

Ethics Instruction in Hospitality Management Programs

Christine Jaszay, Ph.D.
Professor
Director of Isbell Hospitality Ethics

School of Hotel and Restaurant Management
Northern Arizona University
P.O. Box 5638
Flagstaff, Arizona 86011-5638
(928) 523-2133
(928) 523-1711 fax
Christine.Jaszay@nau.edu

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Abstract

This paper introduces an effective, integrated ethics program with an on-going case study that was designed by Isbell Hospitality Ethics for the purpose of teaching hospitality students to recognize ethical dilemmas and to utilize high level analysis skills to make ethical decisions.

Ethics Instruction in Hospitality Management Programs

The literature tells us again and again that we must teach ethics in our hospitality programs. (Please go to the Isbell Hospitality Ethics web site at www2.nau.edu/~clj5/ethics/ for a complete review of the hospitality ethics literature since 1990 and many of the full-text articles.) An article appearing in the last issue of the *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education* reiterated this need stating that “it is imperative for hospitality programs to offer ethics education and training for their hospitality students” (Yeh, Moreo, Ryan, & Perry, 2005). There is general agreement that it is most likely best to incorporate ethics across the curriculum using a case study approach (Yeh, et al., 2005; Jaszay, 2001).

The results of survey after survey have been reported in the literature, all pointing to the need to teach ethics (Jaszay, 2001, 2003, 2005). The recent results of the Yeh, Moreo, Ryan, and Perry study “imply that many hospitality programs have not incorporated and implemented ethics education into their curricula, however faculty members tend to think that they have” (Yeh, et al., 2005). This catch as catch can approach to teaching ethics in hospitality programs is inconsistent and ineffective. We don’t need any more low level descriptive research telling us over and over that we need to teach ethics. We know we need to teach ethics. What we need is consistent ethics instruction ready to incorporate into our hospitality programs. Most hospitality educators have neither the time nor the ethics expertise to take on such a task.

We at Isbell Hospitality Ethics had the time, the ethics expertise, instructional design skill, and the will to take on this responsibility. We designed a complete hospitality ethics curriculum with an accompanying text book (Jaszay, 2006; Jaszay & Dunk, 2006). The purpose of this article is to describe the ethics curriculum to hospitality educators and encourage them to incorporate it into their own hospitality courses and programs.

The *Curriculum* is organized into 14 lessons that can be delivered within two to six hours depending on the length of time available for the particular lesson. Each lesson includes a list of materials needed, such as handouts and overhead transparencies (hard copies included), the objective of the lesson, the steps of the lesson, a quiz and key, and a complete lesson plan for delivering the lesson. Instructors can use each lesson as is or modify them to suit their particular teaching styles and the needs of their students.

The accompanying textbook has 15 chapters that correspond to the lessons in the *Curriculum* (Ethics and Housekeeping, Ethics and Foodservice, Ethics and Marketing, etc.) and focuses on the “Ethical Principles for Hospitality Managers (*honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, loyalty, fairness, concern and respect for others, commitment to excellence, leadership, reputation and morale, and accountability*). These are rules that have been determined through years of practice in the hospitality industry that, if adhered to in the decision-making process, should result in the best possible consequences for all parties involved.

Hospitality students can be taught these rules, but they might not necessarily believe that honesty is truly the best policy or that loyalty to one’s employer is always expected. In this program, however, students are required to make hypothetical managerial decisions for the fictitious Freshwater Oasis Inn. They are guided into comparing consequences for each possible decision with regard to stakeholders

(manager, employees, company, customers, etc.), and then into selecting decisions that lead to the most favorable outcomes. A pattern ultimately becomes apparent, and students are likely to adopt an automatic acceptance and application of the rules.

The on-going Freshwater Oasis Inn case study is designed to be entertaining and quite realistic. Students will get to know the fictional characters, be interested in the situations they confront in their day-to-day duties at FOI, and care about the outcomes. By the end of the *Curriculum*, students will have analyzed over 50 ethical dilemmas in each department within the case study hotel - - ethical dilemmas they may have already encountered in their own jobs. They will be well acquainted with the Ethical Principles for Hospitality Managers, understanding how the principles apply in a multitude of situations. Overall, our goal is to make students adept at ethical analysis through “hands-on” exercises.

We also address the less obvious behavioral areas that have a direct influence on our ability to be ethical. We address topics such as civility, courtesy, problem-solving, diversity, communication, stress management, delegation, time management, and humility because, to be ethical requires that we have the life skills and people skills necessary to provide the foundation for making ethical decisions and life choices. We cannot manage others successfully if we cannot manage ourselves, nor does it do much good to make proper decisions if we are unable to get anyone to go along with them. How we behave in our personal and professional lives are connected. If we cheat or lie at home, we are more likely to behave similarly at work. To be ethical requires more than just following a set of ethical rules. It requires that we understand other individuals as well as ourselves, and that we also possess the social skills necessary to ensure successful interaction with them.

The on-going integrated case study analysis instruction, backed with consistent philosophy and pedagogy, is far more effective than the inconsistent and often times unrelated ethics instruction that may or may not be presented in each course. It is extremely powerful to have the same line, presented in the same way, by a variety of professors. Students are better able to grasp the importance of and see the relationship of ethics in every area of their careers and lives.

Just as someone can be an excellent piano teacher without being a concert pianist, we do not have to be philosophers to teach ethics. If we are good teachers and have good instructional materials, we can be very effective ethics teachers. This program is based in Utilitarianism – that is, choosing the decision that results in the least pain for the most people. Because this is a pragmatic approach, allowing students to consider various decision options and selecting the decision option that has the fewest negative consequences for themselves and others, we, also, do not have to be saints to effectively teach ethics.

We influence our students who will go out and manage the biggest industry in the world. If our students are steeped in ethics, they can have a profoundly positive effect on their employees, which in turn can have a profoundly positive effect on our society. Through education, we can change the world for the best. That is our responsibility as educators and leaders. *Ethical Decision Making in the Hospitality Industry* and the accompanying *Curriculum* is a tool that can help us to meet our responsibility.

Students obviously have to purchase the reasonably priced text book, but the curriculum is free. Programs can plunk a unit from the curriculum into each of their core

courses and instantly have a professionally designed, effective, integrated ethics program. We know we need to teach ethics. We know that ethics are best taught through an integrated case study approach. The instruction is now available, and there is no longer any reason for not having an integrated ethics program in place in every hospitality program.

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