

Ethical Imperative: Why Moral Leadership Is Good Business

By John Dalla Costa

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Ethics are becoming the defining business issue of our time, affecting corporate profits and credibility, as well as personal security and the sustainability of a global economy. From price-fixing to bribery to toxic-waste dumping, companies around the world are engaging in unethical practices and chalking them up to the cost of doing business. But in an increasingly transparent global economy, where companies are being scrutinized by the media, private watch groups, government, competitors and their own employees, it is just such unethical practices that deplete profits, jeopardize reputations and, in cases like Barings Bank, risk the entire business. By the most conservative estimate, yearly losses due to unethical behavior equal more than the profits of the top forty corporations in North America. Such economic waste and moral loss require more than a PR Band-Aid. But how does a company and its managers and employees begin to encode an ethical construct into its bottom-line strategies and daily practices? In the *Ethical Imperative*, John Dalla Costa outlines the process for incorporating, teaching and reinforcing ethical principles to the direct benefit of customers, shareholders, employees and profits. Drawing from the fields of management, theology and the behavioral sciences, Dalla Costa makes clear why corporate ethics must be a fundamental component of any business. He provides a working practical model that business people can use to establish their own “Ethical Orientation” and outlines a new, forward-thinking “global ethic for the global economy” based on respect, honesty, fairness, justice and environmental responsibility. Case examples from a wide variety of industries are used to illustrate the workings of this ethical framework and help managers customize the model to serve the needs and priorities of their own business. As managers and consumers, many people are concerned about such issues as sweatshops, global warming and discrimination in the workplace, and are struggling to integrate their beliefs into their jobs, companies and purchases. The *Ethical Imperative* links these personal values to business performance. It is a compelling and useful “must-read” for executives and managers, employees and policy-makers, environmentalists, consumers and anyone who possesses an interest and concern over current ethical issues.

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Editorial Review

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Nike's labor practices in the Far East. The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Alaska. Big tobacco and lung cancer. Texaco and employee race relations. More and more, corporations are being evaluated by how they conduct themselves, not just on the numbers they deliver. However, as these and other countless instances of corporate misconduct indicate, instilling a moral sense inside the modern corporation is not so easy. According to John Dalla Costa, author of *The Ethical Imperative*, not developing ethical standards threatens the survival of businesses trying to compete in the global economy.

Costa contends that most businesses are guided by a rational self-interest that blinds them to the consequences of their actions, thus getting them into trouble. He writes, "The badge of rationality is very important to businesspeople because, against it, there can be no criticism." Costa, himself a former CEO, argues that developing a sense of ethics involves more than following a set of rules: it means developing an ethical orientation at all levels and processes of a corporation--not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it makes for good business. Drawing from an impressive range of subjects and case studies, Costa builds a compelling case for moral leadership in today's corporations. Highly recommended. --*Harry C. Edwards*

From Library Journal

Using epigrams from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and building on insights derived from Hans Kung's *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (Oxford Univ., 1998), Toronto business consultant Dalla Costa argues that business managers, particularly at multinational corporations, must adopt a strategic ethical orientation?a moral focus more conscientious and universalistic than market dominance and profit maximization. Dalla Costa provides charts of step-by-step procedures to use in implementing a "Strat-Ethic" focus. While stressing that his own book does not simply represent one more management fad, the author feels constrained to show that goodness is good business. He takes the reader through the paces of orientation, lies, costs, contrarities, impetus, imperative, benefits, alignment, praxis, and conversion, sprinkling his practicum with examples from the likes of Nike and Microsoft. His book is hardly unique; in his *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest* (Berrett-Koehler, 1993), Peter Block shows the mixture of altruism and hard work needed to succeed and sleep well at night, while Tom Chappell's *The Soul of a Business: Managing for Profit and the Common Good* (LJ 10/1/93) gives one success story for merging sensitivity and performance. For larger public libraries. ?John R. Leech, Brooklyn, NY
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About the Author

John Dalla Costa is president of the Center for Ethical Orientation, a consulting firm serving businesses worldwide. He is the author of *Working Wisdom*, and a regular contributor to *The Financial Post Magazine* and *Marketing* magazine.

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