

News Release

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POLL: MOST TEENS THINK THEY CAN MAKE ETHICAL BUSINESS DECISIONS, YET MANY ALSO BELIEVE IT IS OKAY TO LIE AND CHEAT

Paradox Underscores Continued Need for Training in Ethical Decision-Making

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo., February 11, 2009 — In large numbers, teens today express a troubling contradiction when it comes to ethical readiness for the workforce. At the same time they express confidence in their preparedness to make the right choices in the future, they freely admit to unethical behavior today. Those are among the key findings of a new national poll from Junior Achievement and Deloitte, the results of which reveal considerable ethical confusion among teens regarding what types of behavior are appropriate in order to succeed.

Key Findings:

- Eighty percent of teens either somewhat or strongly agree that they are prepared to make ethical business decisions when they join the workforce, yet more than a third (38 percent) think that you have to break the rules at school to succeed.
- More than one in four teens (27 percent) think behaving violently is sometimes, often or always acceptable. Twenty percent of respondents said they had personally behaved violently toward another person in the past year, and 41 percent reported a friend had done so.
- Nearly half (49 percent) of those who say they are ethically prepared believe that lying to parents and guardians is acceptable, and 61 percent have done so in the past year.
- Teens feel more accountable to themselves (86 percent) than they do to their parents or guardians (52 percent), their friends (41 percent) or society (33 percent).
- Only about half (54 percent) cite their parents as role models. Most of those who don't cite their parents as role models are turning to their friends or said they didn't have a role model.
- Only 25 percent said they would be "very likely" to reveal knowledge of unethical behavior in the workplace.

What the Findings Mean:

- Teens' feelings about accountability, coupled with self-reported unethical behavior, raise a potential concern among employers because ties within a community, school, work environment or social network often guide behavior. If teens lack accountability to others, the data suggests that their choices may be driven purely by self-interest and not by interest in the greater good.
- An absence of adult role models can leave a vacuum of ethical guidance as young people enter adulthood. With a significant number of teens reporting they don't have an adult role model for ethical behavior, the data raises even more questions about why adults are not viewed as role models and what can be done to fill the gap.
- Teens seem to be experiencing a sense of ethical confusion and relativism — an endemic ethical attitude of “the ends justify the means.” Given that in a few years these same individuals will be performing our hospital lab tests, repairing our cars, teaching our children and investing our money, the survey results raise concerns for employers about how ethically prepared their future workforce will be.

What Is the Solution?

- To provide tools to teens to help them become better ethically prepared, Junior Achievement and Deloitte offer “JA Business Ethics™” as part of a \$2 million initiative.
- “JA Business Ethics” was developed in response to the needs of high school students; it provides hands-on classroom activities and real-life applications designed to foster ethical decision making as students prepare to enter the workforce. Students examine how their beliefs align with major ethics theories and learn the benefits and advantages of having a code of ethics.
- Additionally, Junior Achievement recently updated the original “Excellence through Ethics™” program, which is available online at www.ja.org/ethics free of charge and provides age-appropriate lessons for students in grades 4–12.

Quotes:

- Attributable to David W. Miller, Ph.D., director of the Princeton University Faith & Work Initiative and professor of business ethics at Princeton University:

“There is a troubling incongruence between the degree to which teens feel ethically prepared to enter the workforce, and the unethical behaviors in which they engage. The survey results do prompt concerns about teens' future workplace behavior and forecast serious challenges to businesses around how they will need to prepare and train these future leaders.”
- Attributable to Sean C. Rush, president and chief executive officer of JA Worldwide:

“The results of the survey reveal considerable ethical relativism among teens and raises questions about their ability to make good decisions later in life. We're understandably concerned about these results but recognize that they do point to a major learning opportunity.”
- Attributable to Ainar D. Aijala, global consulting leader, Deloitte, and Chairman of JA Worldwide:

“Teens need training in ethical decision making, practical tools and role models that help them understand not only how to make the right choices, but how those choices will impact their personal success and the success of the organizations they join. That is why Deloitte continues to support ethics education in collaboration with Junior Achievement.”

Methodology

This report presents the findings of a telephone survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation, among a national sample of 750 teens comprising 375 males and 375 females 12 to 17 years of age, living in private households in the continental United States. Interviewing for this TEEN CARAVAN® Survey was completed during the period October 9–12, 2008. The survey’s margin of error is +/- 3.6 percent.

About JA Worldwide® (Junior Achievement)

Junior Achievement is the world's largest organization dedicated to inspiring and preparing young people to succeed in a global economy. Through a dedicated volunteer network, Junior Achievement provides in-school and after-school programs for students which focus on three key content areas: work readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy. Today, 137 individual area operations reach more than four million students in the United States, with an additional five million students served by operations in 123 other countries worldwide. For more information, visit www.ja.org.

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