

**STRENGTHENING EMPLOYEE CONDUCT:
THE VALUE OF ETHICS TRAINING AND A WRITTEN
CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE FIRE SERVICE**

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

BY: Christopher T. Howes

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue

Palm Beach County, Florida

**An applied research project submitted to the National Fire
Academy as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program**

February 1998

ABSTRACT

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue (PBCFR) recognized that the diversity of its workforce could engender different feelings about ethical conduct. PBCFR also recognized that everyone must be held to the same ethical standards. Evaluative research was used to assess whether ethics training and a written code of ethics would strengthen ethical conduct of employees at PBCFR.

The literature review examined what measures have been taken to strengthen ethical conduct of employees in the private sector, the public sector, and in the fire service. Ethics terminology and theory were defined to give the reader a framework to better understand the concepts discussed in the literature review. A survey was conducted to determine PBCFR employee understanding of ethics.

The literature review identified a written code of ethics and ethics training as a significant means of strengthening employee ethical conduct in both the private and public sector. The literature review revealed that the ethical conduct of employees at fire departments that have adopted ethics training and a code of ethics were also strengthened; however, the review also revealed the fire service has been slow to recognize the benefits of such training. This research suggested PBCFR could strengthen employee ethical conduct if a written code of ethics and ethics training were adopted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE	2
LITERATURE REVIEW	5
PROCEDURES.....	
RESULTS.....	15
DISCUSSION.....	23
RECOMMENDATIONS	27
REFERENCE LIST	30
APPENDIX A MISSION STATEMENT	32
APPENDIX B SURVEY ...	
APPENDIX C ORGANIZATIONAL CHART.....	37

Introduction

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue (PBCFR) is a large urban fire department located in Palm Beach County, Florida. The women and men who work for PBCFR come from varied backgrounds, and PBCFR prizes this diversity. PBCFR recognizes, however, that this diversity may engender different attitudes on the part of its employees in regard to ethical conduct.

In recognizing that individuals have different values and beliefs that could lead to varied standards about ethical conduct, PBCFR is not making a judgment about an individual's personal values; however, PBCFR also recognizes that as a public sector agency, its employees have been given a fiduciary trust that necessarily holds public sector employees to a higher ethical standard. This standard must be consistent for all of its employees, regardless of their personal value system.

Although PBCFR has a mission statement (Appendix A) that serves as a guideline for personal conduct toward the public as well as toward each individual in the organization and a policy and procedures manual that addresses rules and regulations of employment, there are no written guidelines that specifically address ethical conduct, nor is there any type of training program that specifically addresses ethical conduct.

Given the diversity of the work force, the nature of the work, and the high level of ethical conduct expected from people that have been given a public trust, the lack of written guidelines for ethical conduct and the lack of an ethics training program poses a problem for PBCFR.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate whether a written guideline addressing ethical conduct and an ethics training program would strengthen the ethical conduct of employees at PBCFR.

Evaluative research methods were employed to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a generally accepted definition of ethics and ethics terminology?
2. What measures have been taken in the private sector workplace to strengthen ethical conduct?
3. What measures have been taken in the public sector workplace to strengthen ethical conduct?
4. What measures have been taken in the fire service to strengthen ethical conduct?

Background and Significance

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue (PBCFR) is a full service fire department employing approximately 850 people. The service area is predominately residential, with some light industrial areas. The department operates out of 32 fire stations and covers a population base of more than 500,000 people spread over a geographical area of 550 square miles. PBCFR employees responded to over 70,000 calls during the past year; approximately 80 percent of those calls were medical in nature, the other 20 percent were categorized as fire related.

Due to the nature of the fire-rescue business, firefighters see people during times of crisis. They may be having a heart attack, their house may be on fire, or they may be involved in a car accident and badly trapped. Regardless of the situation, people are more vulnerable during times of crisis and they look to fire department personnel to help them in their time of need. The very highest level of ethical conduct from fire rescue personnel is expected.

Just as the external customers expect a high level of ethical conduct, the internal customers, the employees of PBCFR, have a similar right to expect the same high level of conduct from their co-workers. The majority of the personnel work a 24 hour shift with 48 hours off, which means they spend a third of their lives working and living with their co-workers. High ethical standards are extremely important in this type of environment.

