



"What in the world people are really thinking"

For Immediate Release

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Do Ethics Still Matter? **Lichtman / Zogby Poll of Young Americans Say, "Yes, but..."**

(Utica, NY)—Young Americans entering the workforce overwhelmingly value honesty and integrity, with 92% saying they believe that doing the right thing is more important than getting ahead in their careers—but there is also a strong undercurrent of competing values, placing loyalty to friends, love and getting ahead personally above honesty in business dealings. That's the finding of a new survey of 604 young adults aged 18-24 nationwide, conducted April 25, 2005 through April 30, 2005, with a margin of error of +/- 4.1 percentage points. The survey was conducted by Zogby International on behalf of author and ethics specialist Jim Lichtman.

The survey finds that, despite more than nine-in-ten (92%) of young adults who say they value doing the right thing more than getting ahead in their careers, and 96% saying honesty and trust are important in the workplace, when faced with a number of potential ethical dilemmas, a substantial number are more likely to value loyalty to friends (43%), forbidden office romances (32%)—and as many as one-third (34%) say that the cost of doing the right thing is sometimes too high.

"Loyalty and Honesty are two essential components of good character," Lichtman says. "However, time and again, when these two values conflict, individuals tend to choose loyalty over honesty. The prisoner abuse scandal at *Abu Ghraib* is only the most recent and distasteful example. Individuals often see themselves being placed in situations that call for them to choose between loyalty to a co-worker or boss and honesty to a client or another. Once individuals fall into the 'false necessity' trap there is a strong tendency to compromise other ethical principles later on."

In addition to the 34% who say that doing the right thing can be too costly, another three-in-ten (31%) say ethics are important as long as they do not compromise personal goals. And this attitude is in evidence on a number of questions dealing with situational ethics.

When asked if, in a management role in a company, they would consider dating a subordinate employee against company policy, even if it could potentially cost both the respondent and the other individual his or her jobs, one-third (32%) say they would pursue the relationship, and hope they did not get caught. Two-in-five (39%), however, say they would abide by company policies, while another one-quarter (26%) of respondents would pursue the relationship by either quitting or having the other individual quit.

In a question dealing with performance-enhancing drugs, 15% of respondents would, if on the verge of a professional sports career and encouraged to do so by their coach, violate known policies

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and use such drugs if they believed there was a low likelihood of getting caught—though the overwhelming majority, 84%, said they would not use the drugs.

Throughout the survey, some values trumped proper ethical conduct. Loyalty to friends was one area that produced the greatest difficulty for respondents. Given a dilemma involving a friend stealing intellectual property—music downloads—from a mutual employer, and managers asking the respondent to investigate, 45% of respondents say they would turn in their friend. But 43% would not do so, and hope that management did not discover the wrongdoing independently.

The survey did find that, despite a recent surge of ethics scandals in the media, 80% of respondents have not changed their own ethical behavior, and an additional 17% say they have become more responsible. Only 1% say they have become less responsible as a result of high-profile ethics scandals. “When it comes to influence from negative ethics stories reported in the media, it’s encouraging to hear that 80% believe they act as responsible as always and 17% believe they are more aware of their own responsibilities,” Lichtman noted. The survey also confirmed the view that parents (by 69%) remain fundamental role-models for ethical behavior. However, grandparents are rated as a more ethical generation (67%).

The survey of young adults, conducted on behalf of Zogby International client Jim Lichtman, covered a variety of ethical situations. Lichtman has been writing and speaking on ethics to corporations, associations and schools since 1995. His opinion pieces have appeared in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times*. Appearances include NPR’s *All Things Considered*, and CNN’s *NewsNight* with Aaron Brown. Lichtman’s new book, *What Do You Stand For? – Stories About Principles That Matter* is a collection of positive ethical stories.

Do ethics still matter? “Clearly most 18-24 year-olds believe they do,” Lichtman says. “Yet, when good, ethical conduct conflicts with what they want, many show a readiness to compromise the honesty and integrity they believe is so important in their lives. Ethicist Michael Josephson reminds us that, ‘*Ethics is having the character and the courage to do the right thing even when it costs more than we want to pay.*’ If we want to build long-term trusting relationships, each of us should strive to make a stronger commitment to practice the kinds of ethical values many of our grandparents have lived by – honesty, integrity, loyalty, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.”

Zogby International conducted interviews of 604 adults aged 18-24 at random, nationwide from a Zogby compiled database of adults self-identified as aged 18-24. All calls were made from Zogby International headquarters in Utica, N.Y., from April 25, 2005 through April 30, 2005. The margin of error is +/- 4.1 percentage points. Slight weights were added to region, race, gender to more accurately reflect the population surveyed. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

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