BUSINESS ETHICS: HOW TO DEVELOP ETHICAL AWARENESS AND INTROSPECTION IN DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING STUDENTS

Kathleen M. Szczepanek
National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology

“Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.” (Aristotle, 2001).

INTRODUCTION

While I was teaching business ethics to my deaf and hard-of-hearing students at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college for deaf and hard-of-hearing students at Rochester Institute of Technology (NTID/RIT) in Rochester, New York, I introduced a topic related to the principle of virtues and discussed Aristotle briefly. I stated that Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher who tried to teach people about virtues, morality, and how to make virtues habits. In other words, if there are virtues such as being honest, responsible and respectful which we strive to incorporate into our lives, we should make them into habits. For instance, if you don't feel that you are a kind person, then try doing one act of kindness one day, and then again the next day, and eventually, it becomes a habit (Goree, 2007). Ingraining good habits can help a person to have a good sense of character and ethics in a variety of situations and environments.

For those who are not familiar with NTID, it is one of the world’s first and largest technological colleges for approximately 1,500 students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and is one of the eight colleges at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). RIT is a privately endowed, coeducational university that is student-centered and career-focused. NTID’s primary mission is to provide deaf and hard-of-hearing students with outstanding state-of-the-art technical and professional education programs, complemented by a strong arts and sciences curriculum that
prepares them to live and work in the mainstream of a rapidly changing global community and enhances their lifelong learning. NTID’s instructors use a variety of communication strategies while teaching using American Sign Language, spoken language, finger spelling, use printed/visual aids, and web-based materials as part of classroom instruction. When deaf and hard-of-hearing students take courses with hearing students at other RIT colleges, they receive support services such as interpreting, notetakers, and real-time captioning services (NTID Annual Report, 2010).

SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC ISSUES

We hear the questions: “Why is teaching business ethics important;” “Why is it so important that our students take a business ethics courses in colleges and universities;” and “Should colleges and universities require students to take business ethics course as part of their curriculum?” These questions are quite commonly spoken and heard by many, including business educators of deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students. The media broadcasts depicting many ethical violations created by WorldCom, American Insurance Group (AIG), Bernard Madoff, and many others, which include video-relay service call centers for the deaf and hard-of-hearing people (under Viable), have demonstrated how businesses have breached the public trust and necessitates more corporate governance.

Naturally, because of numerous corporate scandals, it is very concerning to the public to see business executives, managers, supervisors, and any working professional not using professional conduct when it comes to making decisions involving other people’s money and assets. Of course, when it comes to making the risk-taking decisions, the good professional manager should have integrity and provide a sense of trust for his/her clients or customers.

To earn and maintain the public’s trust is a critical component of being a successful business-person, hence the importance of requiring students to take business ethics classes. Many students, regardless of their hearing status, graduate from college with little awareness of ethical behaviors and business practices in the work setting. It is apparent that our students’ hearing loss adds to the lack of understanding of general proper ethical conduct in our society. Recently it was noted at NTID/RIT, as well as from research from various sources, that there is anecdotal and factual evidence of deaf and hard-of-hearing students copied the
work of other authors and presented them as their own. This was proven via an anti-plagiarism tool that returned a high percent rate ranging from 60 to 70 percent. It has also been suggested that the parents of these students have “helped” their children with their homework. As a result, the students claim the work of their parents as their own.

Regardless, it should be recognized that hearing students are just as guilty of this behavior. A national survey by Rutgers’ Management Center showed that out of 4,500 high school-age hearing students, at least 75 percent engage in cheating (Slobogin, 2002). This is a very serious concern that we must address by making changes to our academic culture in order to place more value on ethical education itself for learning and professional growth.

