

## Ethical Business

Many of the expressions and much of the language we use to describe our business life refer to aggression, conflict, victory and defeat. Business is 'a rat race'. We say it's a dog eat dog world. When we wish to expand our market, we talk about 'conquering new territory'. We aim to 'beat the competition'. When we have been successful we say "we have made a killing". Another attitude admires successful dishonesty or sharp practice. .

A lot of businesses operate self denial. At the same time as they condemn bribery and corruption, they talk about the need 'to lubricate the gears of business' by offering gifts, percentages and honours. The opposite of a bribe is a threat. If we cannot persuade someone with a bribe, maybe a threat will produce the desired result. In business, a threat is called 'pressure'. "I'm going to make him an offer, he can't refuse."

Fortunately, most of us work in ethical businesses which have a sense of responsibility to shareholders, employees, suppliers, customers and society in general. Let's look at some of the language we used to express these ideas. The extracts below come from Pearson's Code of Business Conduct.

Let's look at the first paragraph:

- 1) "We believe our company should include a range of people from different backgrounds, and different points of view. So when we hire someone to work in Pearson, we choose the best candidate without regard to gender, age, race, national origin, religion, disability or sexual orientation. We apply that same standard when choosing suppliers, partners and anyone else we do business with."
  - a) Which part of the paragraph speaks about employees' **diversity**?
  - b) Which part of the paragraph refers to **discrimination**?

Let's look at the two paragraphs which follow:

- 2) People working with us can expect adequate pay for doing their job and special rewards for extraordinary work. They can also expect training; feedback; a safe, amenable place to work, freedom from bullying or favouritism and respect for their privacy, dignity and life outside work.

We do our best to communicate honestly and openly with everyone who has an interest in our company, including colleagues, suppliers, customers, and shareholders.

- a) Where does it say that the company will not **threaten** employees?
- b) The first two sentences list eight things employees will get and two things they will not get. What are they?
- c) Which two adverbs describe the way they intend to communicate?

Let's look at a paragraph from another section of the code.

- 3) In our personal capacities, we don't compete with any activity or business of the company, directly or indirectly, or use the knowledge gained here to help anyone else compete with the company.

What is this paragraph about?

- a] confidence
- b] confidentiality
- c] competence

- 4) We don't do business on behalf of Pearson with a company from which we or a family member may benefit.

This paragraph means:

- a] you must not steal money from the company.
- b] you must not use the company's money to buy things from your uncle's shop.
- c] no members of your family can buy or use the company's products.

- 5) We don't accept gifts or gratuities from current or would-be suppliers or other parties interested in doing business with us or having our favour for personal or commercial reasons. Likewise, we don't give money or gifts to gain influence for ourselves or for Pearson. Gifts or entertainment of small value may be given or accepted in circumstances where they can be reciprocated and where they don't compromise us or the company.

'reciprocated' means:

- a] gifts or entertainment of equal value are given in exchange for the gifts and entertainment received
- b] when accepting a gift you ask how much it cost and offer to pay for it
- c] gifts are given if they will not be valued by the recipient

in this paragraph, 'compromise' means:

- d] reach a satisfactory agreement
- e] to accept the promise of a gift in place of an actual gift
- f] to do something against your principles which appears dishonest or shameful

- 6) When customers ask a question or make a request or a complaint, we start with the presumption that whatever they say is correct. Our response is always quick, generous, friendly and it resolves the situation. We never blame problems on the customer or someone else, and we always keep our sense of humour.

Which three types of communication from customers does this paragraph mention?  
What is the difference between them?

What is the meaning of the verb 'blame'?



Part of the code of conduct concerns the company's responsibility to society. It begins with is paragraph:

- 7) Much of our business involves keeping faith with the public: as an education publisher with responsibility to serve the purpose of learning; as a newspaper publisher dedicated to giving an unbiased account of events; as a company that protects the editorial independence of authors and editors everywhere. This public trust partly defines our company, and we will uphold it at all costs.

This paragraph means:

- a) The public trusts us to be honest and good. We must respect and maintain that trust.
- b) We believe what we learn in school and read in newspapers.
- c) We should not do anything which will be criticised in newspapers.

In the section of the code which refers to wider responsibilities, we find this paragraph about environmental responsibility.

- 8) We try to make integral to our business decisions to operate in a way that is sensitive to the environment and minimize the impact of our products on the environment.

This paragraph means:

- a) The company will always think carefully about how its activities affect the environment and try to do as little damage as possible.
- b) The company will not damage or improve the environment.
- c) The company will encourage everyone to think about the environment.

[The full text of the Pearson Code of Business Conduct can be found at <http://codeofconduct.pearson.com/en/codeofconduct.htm> ]

## ***Points to notice***

Although the code of conduct concerns quite complicated ideas, it is not written in formal complicated language and it is not difficult to understand. It is very carefully written in simple language. This simple language and clear, careful writing is important because everyone should understand the same meaning from each paragraph. The writing should not be ambiguous. (Look for the meaning of this word.)

## **Discussion and Writing Task**

Discuss and write a code of conduct describing the responsibilities of the teacher and the learners in your class. Try to follow the example of the Pearson code of conduct. Write short, clear, unambiguous sentences in simple language.

Include in your code of conduct sections on:

- 1) Classroom behaviour
  - a) Timing and attendance at lessons
  - b) Politeness between students and between the teacher and students
  - c) They use of English and other languages by the teacher and students during lessons
- 2) Homework
  - a) How much and how frequently the teacher can ask for homework
  - b) Deadlines for completion of homework
  - c) Deadlines for the teacher to check and evaluate homework

## **Extra Reading**

- 1) Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: a speech of less than 300 words, delivered in about 3 minutes, but one of the most important speeches in American history.
- 2) The Seven Commandments from Chapter 2 of *Animal Farm* by George Orwell.
  1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
  2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
  3. No animal shall wear clothes.
  4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
  5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
  6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
  7. All animals are equal.

Remembering the final commandment is later changed to "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

- 3) Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics from *I, Robot*
  - i) A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm
  - ii) A robot must obey the orders given it by a human being except where such order would conflict with the First Law
  - iii) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.
- 4) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 30 short articles issued by the United Nations in 1948.

