

# Introduction: Promoting Business Ethics

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The articles in this special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics* were selected from presentations made at the Fourth Annual International Conference Promoting Business Ethics. This conference is sponsored annually by the Vincentian universities in the United States: DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, Niagara University in Niagara, New York, and St. John's University in New York, New York. The guiding vision of the conference is to create a more ethical world by changing dramatically the hearts and minds of the individuals and organi-

zations with whom we interact. Its mission is to achieve this vision by creating a synergistic community of business and academic professionals brought together to build a more ethical environment.

This year's conference, hosted by St. John's University at the Garden City Hotel in Garden City, New York, October 30 through November 1, 1997, focused on six distinct topical areas. Within each of those areas, a special effort was made to have joint presentations made by academic and business professionals who combined scholarly and practical insight in interactive discussion of issues facing business today. The diversity of disciplines represented by the participants demonstrated the breadth and depth of continuing efforts to bridge ethical theory and practice for business. Among the disciplines represented were theology, law, philosophy, accounting, marketing, management, computer and decision sciences, economics, finance, literature, speech, and education. The international flavor of the conference was reflected by scholars from Australia, Canada, Egypt, Germany, Japan, and the United States coming together to discuss ethical issues germane to business.

The first of the conference's questions or topical areas was "What is the Place of Spirituality in Business?" The keynote address was given by the Rev. Donald Harrington, C.M., President of St. John's University and former President of Niagara University. Representing the largest Catholic university in the United States, Fr. Harrington's address focused the conference on the spirit and mission of the three sponsoring institutions exemplified by the life and thought of St. Vincent DePaul as relevant to business

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ethics. A panel of leading national scholars organized by Dr. Charles Clark of St. John's followed Fr. Harrington's address with a discussion of Catholic Social Thought and Management Education. Then, individual presentations examined the role of spirituality in business, especially its practical application within international business.

The second topic was "How Can Business Create a More Ethical Interpersonal Environment? This track featured a lively and controversial panel discussion by scholars and professionals. This panel was moderated by Al Gini, Associate Editor of the *Business Ethics Quarterly*, who also raised additional ethical implications about work and its overwhelming dominance in life today.

William Redgate, the President of the Ethics Officers Association focused on the topical area, "What Are the Lessons We Can Learn from Ethical Failures and Lapses?" in the third keynote address of the conference. Individual and panel presentations for this track highlighted concerns for corporate social responsibility for political lobbyists, the media, and the tourist industry.

"Has Technology Introduced New Ethical Problems?" was the fourth topical area keynoted by Dr. Kimball Marshall of Jackson State University. The exploration of the relationship between technology and ethics, as exemplified by the growing use of e-mail, voice-mail, and the internet in business, ignited lively and enthusiastic conversation about the perceived gaps between the two.

The fifth topical area, "How Well Do Organizations Align Their States Ethical Positions and Practices?" was introduced by Wayne Brody, Vice President and General Council of Aaron Electronics, Inc. The panel and individual presentations in this track examined the ethical issues involved in "walking the talk" as represented in various industries from hotels

and airlines to hospitals and schools, as well as law enforcement and the tobacco industry.

Additional ethical issues were developed within the sixth topical area: "How Do the Ethical Dimensions of Business Differ Internationally?" keynoted by Marty Taylor of the Institute for Global Ethics. Child labor, sweatshops, bribery and extortion, as well as the ethical issues faced by emerging economies were among the subjects addressed by the scholars and business professionals presenting in this track.

The papers selected for this special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics* represent the diversity, quality, and excellence of the conference presentations. The editors for this special issue were also the conference coordinators: Marilynn Fleckenstein of Niagara University, Mary Maury of St. John's University, Laura Pincus Hartman of DePaul University, and Patrick Primeaux, S.M. of St. John's University.

We are grateful to Dr. Alex C. Michalos of the University of Northern British Columbia, Canada's newest university, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Business Ethics*, for his continued active participation in, and support of, the conference and for his invitation for us to serve as guest editors of this special issue. We are also grateful for the presence of Mr. Hendrik vanLeusen of Kluwer Academic Publishers in The Netherlands for his encouraging presence at the Fourth Annual International Conference Promoting Business Ethics.

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