Other issues noted by a number of researchers show that many, but not all, deaf and hard-of-hearing (d/hh) students have deficiencies in social, emotional, empathy, communication, social perception, social problem solving, and moral development (Suarez, 2000). This shows that they are rather disconnected from the social norms due to their hearing loss. For instance, because of their hearing loss, they miss out on typical environmental cues and normal verbal interactions. This may result in d/hh students having difficulty distinguishing facial expressions and “fitting in” with peers (Berke, 2007). Also, the hearing loss can cause language development delays and lack of incidental learning in many young deaf and hard-of-hearing NTID students. It is the goal of the faculty in NTID Business Studies Department to graduate deaf and hard-of-hearing students who can pass an ethics questionnaire needed in order to be hired and to display ethical behavior upon hire.

The faculty in the business field is quite aware that successful and sustained businesses are focused on giving value to and sharing values with the employees and society in the work environment (Stewart, 2007). With this in mind, college education is now more focused on learning and gaining the necessary skills to succeed in the workforce, but not necessarily focused on learning ethics.

According to Koerber et al as quoted by Bertolami in Enhancing Ethical Behavior: Views of Students, Administrators, and Faculty, learning about ethics is different from teaching ethics. For instance, Koerber (2007) and her colleagues have noted that students considered the memorization of ethical theories, codes, acts, and so on, to be easy in comparison to solving an ethical dilemma. Hence, an ethical dilemma requires more introspection. Koerber’s article showed an example where some dentists believed that obtaining insurance money by charging
insurance companies for additional procedures that were not performed on their patients, was a good practice. What consequences are there for this type of action, and do the dentists fully understand them (2007)?

In order to fully understand the consequences, deaf and hard-of-hearing students can study real-life examples, such as Enron, Arthur Andersen, Martha Stewart, WorldCom, and Bernard Madoff. Ferrell and Ferrell (2002) stated that the Wall Street Journal/NBC public opinion poll indicated that at least 57 percent of the public felt that the corporate standards and values conveyed by business leaders and executives have dropped in the last 20 years. Also, Ferrell and Ferrell cited another survey conducted by ABC News and the Washington Post that indicated 63 percent of the public felt that corporations should be regulated (PowerPoint slide #3, 2002). Atsushi Nakayama’s interview with the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics’ executive director, Kirk Hanson, stated that the most important lesson learned from the Enron scandal was that it required significant reforms in accounting and corporate governance, and a closer look at the ethical quality of the business culture (Nakayama, 2007). Enron is an energy company that was established in 1985, after Houston Natural Gas merging with InterNorth in Houston, Texas to focus on energy trade on an international and domestic basis. It expanded into a large company which involved many complicated contracts and deals which resulted in billions of dollars in debt. Unfortunately, this debt was concealed from shareholders, employees, and society in general through fraudulent accounting and illegal loans. Many of its executives, especially chief executive officers Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling, were charged for fraudulent charges such as money laundering, wire fraud, mail fraud, securities fraud, and conspiracy. An accounting auditor for Enron, Arthur Anderson, was also charged for obstruction of justice for shredding documents related to the scandal. The fraud caused by Enron had terrible consequences on its employees who invested hundreds of thousands dollars in Enron’s stock—because it declared the biggest bankruptcy in United States history causing employees to lose their jobs and retirement savings (The Lawyer Shop, para. 1). As stated before, Enron is an important lesson to learn from, because the United States Congress passed the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in order to oversee and investigate to help to prevent auditing abuse for any companies. (Business Knowledge! para. 4). The Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics has noted that, due to increasing challenges of unethical conduct in business and the expected role that ethical business leaders will be called upon to fulfill,
ethics has now become an academic necessity for business educators (Stewart, 2007).

WHAT SHOULD BE IN A BUSINESS ETHICS COURSE?

