

# Excellence through Ethics™

## Session 2

*Choose Your Professional Attitude*



**High School**



**Junior Achievement®**



*Excellence through Ethics*  
**High School**  
**Session 2**

*Choose Your Professional Attitude*

**Content:** Ethics and Positive Professional Attitude

**Methods:** Role-Playing

**JA Foundational Pillars:** Ethics and Work Readiness

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# Acknowledgements

## **Sponsorship**

JA Worldwide® (Junior Achievement) gratefully acknowledges Deloitte & Touche USA LLP for its commitment to the development and implementation of the supplementary program *Excellence through Ethics*. JA Worldwide appreciates its relationship with Deloitte & Touche USA LLP to develop and implement vital and innovative programs designed to foster ethical decision-making skills.

## Choose your Professional Attitude

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### Overview

Students learn that maintaining a positive attitude in the face of other employees' negativity or apathy is part of a good work ethic.

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Express their responsibility to project positive attitudes on the job.
- Examine some of the problematic attitudes and behaviors they may encounter in other employees.
- Apply proactive strategies for reversing the negative spiral of attitudes and behaviors among teammates.

### Preparation

Review the activity. Prepare the necessary copies and session materials.

Group work is incorporated into this session. You may consult with the teacher to determine how best to form the groups. Explain that the activity will involve role-playing by three pairs of students. Ask the teacher to assist you in selecting the six students needed.

Post Key Terms and definitions in a visible place.

- **Ethics:** The standards that help determine what is good, right, and proper.

### Recommended Time

This session typically takes 45 minutes to complete. Ask the teacher to help you keep track of time.

### Materials

- Impromptu Role-Plays (2 per group)
- A mask

### Presentation

#### Introduction (15 minutes)

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Greet the students.

Now, put the mask on and ask, “If you were seeing me for the first time, how would I appear to you wearing this mask? How much would you trust me?”

Explain that everyone puts on his or her best mask for a job interview. Employers expect a good impression on that first encounter. Businesses often operate by taking risks, and one of the greatest financial risks involves the hiring of employees. To some degree, each new employee wears a mask until the process of matching impressions with actions shows his or her true identity.

Explain that students often go to their first job experiences with a great positive attitude. They usually meet coworkers who are also very positive, but they will find others who are not. Now and then, a new employee will encounter coworkers who exhibit very negative feelings and behaviors. This can raise a

dilemma for new employees: exhibiting the behavior that is needed to please their employer conflicts with the need to fit in with peers and teammates. If a new employee chooses to remain energetic and positive under these circumstances, the employee can quickly find him- or her-self at odds with their new peers' attitudes and work norms. Peers, of course, will react by trying to "strip off the positive mask."

Facilitate a class discussion using the following questions:

- Why do current employees put the new person to the test?  
**Answer:** Positive reasons include their need to know your commitment and "fit." Some will respect you if you hold firm; others will not. Negative reasons include they see you as a threat to the status quo. You might cause management to raise expectations of the whole team.
- To whom do you owe the greater duty?  
**Answer:** From an ethics angle, you have the responsibility to follow through on the positive impressions and commitments you created to get the job. Realize the employer hired you with the hope of increasing the number of positive, dedicated team members.
- What are some ways the new employee can keep a good attitude in the face of testing and negative attitudes from other employees?  
**Answer:** Draw from experience in dealing with negative peer pressure in school. Seek support from other positive teammates. Be friendly, and seek to build rapport with everyone, even the negative employees. Encourage and compliment good behaviors you see. Find small ways of affirming the good things you believe about business and work. Introduce the "firewall" technique: emotionally you need to place a barrier between your own positive beliefs and values, and the negative actions and behaviors of others. Observe others as if they were actors on a stage, and you merely the audience. Don't allow them to draw you into their negative drama.

Continue the discussion by noting that once a conversation or discussion gets headed in a negative direction, it's very easy for others to "pile on" and make it increasingly negative. Sometimes it takes only one key person to "reverse the negative spiral."

Tell students that you want to look at some ways in which one might take the lead in reversing a negative spiral:

- Don't immediately take and defend the opposite position.
- Find someplace in the middle from which to address both sides.
- Validate the problem and the frustration or anger being expressed.
- Carefully validate the needs and feelings of the "other side" in the situation.
- Affirm the need for a positive solution and encourage these suggestions.
- Support positive alternatives offered.
- If none are offered, suggest one of your own.

If appropriate, share your own experience with reversing a negative spiral with a coworker or group. Tell students that it would be great if all employees had the same positive attitudes we affirm with JA programs. Each employee makes his or her own choices. Good leadership and work ethics include being prepared to encounter and confront negative attitudes and behaviors of other employees, while building rapport and offering friendship.

## **Activity**

### **Impromptu Role-Plays (25 minutes)**

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Select three pairs of students to prepare an impromptu role-play of negative and non-productive employee behaviors. The other students should put themselves in the position of “the new employee” who’s a silent third member of the group, trying to fit in while getting the work done. At the end of each role-play, conduct a discussion of how the new employee might respond to that situation based on the following information provided to debrief.

