

## **Cheating in Business Starts in Classrooms**

John D. Copeland  
J.D., LL.M., Ed.D.

Is business ethics education succeeding? In the post-Enron and Sarbanes-Oxley era, business schools increased their students' business ethics studies. Some business schools created separate courses on business ethics, while others tried to integrate business ethics in existing courses. Of the 50 top-tier business schools, one in three requires course work in ethics, sustainability, or social responsibility, according to a Christian Science Monitor article published in March. Thirty-nine of the fifty schools created centers dedicated to those three areas of study.

Unfortunately, much work remains to be done. Recently, officials at Duke's Fuqua Business School caught thirty-four students cheating on an exam. In September 2006, Rutgers University professor Donald McCabe released a revealing study on student cheating. In a study of 5,300 graduate students, 56 percent of the business students admitted to cheating on an exam. McCabe assumes it is likely more students cheated than those willing to admit to it.

### **Real-world Copycats**

The students justified their conduct by saying they were only copying the behavior they will need in the real world. They believe getting the job done is more important than how it is done- commonly referred to as the end justifying the means.

It may be the students are copying their business school leaders. In 2000, the Wall Street Journal gave an ethics test to many of the deans of the nation's business schools.

Nearly half of the deans said they would admit an unqualified student to their school in exchange for a million dollar donation. Thirty-seven percent said they would backdate a donor's \$500,000 check-a felony act- to help the donor with a tax problem.

Regardless of the new emphasis on ethics, a philosophy of pragmatism still dominates business schools. Students get the message that unethical behavior is sometimes necessary to maximize profits.

It is disturbing when so many business students justify cheating. It is not promising for the future of U.S. business.

### **Functional lying**

Admittedly, it is difficult to teach someone to be ethical. Ethics courses, however, should create an awareness of ethics issues and teach ethical solutions to business problems. Professor Michael Hoffman of Bentley College's Center for Business Ethics believes business schools leaders must decide whether the "bottom line" will continue to outweigh questions of right vs. wrong.

A business book released this year is an example of the problem of the mixed message on business ethics sent to students and those in business. In David Schulman's book, "From Hire to Liar: The Role of Deception in the Workplace", he contends that lies and misinformation may not be so bad. According to Schulman, they are essential to doing business. The author concedes that lying is unethical, but argues it has great functional value.

I hope the book will not influence business students and current managers. I doubt the former executives now serving prison terms for their roles in business scandals would agree with the author. We do not need any more liars or felons in business.