We can safely conclude that, due to the decline of corporate standards and values, a business ethics course should be integrated into the curriculum of business schools, including NTID. According to The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business’s (AACSB) website, a business ethics course can and should be part of a business program curricula so the students would be able to deal effectively with ethical dilemmas, understand the responsibility of appropriate business practices, and know the appropriate principles and practices of sound corporate governance. This also will help to counterbalance unethical behaviors in business settings; students should develop a set of skills to bring together ethical concepts and apply them to decision-making practices in order to become more self-aware and in order to make good contributions to the organization and society in general (Stewart, 2007). Bennett (2003) stated that “office ethics” is generally defined as having common sense. “It is something judged as proper or acceptable based on some standard of right or wrong. At the very least, an activity should be legal, as well as to be of great benefit to most people” (Bennett, 2003, p. 3). This is the kind of common sense that we would like our students to have so they would be more aware of the best business practices and be able to make informed ethical decisions for ethical dilemmas they may face in the workforce.

HEARING LOSS AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OBSTACLES TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION

In order to make the development and implementation of a business ethics course successful, there are several factors that need to be taken into consideration. Deaf and hard-of-hearing students have different kinds of learning styles, experience, knowledge, and strategies compared to their hearing peers, which can influence their instructional material (Marschark, Lang, & Albertini, 2002). It is well-known that hearing loss is a major obstacle to mastering overall English literacy skills. Many deaf students fall years behind their hearing peers in knowledge of English grammar (Berent, Kelly, and Aldersley, 2006), hence students need to rely on visual communication in order to fully comprehend information such
as business ethics in the workplace. This involves using visual aids as well as using American Sign Language (ASL). When students are better able to understand the logic of business ethics through visual classroom instruction, they are more likely to participate in the classroom learning process and activities. Business ethics scenarios would be discussed with the deaf and hard-of-hearing students, as well as how the decisions are involved to perform appropriate ethical standards, and how the consequences of the decisions are “to be based on what is best for all the parties involved,” as stated by Alan Axelrod, author of *My First Book of Business Ethics*, during an interview with Joseph Gidjunis (Gidjunis, 2008, p. 1). With this in mind, according to Marschark, Lang, and Albertini, most deaf and hard-of-hearing college students are dependent learners, meaning they need their professors to provide structured and organized presentation materials. Also, students need to be more involved in classroom activities rather than passively receiving lectures. When they are more active in their learning, they are more likely to comprehend the material and achieve academically (Marschark, Lang, and Albertini, 2002).

In order to provide structured and organized business ethics course for deaf/hh students, I chose three textbooks and one videotape, which aided with the course development and topic selection. Again, due to deaf and hard-of-hearing students’ communication differences and limited accessibility, the material had to be designed in a way that it was comprehensible and conducive to learning. The textbook *My First Book in Business Ethics* by Alan Axelrod, is a basic and comprehensive “primer,” which offers matter-of-fact and introspective advice and procedures for best business practices. It is written at a level that deaf and hard-of-hearing students would find easy to follow. The other comprehensive and easy-to-follow textbooks used were *Ethics in Business* by Carole Bennett, and *Business Ethics Applied* by Keith Goree, et al. The videotape used was called *Not For Sale*. These were used as supplemental references for topic-related ideas, scenarios and situations in order to develop lesson plans for the ten weeks of the quarter.

**BUSINESS ETHICS COURSE DEVELOPMENT: HOW TO TEACH BUSINESS ETHICS TO DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING STUDENTS**

The National Academy for Academic Leadership stated that designing a college curriculum is at the “heart of a student’s college experience.” It is also the college’s primary means to help to change students’ directions valued by the faculty. Ideally, college curriculum and
the courses should have clear purposes and goals with theoretically sound processes in a rational sequence with continuous assessment and improvement of quality and with high-quality academic advising (National Academy for Academic Leadership, 2008).

The creation of a business ethics course for deaf and hard-of-hearing business students was necessary due to several reasons: the need to prepare our students to enter the workforce and allow them to see the depth and breadth of businesses and organizations being faced with increased complexity involving ethical issues due to quick-changing employment practices and policies, increased corporate governances and regulations, and an unprecedented number of accounting scandals involving U.S. corporations shaking public trust and confidence. We wanted to expose our students to the concept of business ethics. Our students’ job search advisors’ observed that students’ technical skills were fine but their soft skills need to be improved further. Lastly, the creation of this course was the capstone project for my graduate degree in the Multidisciplinary Professional Studies program at Rochester Institute of Technology.