What happens when these high ethical expectations are not met? Fire-rescue employees are offered many different perks by local business owners. For instance, many businesses offer discounts to on-duty personnel, such as half price lunches and free coffee. Movie theaters offer off-duty personnel free movies if they show a fire department badge. Video rental companies offer reduced rates or free movies to both on and off-duty personnel. All of these situations could be examined from an ethical standpoint. Are these just harmless benefits that come with the job, or are they instances of ethical misconduct?

Just as there are instances of questionable ethical conduct when people accept benefits that some may assume come with the job, so there are instances of behavior while on-duty that many people assume is their right. People sometimes spend time on the telephone conducting

business that is related to their off-duty work. People may use fire department office supplies to complete projects that are not work related. Supervisors may exhibit favoritism when scheduling vacation time for subordinates who are also friends. Again, are these harmless benefits that come with the job, or are they instances of ethical misconduct?

These are just a few examples of potential ethical misconduct, all with the possibility of consequences both for the department as well as for the individual. The real problem is that not everyone views these scenarios as examples of ethical misconduct because every person has his or her own code of ethics that may not necessarily conform to the higher standard of ethics demanded from people working in the public sector.

The examples of ethical dilemmas discussed so far could be debated as to whether they are truly instances of ethical misconduct or just benefits of the job. There have been times, however, when PBCFR employees have crossed the line and committed offenses that are truly examples of ethical misconduct. Supervisors have sexually harassed subordinates. Paramedics have falsified reports so the reports meet quality assurance standards. Drug logs have been falsified to hide the disappearance of controlled drugs. Training and inspection records have been falsified to meet quotas established by the department. These are very serious breeches of ethical conduct, and the offending employees have been punished according to the disciplinary guidelines in the rules and regulations.

The lack of a specific guideline that addresses ethical conduct has left many areas of employee misconduct open to interpretation. This has subjected the employee to discipline that

may not necessarily be the best course of action for the employee or the fire department. In fact, at times the wrong message has been sent because union representation during grievance proceedings has been skillful enough to exonerate the employee on a technicality, even though a breach in ethical conduct did occur. Some now feel they can break the rules with impunity, provided they have good union representation.

Ethics in the public sector, ethical theories, ethical dilemmas, ethical responsibilities, and implementation of ethical guidelines were discussed in module six in the National Fire Academy's Executive Development class. During this discussion, particular emphasis was placed on the senior fire officer's role as a manager and leader and the responsibilities those roles carry from an ethical standpoint. This section clarified how important high ethical standards are in the public sector. Class discussion during this module clearly showed differences in each person's own value system and how those differences can lead to breaches in ethical conduct.

Literature Review

Ethics: History and Terminology

Moore & Stevens (1959) credit Socrates as the first to fully develop Western ethical thought. Bourke (1968) traced the history of ethics in Western civilization back to 500 B.C., beginning with the early Graeco-Roman philosophers. The Graeco-Roman philosophers were the first to develop and write theories on ethics (Bourke, 1968).

Although the terminology that is used in the study of ethics may seem arcane and the theories abstract if not difficult, it is important for the reader to have a basic understanding of terminology and theory. Moore & Stevens (1959) view ethics as “a practical science which establishes principles of human conduct and directs our activity by these principles” (p. 5). They talk about ethics as a practical science because the study of ethics seeks a truth designed to direct action.

Singer (1979) starts by telling the reader what ethics is not. It is not a set of prohibitions, and it is certainly not a system that is only good in theory and not in practice. Singer cites as an example ethical judgment. If ethical judgment is no good in practice then it must have a theoretical defect because the whole point of ethical judgment is to guide ethical practices.

Lewis (1991) writes about ethics in the public sector, and she defines ethics as “thinking systematically about morals and conduct and making judgments about right and wrong” (p. 3). She feels that a definition of ethics need not be complicated in order to have a practical discussion about ethics. Lewis also helps define the concept of public service employment as a fiduciary trust. She argues that “What makes ethics so important to public service is that it goes beyond thought and talk to performance and action” (p. 3). She further states that employees in the public sector are in a unique position due to the relationship they have with the tax paying public, thus the fiduciary trust and the inherent responsibilities that are a part of that trust.