Discuss the following with the students after each role-play:

#### **Role-Play 1**

- “Sympathy Sappers.” Clarify that the challenge is to remain friendly with the two while setting an example and focusing on work.
- Leader: Focus on early pieces of the “reversing a negative spiral” outline.
- Pick out a feeling or frustration to quickly validate and build rapport.
- Don’t join in and try to “problem solve” their personal issue.
- Focus on work by asking for their help: “Can you hand me that diskette?”
- Offer to discuss their personal matters on break or after work.

#### **Role-Play 2**

- “The Villain Boss.” This is another “reversing a negative spiral” challenge. How do you respond?
- Try to build rapport by responding to one frustration you can empathize with.
- Find something positive about the company, if not the work and scheduling.
- Ask for their help with something to refocus on work.

#### **Role-Play Play 3**

- “The Anti-Capitalist Crusaders.” Given all the positives you’ve learned about business, good ethics, and community service, how do you respond?
- Try to avoid the temptation to do a “data dump” of all the positives of capitalism.
- The need here is to build rapport and return to something positive.
- Find something you can agree with: the need to improve the environment, reduce poverty, etc.
- Explain that the company pays taxes to help solve these problems.
- Explain ways the company helps address community issues.
- Shift your focus to the work at hand.
- Offer to discuss it further on break or off the clock.

### **Summary and Review (5 minutes)**

Briefly review the vocabulary introduced in the session.

Explain that students should expect a clash between the positive attitudes they’ve learned in JA Success Skills and some of the behaviors and attitudes encountered in other employees. Encourage them to keep a good attitude in the midst of other employees’ negativity. In such situations, they should find support from positive coworkers, or from trusted friends and mentors.

## **Session Outline**

### **Introduction**

- Greet the students.
- Put on the mask to illustrate how each new employee is an “unknown quantity.”
- Explain that some employees exhibit bad attitudes and behaviors and will test the newly hired person.
- Facilitate a discussion of how a good attitude will be tested and what students can do.

### **Activity**

- Assign six students to do the role-play.
- Discuss the role-play using the information found in the debrief notes.

### **Summary and Review**

- Briefly review the vocabulary introduced in the session.
- Conclude the activity by stressing that good leadership and work ethics require one to make an effort to reverse other workers’ negative attitudes and behaviors.
- Thank the students for their participation.

## **Impromptu Role-Plays**



### **Role-Play 1: “Sympathy Sappers”**

You are two employees who are wasting job time recounting your horrendous personal problems to each other. You are discussing issues you are having with your families, significant others, teachers, etc. Be as dramatic as you like.



### **Role-Play 2: “The Villain Boss”**

You are two employees who are bad-mouthing your boss regarding your recent schedules and work assignments. To you, the boss is an autocrat. But your conversation spirals beyond that into the personal gossip you’ve overheard about the boss’s personal life away from the job.



### **Role-Play 3: “The Anti-Capitalist Crusaders”**

You are employees who are bad-mouthing the company and extolling the “evils of capitalism” in general. You have a beef with companies making “a gazillion dollars” in profits while giving employees a break only every two hours, not paying for college tuition, and not spending profits to solve he community problems with the environmental and poverty.





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## Welcome to Junior Achievement's

### *Excellence through Ethics*

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As a Junior Achievement (JA) volunteer or teacher, you are joining other teachers and volunteers from across the United States in providing students with a unique educational experience. Junior Achievement's *Excellence through Ethics* offers students learning opportunities to share knowledge and information regarding ethics in business. JA strives to show students how business works, and to better evaluate organizations that conduct their operations in the right way.

*Excellence through Ethics* is designed to equip volunteers and teachers with supplemental, ethics-based activities for use with JA in-class programs for grades four through twelve. All these activities provide students with current and essential information about business ethics.

These activities are designed to reinforce students' knowledge and skills, teach them how to make ethical decisions, assist them in learning to think critically, and help them to be better problem-solvers. All the activities are hands-on, interactive, and group-focused to present the material to students with the best instructional methods.

Within these supplements, you will find sections to help you effectively implement the activities in your volunteer experience. Materials include: (a) an introductory discussion of business ethics, marketplace integrity, and the growing capacity of students for ethical decision-making; (b) activities and student materials that connect to and expand current classroom-based Junior Achievement programs; and (c) a functional glossary of terms relating to a wide spectrum of ethics, quality, service, and social responsibility considerations in business.

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## Introduction and Overview

- *How do I do the right thing in this situation?*
- *Should I be completely honest, even if it puts others in jeopardy?*
- *What kind of community do we want to be?*
- *How do we do what's best for the long term?*
- *Who should cover the cost of "doing the right thing"?*

These are all questions having to do with business ethics. They are valid and necessary questions, and good business people have asked them for generations. They form the backdrop of vital discussions as business, community, and political leaders grapple with significant issues. Many students would ask these questions, even if Junior Achievement hadn't developed this ethics curriculum.