The initial phase of the course design/development was to create a two-hour interactive business ethics workshop for Administrative Support Technology students. This was part of a formative evaluation process for topic, textbook materials, and assessment tools to measure our students’ comprehension level regarding ethics. The workshop was a combination of lecture, role play, and interactive discussions led by myself, and my two colleagues, W. Scot Atkins, then Director of Organizational Development and Human Resources of Interpretek and Dawn Lucas, Employment Advisor of NTID’s Center on Employment with d/hh students. I also provided the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires which were derived from Carole Bennett’s *Ethics in Business*. The purpose of having students fill out their answers was to measure their comprehension level regarding the ethics-related terminology as well as determining their reading comprehension regarding the ethics-related language. When the workshop ended, it produced good results which surpassed the team’s expectations. It was clear that after viewing the PowerPoint slides with information communicated in American Sign Language, and role-played by myself and colleagues, students started to realize that making good ethical decisions started within themselves and the kind of decisions they are making every day that can have lasting consequences, either good or bad. Students were beginning to develop a sense of introspection. I also gained further insight into their
comprehension of the pre- and post-assessment questionnaire questions and issues. This allowed me to fine-tune future workshops as well as the business ethics course to be taught following our experience with the workshop.

Based upon the workshop results, I fine-tuned the course material further. In the Spring Quarter of 2008, the business ethics course was taught for the first time to nine deaf and hard-of-hearing students at NTID. During the first week of the quarter I had students fill out the same pre-assessment questionnaires as was used for my ethics workshop. This allowed me to determine their initial knowledge of business ethics. Throughout the following ten weeks, I taught a variety of case studies, showed the Not For Sale videotape depicting several unethical work scenarios, had readings and discussions on selected topics from My First Book in Business Ethics by Axelrod, and Ethics in Business by Carole Bennett, and Ethics in the Workplace, 2nd Edition by Keith Goree, along with a few invited speakers, who came to the class to discuss unethical scenarios and what kind of steps were taken to approach these situations. At the end of the quarter, I had my students do the post-assessment questionnaires to determine if their understanding of business ethics had substantially improved or not. It was clear that their responses had improved greatly as compared to their initial knowledge. It was evident that students learned how to become more introspective and they improved their ethical sense of values in order to succeed in the world of work.

I then taught two successive classes (the first class had nine students, the next two classes had four and five students respectively). I combined all evaluation data and collected their one-on-one interview responses from three classes which are noted on the table on next page (Figure 1). The percentage differences between pre- and post-assessment survey questions are noted. My observations or comments are listed at the furthest right to depict the possible reasons for further modification of the course or indication of reading level difficulty d/hh students are experiencing while reading the questions. The discussion of data collection and observation will follow in later sections.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct Answer</th>
<th>Ethical Questions*</th>
<th>Pre-Assessment</th>
<th>Post-Assessment</th>
<th>Possible Reasons for Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 Students</td>
<td></td>
<td>% Correct</td>
<td>% Increase or Decrease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>1. Unethical decisions can be costly to a business.</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>Post-Assessment score reflect improved understanding of poor decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>2. Making an ethical decision should be a quick process if you are an ethical person.</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>One student didn’t understand the question (pre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>3. Taking your company’s office supplies home can be unethical.</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>Improved understanding of stealing supplies is unethical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>4. Clear communication at workplace can help to prevent unethical decisions.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>May need to include discussion on communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>5. Changing or falsifying your resume is not a common practice in the United States.</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>Analyze the double negative sentencing—common issue amongst deaf/hh students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>6. Most employers welcome children in the office environment in order to provide employee satisfaction and saving employees the cost of child care.</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>Need to examine about what’s right to bring kids in or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.</strong> Using a company’s computer to work on your personal project during after-hours is considered an ethical decision.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.</strong> Playing computer game is relaxing and acceptable to relieve work-related stress.</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9.</strong> Listening to gossip actually generates more gossip.</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10.</strong> Sharing gossip with your supervisor is not appropriate.</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11.</strong> Copying someone’s work without asking permission is considered plagiarism.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.</strong> Getting the facts first before making a judgment because things are not what they appear to be.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DATA COLLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE FIRST BUSINESS ETHICS CLASS