There are several important theories in use today that serve as the foundation for ethical decision making models. Kidder (1995) describes utilitarianism as ends-based thinking. Quite

simply, it means making decisions based on the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In modern terms, utilitarianism is a cost-benefit analysis. The heart of this principle revolves around an assessment of consequences which has a legal basis. It is one of the primary tools used today in public policy, particularly in legislation.

Moore & Stevens (1959) explain the theory of rights and the theory of justice, two other important theories used in public policy. The theory of rights grants individual freedoms such as free speech, privacy, and due process among others. Like utilitarianism, it has a legal basis. The theory of justice is defined in several different ways. Justice as a virtue means that man respects “in action and thought the rights of others” (p. 113). They further define justice as general in nature which means that man respects “the rights common to all men in society” (p. 113). And finally they define justice as particular which means that man “will act justly to those particular individuals with whom we ourselves have contacts” (p. 113).

These three theories are central to the public policy decision-making process. The rights of the individual must be balanced against the rights of the community and these theories are used as a model for decision-making because they are legally defensible (Bayles, 1989; DeGeorge, 1995; Kidder, 1995; Moore & Stevens, 1959).

After a conference sponsored by the Institute for Global Ethics, Kidder (1995) reported that individuals from sixteen different nations all agreed that the ethical standards of people and nations were deteriorating and at the same time the ethical standards required of people and

nations were becoming increasingly complex. They felt that the ethical standards of the twentieth century would not be adequate for the global ethical issues we will face in the twenty-first century.

Ethics: Private sector

The Business Roundtable (1988) conducted a study on ethics at one hundred major corporations in America. They found that each company had a written code of ethics that was understood by all employees and was an integral part of each company's corporate culture.

Other shared characteristics discovered during this study centered on top management's role. The study found that the CEOs played an absolutely crucial role in the success of ethical standards within the company. Maintaining the highest possible ethical standards required a top down message that stressed ethical values and was a part of the corporate culture. This message was echoed by senior managers, middle managers, line bosses, and finally by the workers.

Shea's (1988) research supports the study conducted by The Business Roundtable. He found that "a consistent pattern of ethical conduct among managers and within the organization helps to solve many problems and contributes to high performance" (p. 81).

Periodic communication specifically addressing ethical commitment was also found to be very important. Policy statements, speeches, and training were all helpful ways to reinforce the fact that ethics are a core value within the corporation. The most effective means of sending this message, however, was through the actions of management (The Business Roundtable, 1988).

Kellar (1988) found four conditions that must be met if ethics training is going to be successful. First and most importantly, top management must be committed to the idea of ethics training because the values of the corporation will be closely examined by the students. Second, issues that are ethically important must be identified to insure the training has relevancy. Third, the trainer must have broad-based academic experience in ethics training, as well as a thorough understanding of the particular industry. Fourth, enough time prior to the training must be allowed to insure support and buy-in from the employees. The idea has to be sold before implementing any type of ethics training program.

Ethics: Public sector

Lewis (1991) feels that ethics in the public sector can either be good or bad, depending on whether it is used to empower or disable. It can be used in a coercive manner as a public relations tool, or it can be used as a supporting mechanism to reinforce accountability. Too many times, organizations rely on rules and regulations as the final answer, rather than molding more disciplined behavior through a good code of ethics.

Kidder (1995) found that core values play an important role in public policy issues. Core values often conflict with the rights of individuals versus groups. Understanding that core values which conflict with individual versus group rights usually leads to tough dilemmas is the first step in developing solutions that provide a reasonable accommodation for everyone.

Guy (1990) feels that a good decision-making model is essential, especially when core values are involved. He speaks about the dilemma people face when one value is maximized and the other is minimized. He suggests clearly defining the problem, identifying the goal to be achieved, listing all possible alternatives, and then evaluating each alternative to determine which is the best solution for the desired outcome.

Kellar (1988) also discusses ways that managers can use different tools to help resolve ethical problems. Key among these tools is a way of asking questions that helps resolve issues so that all parties are treated fairly. This is not to say that all parties get what they want.

Many times the tools used to resolve ethical problems in the public sector are ethical models that are used to answer questions. There are three ethical models that can be used to help guide managers in their decision-making: the end-point ethics model balances good versus bad for everyone involved; the rule ethics model says that a person or organization should act in a manner consistent with valid ethical principles; and the social contract ethics model is an agreement about basic principles governing a particular group or organization (Kellar, 1988).

