

John English  
February 1, 2005  
Public Service Month

## **Social Responsibility**

The dim lights cast eerie shadows across the deep mahogany table around which twelve men and women sit behind their whirring laptops. The droning hum that makes up the ambiance of the dark room could be either the powerful air conditioning unit that chills it or the minds of the twelve individuals who are deeply considering the proposal on the table. High atop the powerful-looking building, the board room is full of the corporation's finest talent from the management, marketing, and finance departments. If approved, the new marketing proposal could prove to be one of the most lucrative initiatives since the firm's incorporation.

The twelve around the table are deep in thought. Eleven are crunching numbers, but one man is turning another issue over in his head. After graduating Seton Hall, he has worked his way up through the company's marketing department for the past fourteen years. Now he is facing one of the most serious dilemmas of his career. On one hand, this proposal looks like it will set off an explosion in revenues for one of their most popular products. However, he fears it may be detrimental to the common good.

The issue at hand, in this particular board room, is marketing products to children. It is a fictional example, one that takes place fifteen years in the future, but it is a very real issue today among the many that currently pose ethical questions in the business place. Most parents would not allow a salesman to spend a few minutes delivering a pitch to their children, but every day kids are the target of millions of dollars worth of television advertising, among other marketing techniques, that try influencing children.

Surely, there are some degrees to which child marketing is not harmful. However, the question ought to be asked, when is the line crossed? Many people can answer this question in their own minds, but most probably there are only a handful of people in the company itself that can actually effect a change in policy. Therefore, the people in power have a social responsibility to promote the common good of their stakeholders, customers, and community.

Many people mistakenly consider profit maximization to be the sole objective of a company in a capitalist society. However, every company has to achieve the goals of the owners while contributing to and maintaining a safe and ethical society. Companies cannot be simply cutthroat and deceptive to get on top; instead they must protect the public and are responsible for giving back some degree of charity. Besides, a bad enough public image could hurt sales. Corporations do not have to be cold and heartless, and a great leader can and should stand up and steer his or her company away from the almost mathematical machine of the capitalist drive if it threatens the common interest.

At Seton Hall University, ethics is one of the greatest values instilled in students. After the alleged misconduct of several prominent alumni in the business field, the Stillman School of Business has made an especial effort to stress the importance of business ethics. Social responsibility and adherence to a greater morality are critical components of good business practice, and the school has taken great efforts to show the value of business ethics and social responsibility in the professional world.

Back in the futuristic board room, the troubled man has been gazing out the window overlooking the city for the past fifteen minutes. He now stands up. He legitimately fears that the new proposal threatens the common good and fails to satisfy the company's responsibility to the public. He must remind his coworkers of the company's duty. It is what his professors emphasized in school. It is what he knows in his heart. He is sure, he is prepared, and now he must be strong.