Based upon the results, I learned several things from the collected data, my observation notes, and the one-on-one interviews with my students. I showed them their pre and post test results so they were able to compare the differences or notice any improvement on their responses. A few of the students had some errors on the same questions, such as “Changing or falsifying your resume is not a common practice in the United States.” I asked them why they answered incorrectly both times and they stated that the sentence itself was confusing—especially the words “changing or falsifying” and “not” being double-negative words, which can pose a slight challenge for most people and is especially difficult language construction for d/hh students. This led me to think that there may be the possibility of a reading or language comprehension issue associated with the questionnaire and deaf respondents. Another area which appeared to be confusing for students was “Being respectful toward your supervisor, but saying negative things behind his/her back to other workers is okay as long as he/she isn’t aware of it.” Interestingly
enough, three same students answered this question incorrectly both times so I asked them individually, of course, and they generally stated that it seems like “everyone does it”—they talk behind their teachers, supervisors’ or friends’ backs as long as they didn’t know it. I find that puzzling; however, I believe that their perception does not reflect the entire deaf/hard-of-hearing population because not everyone shares this perception.

While reviewing the data and one-on-one interviews, I concluded that the questions needed to be explored further in subsequent classes, and materials related to cultural perceptions needed to be developed, as well as case studies or articles which may have some misleading sentences or double-negative wording, to ensure that d/hh students are able to achieve a higher score on the post-assessment survey, and ethics-related questionnaire during their job application process.

During the one-on-one interview with the students regarding reviewing companies’ policies, students stated that they would like an additional in-depth study of various ethical policies to help them increase their broader understanding of policies of a variety of companies throughout the United States. They also requested further assistance be provided in researching via the internet for appropriate ethics related articles to be brought to class for professor and students’ discussions. I observed that they brought to class some articles related to violence, which were not entirely correct, which led me to believe that they needed further guidance on how to pinpoint the correct sources of information to share with the class. With this in mind, I would begin the class by defining an ethical dilemma. Then this should help students to determine what kind of articles to search for and bring to class for further discussion. They also would like practice further using Carole Bennett’s decision-making model showing six steps for ethical behavior in depth:

1. **Background**—reviewing the history of an unethical situation
2. **Conflict**—describing and identifying the conflict stemming from an unethical situation
3. **Outcome**—develop several possible solutions and figure out the outcomes for these solutions
4. **Impact**—review the possible impact from the above-mentioned solutions upon people
5. **Weigh**—compare and weigh the decisions and their possible outcomes
6. **Decide**—make the final decision to solve the ethical dilemma

(Bennett, 2003)
I concluded that the data and students’ feedback were quite essential and valuable for me to tweak further in the subsequent classes, and my students stated that they truly enjoyed the class overall, for it helped them to gain further insight and become more introspective when making ethical decisions in the workforce upon graduation.

ADDITIONAL DATA COLLECTION AND INSIGHTS FROM THE SECOND AND THIRD BUSINESS ETHICS CLASSES

In the second and third business ethics courses during Winter 2009 and Spring 2010, I had my students use the lab computers to google search for and print out the company policies to be discussed in class, which gave them better insights of general ethical expectations in the workforce. My students were able to increase their ethical vocabulary base by learning and using a variety of terms such as “percolate,” “integrity,” and “accountability” quite well in their essays or journals, which I was pleased to see. I encouraged my students to use terms such as these and any new terms they learned in class for their journals, homework, as well as during the group discussions. Group discussions in class were also beneficial because the students shared their job experiences, if any, or their perspectives on ethical issues and were able to develop strategies to make ethical decisions. They also developed a sense of introspection throughout the courses—the goal for them was to learn to observe unethical and/or poor decision-making scenarios, and analyze their own mental and emotional processes to determine what is right or wrong, and how to act upon their observations.