Ethics: Fire service

The fire service today is a much different service than it was twenty or even ten years ago. Schmitt (1992) found that individual firefighter rights are playing a much bigger role than in the past, even though the fire service is still a para-military organization. Because firefighters are no longer reluctant to demand fairness from supervisors and are even more willing to

challenge tradition, especially when department policy is based solely on tradition, it is essential to have an ethical model to follow when making decisions.

Folisi (1995) is a fire service instructor, and he explored the issue of teaching ethics to fire service personnel. He found that everyone had a different perspective on ethical issues, but he also found that regardless of age, gender, personal beliefs, or ethnic background, teaching ethics is easier if students understand their own character traits. Understanding individual traits is the first step toward improving existing traits and developing new traits that would lead individuals to make better decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Cleveland (1997) explored core values that can be used when addressing customer service issues. He cites Phoenix, Arizona, Fire Chief Allan Brunacini as one of the first to talk about customer service but feels that fire departments are just now starting to understand his message. The first core value that he mentions is an ethical standard that embraces honesty, integrity, trust, and commitment. He maintains that without this core ethical standard fire department personnel and the fire service are severely compromised and ineffective. He lists organizational vitality, empowered associates, quality control, and citizenship as the other important core values that are necessary for leaders and organizations to be effective.

Marinucci (1992) writes about the need for a written code of ethics and ethics training as ways to insure better ethical behavior from fire department employees. He maintains that a written code of ethics and an ethics training program helps foster an awareness of common

ethical dilemmas faced by all employees, which in turn helps employees develop higher ethical standards.

Steffens (1994) writes about the erosion of ethics in the fire service and the threat this imposes. He feels that the fire service is far behind the private sector in recognizing the importance of formal ethics training. He suggests taking advantage of local universities, training seminars, and the National Fire Academy's Company Officer Leadership Program. He also recommends adopting a written code of ethics and suggests that the American Society for Public Administrators' code of ethics can be adopted for use by the fire service.

Summary

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the need for ethics training and a written code of ethics at PBCFR. The literature review examined ethics training and a written code of ethics in the private sector, the public sector, and in the fire service in an attempt to determine if ethics training and a code of ethics has strengthened employee ethical conduct in the workplace. The review proved very beneficial and had a positive influence on this project.

The literature reviewed provided a background on the history of ethics and clearly described the terminology associated with the study of ethics. This information was presented first so the reader would have an understanding of the vocabulary that is specific to the study of ethics.

The review examined private sector ethics and found that ethics training and a written code of ethics positively influenced the ethical conduct of employees. This finding is important because PBCFR's organizational structure (Appendix C) is similar to a private corporate structure. It is reasonable to assume the same results can be expected at PBCFR if similar training is provided and a written code of ethics is adopted.

The review of public sector ethics found the benefits of ethics training and a written code of ethics were similar to the benefits found in the private sector. Information on ethical models designed to guide decision-making when faced with ethical dilemmas was found in the review of this literature. This is particularly important to this project because PBCFR is in the public sector and its employees, especially senior staff, are faced with ethical dilemmas every day. The availability of a model to guide the decision-making process would be very useful.

The review of ethics specific to the fire service was also beneficial. It showed that the fire service has benefited from ethics training and from a written code of ethics, but it also showed that the fire service, in general, has been slow to recognize the benefits of ethics training and a written code of ethics. The literature review showed that ethics training and a written code of ethics could strengthen employee ethical conduct, regardless of the type of organization. It is clear from the findings of others that PBCFR could strengthen employee ethical conduct if ethics training and a written code of ethics were adopted.

Procedures

The research procedures used began with a literature review at the Learning Resource Center at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. A further review was conducted using reference material from the Delray Beach Public Library, Delray Beach, Florida as well as inter-library loans from Florida Atlantic University Library, Boca Raton, Florida; Palm Beach Atlantic College Library, West Palm Beach, Florida; Broward Community College Library, Davie, Florida; and Palm Beach Community College Library, Lake Worth, Florida.

