

College of Business Book Review by Lorrie Willey

Title: "There's No Such Thing as 'Business Ethics': There is Only One Rule for Making Decisions"

Author: John C. Maxwell

Publisher: Warner Business Books

Length: 134 pages

Price: \$14.95

Reading time: 2 hours

Reading rating: 10 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 3 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

Sitting on your mother's knee you learned the rule that John Maxwell feels is the "only rule" you need to make business and personal decisions: the "Golden Rule." You know, "Do unto others..." In a short and easy to read text, Maxwell makes his arguments for eliminating the distinction between business and personal ethics and sticking with this old standby. The man has a point. After all, business decisions are not made by non-humans; it is the people in business who make the decisions and it is people who suffer the consequences of those decisions, good or bad.

Could it be that the distinction between personal and business ethics is the means by which a business can justify unethical behavior? The "this is a business" justification for decisions that harm others should be thrown by the wayside. The position that being ethical impedes a company's ability to succeed and "win" in the world of commerce is inaccurate. According to Maxwell, following the Golden Rule will result in only winners; winners who have both personal and business integrity. "Ethics + Competence is a winning equation."

One of the strongest arguments in support of following the Golden Rule in decision making is that the Rule is appropriate in all decision-making situations. It is easy to contemplate how one would want to be treated in any situation and act towards others in that manner. As Ted Koppel states in a quote from the book, "There's harmony ...in following a moral compass that points in the same direction regardless of fashion..."

To do unto others, one first has to consider how s/he would like to be treated. Maxwell points out that we all want the same thing in our work and personal lives; we want to be valued, appreciated, trusted, respected, understood and we do not want others to take advantage of us. That about covers it for me, how about you? Making the decision to act ethically should be so easy.

But if it were so easy, why is it sometimes so difficult to do the right thing? Maxwell discusses several factors that "tarnish" the Golden Rule: pressure, pleasure, power, pride and priorities. While perhaps a fair listing, these factors can not be easily dismissed and few can look at themselves with such honesty that they can change prideful behavior or resist the lure of power. Not much Mr. Maxwell's book can do about that, but as he points out, if you are reading the book, then ethical behavior is something you value.

While many may feel that Maxwell's book is somewhat naïve, there is a simplicity and honesty in his thoughts and discussions that are compelling. Maybe the issue of ethics has been complicated more than it need be; maybe, as in so many other instances, the simple way is the best way.

Included in the text are end-of chapter discussion questions. Yes, it may make you feel like you are back at school but these questions do serve to focus your attention on your own attitudes and decision making and to consider those stances from a different perspective. This book would serve as a good opening for a company-wide discussion of ethics and as a means to encourage and enhance ethically considerate decisions in the workplace.

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