For my second class, I introduced a new workbook called *Ethics in the Workplace, 2nd Edition* by Keith Goree, and my students read the case scenarios and answered questions at the end of each chapter and participated in classroom discussions. My students found the workbook to be quite useful because of its clear-cut scenarios, vocabulary terms with descriptions, and homework exercises. Their feedback at the end of the course was that they liked the workbook because it is straightforward, with some challenges in reading the language content, but they were able to follow the overall subject emphasis easily. I also included the workbook in the third course in Spring Quarter and I intend to use this as a tool to cover a variety of unethical scenarios and corporate scandals in the media. I included visiting presenters with activities to help students to make the connection with ethical issues so they would be able to relate the experiences to the workforce upon graduation, which my students
enjoyed very much. They appreciated the presenters’ firsthand experiences which helped them to develop possible problem-solving strategies and ideas should they encounter unethical situations in the workplace.

For both classes, I had students role-play Bennett’s six decision-making steps in class, and then discuss their conclusions or final decisions with other students to gain further perspectives from each other. I observed that these exercises helped students become more observant and objective by examining the unethical scenarios from several different angles using the utility principle which is “to draw the best possible consequences for everyone involved, not just for one individual (Goree, p. 28).”

SECOND BUSINESS ETHICS CLASS PRE- AND POST-ASSESSMENT RESULTS IN-DEPTH

The second business ethics class was much smaller than the first one. The class consisted of four students at either Associate of Occupation Studies (AOS) or Associate in Applied Science (AAS) level, with varying language levels. At least four had a good language base, while the one had weaker reading and writing skills. Because of the student who had lower reading and writing skills, I used more examples outlined on the PowerPoint slides to help all students to comprehend the case studies, as well as the textbook vocabulary. I observed that even though PowerPoint slides were a helpful aid for all students, it was a good supplemental visual aid for the for this particular student, combined with American Sign Language, and increased role-playing activities. The other four students also helped the student by supplying their own examples at a peer-level language to help the student move along in the class. It was a good example of teamwork to support a peer of their own group to succeed in their endeavors.

The pre- and post-assessment questionnaires were given to the students, again, to determine their initial knowledge of business ethics. I had one-on-one interviews with these four students to discuss their responses to questions answered incorrectly, such as changing or falsifying one’s resume being not a common practice in the United States, regarding childcare at the place of employment to save the cost of childcare, using a company’s computer during off-hours, listening to gossip would generate more gossip, gathering facts first before making a judgment because things are not what they appear to be, and finally,
being respectful toward your supervisor but saying negative things behind his/her back was okay as long as he/she wasn’t aware of it.

**Students’ Statements Regarding Their Responses**

It was interesting to obtain my students’ observations regarding their responses. Again, not surprisingly, the “changing or falsifying” the resume question with the double-negative wording was another typical confusion for them.

Their observations about bringing children to workplace to save some money being acceptable seemed to be the norm for these students. I probed further into why it was acceptable or the norm; they stated that they’ve observed other people who brought their children to the workplace and their supervisors did not object to this. They also stated that it seems to be the right thing to do to save money at the company’s expense, and they didn’t realize that it is not the right thing to do.

The topic of gossip also seemed to be a bit confusing for these students. At least one or two stated that they didn’t know what the word “generate” meant, but after I explained the meaning of the word, they then understood that if they participate or listen to the gossip, it could manifest further vicious cycle of gossip.

In addition, the students seemed unclear about saying negative statements behind your supervisor’s back without him or her knowing. Again, they generally stated that people say things about each other behind their backs, and it seems to be the typical thing to do amongst many people these days. I explained to them that unfortunately people do say negative things about other people, but it is for their own good to not say anything negative to preserve their own reputation and image, because people do observe other people’s characters and how they conduct themselves in the workplace in terms of trust, teamwork, promotion, and so forth.

