



This Week:

- [Evaluating the Business Impact of Ethics Training](#)
- [Developing Career Paths](#)
- [The Bottom Line of a Human Resources Certificate](#)
- [Convincing Managers to Train](#)

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How Do We Know If Ethics Training Is Working?

Q: How do I evaluate the success of training in business ethics, both for management and non-management staff?

--Results-Oriented, legal services, Durban, South Africa

A: The success of business-ethics training can be difficult to quantify if the measurement criteria are not clearly defined. Measuring numbers of employees who have affirmed a code of conduct or who have attended a course may not have a strong connection to whether behaviors are in alignment with the company's expectations.

The good news is that there are in fact several ways to effectively measure the success of an ethics program, each dependent on the company's ability to set specific goals and milestones.

With ethics and integrity, each company has to define its own criteria for success based on its own prioritization of risks relating to people and integrity issues.

What issues, for example, pose the greatest risk in terms of financial cost, such as fines and lawsuits for ethics violations? What are your company's risks in terms of damage to its reputation--for example, the cost of negative news stories that affect how customers and investors see the company?

What are the risks in terms of organizational effectiveness, such as

inefficiencies due to culture clashes or internal time spent in investigations and damage control?

Once you identify these key integrity factors, develop surveys and other measurement tools to gauge how well you're doing year to year in reducing risk factors. In asking questions of employees and managers coming out of ethics training, be sure to focus on key behaviors that are leading indicators of the ethical climate within the organization.

Questions--and therefore measurement criteria--generally fall into three categories. First, do people have a sense of personal accountability for their actions? Second, does the corporate culture support the kind of individual behavior that is necessary for the company to meet its integrity goals? Last, do managers model the behaviors they are advocating?

Surveying employees and managers in these areas will not only help gauge the success of the program, it will help in guiding the issues and learning objectives needed for the subsequent year's training as well.

SOURCE: David Gebler, president of [Working Values, Ltd.](#), developers of integrity and compliance solutions, Sharon, Massachusetts, Sept. 22, 2003.