## Business Ethics Discussions Are Here To Stay

Business ethics has been in the spotlight for much of the past decade, especially as examples of wrongdoing come to light in the media. New technologies and international competitive pressures cause a steady focus on the question, "Is it possible to be competitively successful in business today and still operate in an honest and ethical manner?" The past decade has seen individuals search for deeper personal meaning in the workplace, which has contributed to lively ethics discussions in the business realm. For these reasons, the discussion of business ethics is not a passing fad; it's here to stay.

Many graduate schools of business have either required ethics coursework or integrated ethics principles throughout all areas of study. That is commendable. We believe this vital area of exposure and instruction also should happen at earlier ages and continue throughout the students' educational journey. Many of today's students haven't had access to a well-rounded education in economics and free enterprise or have come to see these in a very negative light. They have limited awareness of the extent to which good business leaders engage in the challenging exercises of ethical decision-making amid heavy competitive pressures. As students learn the general principles of economics and business, it's critical that these be underpinned with a strong foundation in ethics. This will accentuate the best in American business traditions, while laying the groundwork for students' continued evolution into future generations of leaders.

## Integrity in the Marketplace?

Many adults and young people choose to believe that the marketplace is driven only by greed. They view it as bringing out only the worst in human behavior, demoralizing the human spirit, and driving out any sense of idealism. While elements of greed and extreme self-interest among some individuals cannot be denied, solid research has shown time and again that companies with a long-term focus on ethics and a broad consideration of stakeholders' interests are much more profitable than those lacking such a focus.

James A. Autry, in his book *Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership*, said it well: "I do not doubt the presence of greed in the marketplace because I do not doubt the presence of greed in people. But, I also do not doubt the ennobling aspects of work, of the workplace, of the community, of endeavor, of

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the marketplace. So I choose to believe that most of the marketplace is driven by people who want to do good work for others and for themselves.”

*Excellence through Ethics* accepts the challenge of educating youth in the basics of economics and business while establishing a positive balance on the side of well-informed, ethical business practice. This may appear to place a heavy burden on Junior Achievement volunteers, who are not trained ethics experts. The following informational pages will not turn you into an ethics expert. That’s not what we’re striving for here. What students need most is meaningful interaction with people who are willing to engage in a discussion of these vital issues.

## **Lively Practitioners Rather Than Dry Theorists**

This program is more about day-to-day ethics practice than the nuances of ethics theory. Some believe that working in business requires a disconnect from one’s personal ethics. We do not believe this is the case. Students need to know that what they learn about fairness and honesty in general also applies to business. While business ethics may address some specific areas of business practice, it’s not a separate and distinct specialty to be set apart from the general ethical principles that apply in other areas of life. Young people need to encounter the wisdom of age and experience that volunteers bring to the classroom.

## **Students’ Growing Capacity for Ethical Decision-Making**

*Excellence through Ethics* is designed to foster discussions at the appropriate level for each age group. The curriculum developers have designed the ethics activities with sensitivity to student’s mental maturity. At the late elementary and middle-grades levels, students’ capacities for ethical reasoning tend toward good personal behavior as determined by adult rules and authority. In relationships, personal trust, loyalty, and respect are of paramount importance. For these students, corporate ethical behavior is viewed in much the same light as their own personal behavior: it’s governed by rules.

As students advance into high school, their ethical decision-making moves into the larger arena of social contracts and systems that guide and govern societal and group behavior. Here the rationality and utility of laws are scrutinized, as students become more capable of higher-ordered, principled thinking. Students are increasingly aware of the diversity of values among different cultures and communities. At this level, students’ capacities for processing the complex, ethical dilemmas that may be encountered in business are greatly enhanced.

You will gain confidence as you come to realize that conducting a robust, provocative discussion with students is more important than “having the right answer.” The activities have been designed to leave room for lively discussion and multiple points of view. Having the courage to share your own experiences is very valuable to students.

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You don't have to apologize for the excesses students may see in business. Don't assume responsibility for actions that are not your own, and do not try to defend the indefensible. While accentuating the fact that most businesses operate ethically, it's okay to scrutinize the unethical players in the marketplace who give business in general a bad name.

## **Continuing Education**

Teaching this material to students will no doubt strengthen and enhance your own ethics awareness and continuing education. Some students will challenge your best reasoning capacities. Having your own support network of professional colleagues with whom you can share and discuss some of these issues is very valuable. It's also helpful to seek out colleagues with philosophical views that differ from your own. This serves as a valuable "cross-pollination" function because you will be able to understand and discuss a variety of views with students, as well as share students' perspectives with your colleagues. In this way, everyone learns.

Finally, please be assured that your contributions here have tremendous value to students and will serve to upgrade business ethics in the future. We're dealing with the future generation of leaders in their formative years. We can take pride in the fact that we've had a hand in shaping the very people who will be responsible for business ethics and social responsibility in the future.

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**Thank you for participating in JA!**







