



# **Jewish Principles in the Workplace**

## **A Money and Morals Guide**

**JABE's mission is to instill the values of honesty,  
integrity and social responsibility by teaching the  
Jewish approach to business ethics**

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## Why a guide?

Judaism regards the dignity of work as an essential part of life. The legal system and Jewish law provide the basic framework for operating within the commercial world.

Beyond this, Judaism urges us to set exemplary standards of ethical behaviour and to epitomise the Jewish concept of *Lifnim M'Shuras Hadin* (Going beyond the letter of the law).

*You shall do what is straightforward and right - Deuteronomy 6:18. (Rashi explains this as Beyond what the law requires). "You shall make known to them the path in which they should go and the deeds that they should do" [Shemot 18:20]. According to The Babylonian Talmud, this refers to actions beyond the letter of the law (lifnim m'shuras hadin). Tractate Baba Metzi'ah P 30 Col 2*

This aspirational model of personal behaviour is reflected in these guiding principles which promote positive character traits that can influence our working environment.

## Office Life

In the course of our working life we all assume different roles: employer, manager, colleague and, most frequently, employee. We automatically accept responsibility to various parties and stakeholders including our employer, shareholders, clients and the general public. This guide deals with these different stages within our working life, namely entering the workplace, one's working life and leaving the workplace.

## Guiding Principles

### Consider the consequences of your actions

*For one positive act leads to another positive act and one transgression leads to another transgression - Ethics of the Fathers 4:2*

### Value integrity and fairness

*Hillel said: What would be hateful to you do not do to others - Babylonian Talmud; Tractate Shabbat P 31 Col 1*

### Maintain dignity of speech and action

*We are reminded to remember God all the time. A person ought to acquire for himself those attributes that flow from remembrance of God such as awe, modesty, appropriate intention and good behaviour - Sefer Charedim Ch. 21*

### Cherish diversity and challenge discrimination

*Love your fellow person as yourself - Mishlei 2:20*

### Safeguard confidentiality

*Rabba stated: From where do we learn that if one relates something to another, the receiver of this information is prohibited from repeating it to others without permission to do so? As it is written (Leviticus 1:1): "And the Lord spoke to him in the Tent of Meeting, to say." - Babylonian Talmud; Tractate Yoma P 4 Col 2*

### Admit mistakes

*That you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous - Proverbs 2:20*

## AN ETHICAL GUIDE TO OFFICE LIFE

### ■ *Entering the workplace –*

#### Points to consider:

- Is it acceptable to withhold certain information when I apply or recruit for a position?
- Should I take the job if I do not approve of what the company does?
- What lines should I draw when trying to be accepted by my new colleagues?
- Should I, as an employer, consider how much I think someone needs the job when hiring?

#### Guidelines:

- Provide honest and accurate information to potential employers/employees and avoid knowingly making false or inaccurate statements
- Disclose all relevant information and respect the need for confidentiality
- Strive to build constructive working relationships and value your colleagues' opinions
- Ensure that new employees understand their role and how it relates to the rest of the workforce
- Do not poach employees
- During the application process, avoid questions that are not directly related to the job, e.g. marital status or race
- Value diversity and equal opportunities

#### Sources:

- You should keep your distance from a falsehood
- - Exodus 23:7
- Do not encroach on the boundary of your neighbour (in connection with poaching employees) - *Deuteronomy 19:14*
- Who is wise? He who learns from every person, as it is said: From all my teachers I grew wise -
- Ethics of the Fathers 4:1

### ● *In the workplace –*

#### Points to consider:

- Under what circumstances should I blow the whistle on a colleague?
- Is it all right to take a few pens home from work for the kids?
- Is it ok to 'round up' my expenses?
- Can I tell a 'white lie' when representing my company?

#### Guidelines:

- An employee's primary responsibility is to their employer
- "Do not use company facilities (e.g. photocopier/telephone) for personal purposes unless permitted to do so by your employer". Also, any time spent on private matters during work hours should be in line with employer's guidelines
- Do not undertake out-of-hours work which may have a negative impact on your day-to-day role
- Report instances of corrupt practices to the correct authorities
- Safeguard the confidentiality of data and information of a non-public nature
- Maintain a dignity of speech and action with colleagues, employees and clients
- Ensure employees are given duties appropriate to their level of competence. Offer employees any training necessary to enable them to carry out their contractual duties effectively and help them develop their full potential
- Pay promptly. This applies equally to wages and expenses

#### Sources:

- Even a good deed, if done (without permission) in the employer's time is a sin - *Path of the Just 11*
- Just as an employer is warned not to steal the

payment due to the labourer, so to the labourer is warned not to steal from work due to the employer. He may not waste time a bit here and there but is rather required to be extremely careful.....Further he is required to do his work with all his strength. - *Rambam: Laws of Leasing and Hiring 13:7*

- The prohibition of “Do not go around as a gossip among your people” [Leviticus 19:16] does not apply where the purpose is to prevent loss - *Sefer Hachinuch*
- A worker is not permitted to work at night and hire himself out during the day - *Code of Jewish Law; (Civil Law) 337:19*
- Just as it is forbidden to wrong a colleague in trade or commerce, so too, it is forbidden to wrong him through speech - *Babylonian Talmud Tractate Baba Metziah P 58 Col 2*
- Pay his wages when they are due - *Deuteronomy 24:15*

### ◆ **On leaving the workplace –**

#### Points to consider:

- ◆ Would I dissuade a friend from taking a job at this company?
- ◆ How would I like to be remembered at the place I am about to leave?
- ◆ My company or department needs to downsize, who goes and who stays?

#### Guidelines:

- ◆ Endeavour to give your employer sufficient notice
- ◆ Make suitable arrangements to ensure an orderly transition and, if appropriate, make yourself available to former colleagues for advice
- ◆ Do not speak disparagingly about former employers and/or colleagues
- ◆ Provide a fair and truthful reference for the employee

- ◆ In event of redundancy or downsizing, provide a reasonable severance package. Where possible, take measures to assist an employee to find new employment, offer services such as training to long-term workers or consider providing interest free loans
- ◆ Make sure all payments, including salary and expenses, are settled in good time
- ◆ If appropriate, allow dismissed employees to collect personal effects and to take leave of colleagues. Forward personal post or other communications to the former employee

#### Sources:

- ◆ Do not plot evil against your neighbour, whilst he dwells trusting you - *Proverbs 3:29*
- ◆ When you send him away to be free, do not send him away empty-handed. You shall extend to him a grant from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine press, with which Hashem has blessed you - *Deuteronomy 15:13&14*
- ◆ The highest form of charity is to help sustain a person before they become impoverished by offering a substantial gift in a dignified manner, or by extending a suitable loan, or by helping them find employment or establish themselves in business so as to make it unnecessary for them to become dependent on others - *Rambam, Mishna Torah 10:7-15*
- ◆ ‘A good name is better than precious oil’ – *Ecclesiastes 7:1* Rashi comments: Fine oils are for the moment, a good name is forever.
- ◆ “Rabbi Shimon said, there are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship. And the crown of a good name is superior to them all.” - *Ethics of the Fathers 4:17*

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