**The Third Business Ethics Class Pre- and Post-Assessment Results**

The third business ethics class initially consisted of five students; however, by the tenth week of the quarter, one student had to withdraw from the course due to a leave of absence so the results and observations are based upon the responses of four students. Two students’ language levels were on the higher end, while the other two had secondary
disabilities besides their hearing loss. One had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder with low language comprehension and the other had a learning disability, but her reading and writing levels were fair. Again, I used the PowerPoint slides from my previous class to supplement their learning process, as well as increased role-playing, and peer-level discussions. Interestingly, the correct responses to question two decreased from pre- to post-assessment. At first it was 50-50 responses, but at the end of the quarter, one student had it correctly, while the other three didn’t. I am not sure if it was related to sentencing itself, or it was at the end of the quarter when they were fatigued by their academic studies and responsibilities, which affected their responses. They also have the double-negative wording issues regarding question five. Several issues related to the language content for the questions such as: “listening to gossip generates more gossip;” “getting the facts first before making judgment because things are not what they appear to be;” “purposely holding back the work production to sabotage someone’s work is okay;” and finally “being respectful to your supervisor but backstab him or her without him/her knowing it.” In a nutshell, due to two students’ additional disabilities such as ADHD and learning disability, understanding the phrasing of these sentences was an additional challenge to them. When I signed to them in American Sign Language, they gave appropriate responses, and stated that when these sentences are on the paper, the grammar and structure is slightly deviant from ASL as ASL has its own grammatical structure and rules, which can cause English translation to be difficult for them. With this in mind, the importance of continuous practice and providing students with practice ethics questionnaires and surveys will assist them to successfully pass the actual questionnaires should they apply for their respective positions in the workforce.

They also stated that the Ethics in the Workplace, 2nd Edition by Keith Goree was a helpful asset to aid in their understanding of societal, moral, and ethical values of many societies. Their ethical vocabulary base improved just like the first business ethics class.

Even though my data collection has concluded for the time being, there is still a great deal to learn about teaching business ethics to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and I will continue to collect information to improve learning quality. Again, we remind ourselves that due to our students’ hearing loss it can cause a lack of incidental learning throughout life. One critical insight is the importance of providing business ethics courses to the specific deaf and hard-of-hearing population. For instance,
a student made an important comment which made me realize the deep need for access to information; she felt that she did not “know what to do” because no one had ever told her. I relate to these feelings very well since I am deaf myself, and I, too, have felt “left out” in many situations and felt unsure about what I should do, and naturally, we all want to “do the right thing.” The need to “do the right thing” reminded me of the National Academy’s press workshop giving the engineering students the ability to express their concerns and being able to identify and evaluate problems (Bird, 2004). Basically, the continuous study of the decision-making steps helped our students to become more analytical and introspective, and left the class feeling more prepared to deal with any possible ethical dilemmas in the workforce.

At the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, this course will be offered again in subsequent quarters. I am drawing from all data collection, group discussions, and students’ feedback, and I will continue to find even more case studies and perhaps show at least one ethics-related movie, and then have a discussion and assignment to follow up. The course will continually be modified as any new ethical issues appear in the business world, and they will be used as real-life examples to help our students stay current and continue to self-check on their values and be introspective should they encounter any dilemma at some point in their careers.

As Aristotle stated, we should make our good virtues into habits. Learning and analyzing unethical scenarios can and will help students, regardless of their hearing status, to develop good ethical habits in their respective careers.

REFERENCES

Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. 2007. http://www.aacsb.edu

Bennett, Carole. Ethics in Business. South-Western, a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.; 5191 Natorp Boulevard; Mason, OH 45040.


*NTID Annual Report, 2010.* National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology, 52 Lomb Memorial Drive; Rochester, NY 14623.

