Employees have a simple yet accurate way of figuring out what’s important at work. They just look at what their leaders pay attention to – what the bosses talk about and focus on.
Start With The Rules Of The Road!

Your first responsibility in building ethics awareness is to make sure that all employees know the laws and regulations that specifically pertain to their jobs – as well as the values, operating principles, and “ethical standards” of your organization. Don’t make the mistake of assuming “they’ve worked here long enough – they outta know that stuff,” or “they know it because we covered it in orientation.” MAKE SURE THEY KNOW by giving each employee copies of all relevant guidelines, reviewing the information with them on a regular basis, and by keeping a written record of what you discussed . . . and when you did it.

Keep It “In Front Of People”!

Make ETHICS a regular topic of conversation. Add something about it to the agenda of staff meetings you conduct (e.g., discuss an article you read in a magazine or newspaper, share a best practice from your organization or work unit, ask people to identify and describe their ethics heroes, develop hypothetical scenarios involving ethical dilemmas and discuss the appropriate responses, invite a senior manager or customer to share his or her experiences and expectations, etc.).

Go Beyond Information!

Your communication needs to accomplish more than merely sharing data. The real purpose of discussing ethics is to build USA – Understanding, Support, and Acceptance throughout the workforce. And you do that by expressing:

- WHAT your shared values are and HOW they should be applied;
- WHY they are important – WHY people should care;
- WHAT the benefits to be gained are (what’s in it for them);
- WHAT you expect of employees and WHAT they can expect of you;
- THAT you are personally committed to ethical business practices.
What have you done, in the last month or two, to keep employees focused on business ethics?

Include It In What You Write!

Examine all the written communications (memos, e-mails, etc.) that you’ve recently sent. Do the words “ethics” or “integrity” appear anywhere in them? If yes, congratulations – you’re seizing additional opportunities to enhance ethics awareness. If no, why not? Everything you write provides a chance to mention integrity in some way.

Have a new procedure you’re announcing? Try opening the memo with, “As a way of enhancing our commitment to ethical business practices, we’re going to ....” Issuing the work schedule for next week? Why not add the tag line, “Working to make Integrity a business way of life” at the bottom. The more you use the words, the more important they’ll become … to everyone.

Display It!

What’s on your walls and bulletin boards? Anything about ethics? If not, change that. Hang motivational posters on available wall space. Get a bulletin board and create an “Integrity Wall of Fame” where you recognize ethical actions by employees. Give people pins and patches (even hard-hat stickers) that visibly tout the importance of doing the right thing. Get creative … show it off!
Share It With “Outsiders”!

The task of building ethics awareness should not be directed to employees only. “Outsiders” need to understand and be in-tune with what’s important to you as well. Sharing your integrity imperative with suppliers, shareholders, and business partners forms the foundation of your relationships and clarifies reciprocal expectations.

Make sure your communications with the outside world are as values-based and integrity-laden as are your internal ones. You’ll increase shareholder confidence and send the message to vendors and strategic-alliance members that matching your commitment to ethics is the only way to keep your business.

The Ethics “Rule of Three Plus One”:

Out of sight, out of mind.
Out of mind, out of importance.
Out of importance, out of practice.

Out of practice ... OUT OF BUSINESS!