

## Religion Experts Column

This is my response to this week's question of **Ask The Religion Experts**, a feature in the *Sunday Ottawa Citizen*. Questions are the editor's. All responses are available on the Citizen's online blog for the feature. We invite you to consider this response and share your own. It is our hope this will generate some thoughtful discussion of the real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.

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Sunday, February 27, 2011

**Q** : Do we pay enough attention in the workplace to ethics?

**A** : Workplaces vary. Some require greater attention to ethical concerns than others. In the health environment where I earn my living, we are ever-attentive to issues of privacy and professional service standards. The same is true in many other professional environments where the consequences for un-ethical behaviour are well established. The current rash of investigations into police, military, corporate and financial practices demonstrate the presence of such strong ethical frameworks.

A framework cannot guarantee ethical behaviour. Some police are still brutal, some traders corrupt. Clearly, even some professions with high ethical standards and serious legal consequences are subject to individual moral lapses. We might better ask "is there a consistent ethical code in our work lives?"

The transformation of our world into an international cultural community has resulted in a multiverse of ethics. Our world includes both religious-inspired ethics and secular ethics as well, some driven by values of fairness, relationship, respect and an understanding of eternal presence. Others, as evidenced by the above-mentioned lapses, suggest conflicting

codes which value dominance, competition, wealth and national pre-eminence above all.

Culturally, we are no longer so uniform in adhering to former values and not yet clear what are appropriate to this new world. It is here, in dialogues like this, that those of us with an understanding of the ethics of our traditions, religious and otherwise, can try to articulate new and relevant standards. Undoubtedly world's great faiths all guide their followers in public and private matters. Buddhists, for example, would not distinguish between workplace ethics and private situations. In every moment we are guided by precepts which apply to any decision or action.

Perhaps the question only points out that our workplace environments have been allowed to become barren secular environments where religious ethics have no place. Professions can bring standards to work, yet the workplace is seen as neutral. Until we connect the site of where most of us spend our days to some consensual and socially responsible values, we may well wonder if the workplace can ever be ethical.

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