater significance, no job should be discriminated against on any basis whatsoever. Regardless of whether one's occupation demands physical labour or intellectual effort, all jobs deserve their due respect.

Social justice, in its simplest definition, implies both a politico-philosophical theory that promotes the concept of fairness in relations between individuals in society, and an equal access to wealth, opportunities and allied social privileges in a society.

Social justice is simply that which constitutes the proper human social order that can guarantee the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens in a society, and especially in such a manner as to foster a flourishing state where individuals are treated equally by the state, regardless of social status or creed.

There is an overwhelming need for a reform of the judicial process in the country in line with the global tendency towards human rights protection.

### **RELIGIOUS TOLERANT**

The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees freedom of worship to every citizen, and this provision easily translates to the absolute truth that no one should be victimized for their beliefs.

The multiplicity of religions in Nigeria affords every citizen the right to choose which faith is convenient for personal and individual worship. Therefore, freedom of faith must be defended at all cost.

Religious intolerance, or what might simply qualify as religious fanaticism, is the narrow-minded inability of an adherent of a particular religion to acknowledge, accommodate and accept the right of others to live in accordance with the tenets of a faith different from his own.

The fundamentalist agenda is primarily focused on ascribing the right to humanity on the basis of a certain religious claim which it seeks to legitimize, by force of coercion or intimidating violence that can border on outright terrorism, of recognized state authority, in the

process introducing a new set of alarming dynamics that totally destabilize the body politic.

## SELF RELANCE

"There is an inverse relationship between reliance on the state and self-reliance." - William F. Buckley Jr.

In much the same way that the future of every family is dependent on the quality, and not the quantity, of the youths in that family, so is the future of any nation dependent on the quality, and not quantity of the youths of that nation.

Investment in people must be substantially boosted. The government should set targets for increasing expenditure on education and health, using oil revenues to fund both infrastructure and recurrent spending, while ensuring that existing funds are spent more efficiently.

Nigeria should harness the potential of its diaspora to provide opportunities for the youths, and for new ideas and investments.

## Patriotism

It is a matter of the most tragic commentary that the word '*patriotism*' is simply not a very popular one in the lexicon of commonly-spoken English in Nigerian.

Even though the average Nigerian will often exhibit a certain intellectual reticence, if not a bemused detachment, mostly occasioned by a sense of bewilderment, at the sometimes confounding unfolding of events in Nigeria, the time has come for him to wake up a latent pride, and a certain bumptious faith in his citizenship of a potentially great nation.

## CONCLUSION

A strong work ethic creates a bond of trust between the employees and the organization. The employees trust the company to treat them equally and give fair compensation and future growth opportunities based on their performance, while the organization becomes confident that their employees are capable of performing the assigned duties within specified timelines.

However, to inculcate a strong work ethic, it is necessary to learn the various techniques that increase productivity, trust and coordination.

In this paper, we have tried to indicate that there is a strong correlation between positive values, correct attitudinal disposition and sustained ethical standards.