Evaluative research methods were employed to better understand the history of ethics and the terminology associated with the study of ethics. The literature was also examined to determine what actions have been taken to strengthen the ethical conduct of employees in the private sector, the public sector, and in the fire service. The desired outcome of this research was to determine whether written ethical guidelines and ethics training would prove useful in strengthening the ethical conduct of employees at PBCFR.

A four hour training session on ethics was conducted by this researcher as part of an 80 hour curriculum for an Officer Candidate School that was held October 13, 1997 through October 24, 1997 at PBCFR. A lieutenant's promotional exam for employees at PBCFR produced a register of 150 promotional candidates. Prior to their promotion, the top 28 candidates attended this class. Part of the lecture given on ethics covered the responsibilities inherent in a public sector job. During the class, discussion about ethical standards and

responsibilities and the concept of a fiduciary trust revealed the students limited understanding of their ethical responsibilities associated with employment in the public sector.

Although the number of students that attended the Officer Candidate School is statistically not a representative sample of the total population of lieutenants on the promotional register (28 out of 150), the discussion that took place during the four hour training session on ethics cannot be overlooked. None of the students had a clear understanding of their fiduciary responsibility as public sector employees. In fact, many of the students disagreed with the precept that they should be held to a higher standard.

A survey of the employees at PBCFR was conducted in an effort to gauge their understanding of ethical issues and determine their feelings about the need for a written code of ethics and ethics training (Appendix B). A cover letter accompanied each survey and explained the purpose of the survey and provided instruction on completing the survey.

The questions used in the survey were developed by this researcher, and a sampling, generated by a random computer selection of all personnel on the fire department's payroll, was sent out on November 3, 1997. The total population on that date was 850 personnel. In order for the survey to be valid, 265 completed surveys were needed. A total of 380 surveys were sent out and 278 surveys were completed and returned, giving this sample a 95% confidence rating. The labor relations' office coordinated the distribution of the surveys and assisted with the tabulation of the results.

Results

Research question 1: Is there a generally accepted definition of ethics and ethics terminology?

The history of ethics in Western civilization can be traced to 500 B.C., beginning with the early Graeco-Roman philosophers. Socrates is credited with being the first to develop Western ethical thought (Bourke, 1968; Moore & Stevens, 1959).

The terminology used in the field of ethics can be viewed as scientific. Principles, theories, and models have been developed to define ethics and shape ethical decision-making. Moore & Stevens (1959) view ethics as “a practical science which establishes principles of human conduct and directs our activity by these principles” (p. 5).

Kellar (1998) defines ethics by stating, “The ethics of a person or organization is the set of ground rules by which that person or organization acts” (p. 91). Lewis (1991) defines public sector ethics as “thinking systematically about morals and conduct and making judgements about right and wrong” (p. 3).

Several theories were examined, all of them important in the public policy decision making process. The theory of utilitarianism provides the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The theory of rights grants individual freedoms. The theory of justice demands that

men and women respect the rights common to all people. All of these theories are legally defensible (Bayles, 1989; DeGeorge, 1995; Kidder, 1995; Moore & Stevens, 1959).

Research question 2: What measures have been taken in the private sector work place to strengthen ethical conduct?

Research conducted by The Business Roundtable (1988) at one hundred major corporations showed that a corporate culture that engenders ethical behavior, in conjunction with a written code of conduct and periodic training in ethics, strengthened ethical conduct. The study showed that top management's role is vital to the success of an organization, particularly when it comes to instilling high ethical standards in its employees. Other researchers supported the results of the study conducted by The Business Roundtable, with particular emphasis placed on ethics training as a means of strengthening ethical conduct (The Business Roundtable, 1988; Kellar, 1988; Shea, 1988;).

Research question 3: What measures have been taken in the public sector work place to strengthen ethical conduct?

Lewis (1991) noted that ethical standards in the public sector can either be used in a coercive manner, or they can be used to reinforce accountability. Lewis found that many organizations rely on rules and regulations as a final answer, rather than raising people's ethical standards through a code of ethics.

Kidder (1995) found that core values play an important role in public policy issues. He also discovered that core values are the cause of most conflicts between individuals and groups. He maintains that recognizing the inevitability of conflict is the beginning of developing solutions to tough dilemmas.

Different ethical models were discussed as ways to resolve ethical conflicts. Guy (1990) advocates clearly defining the problem, identifying the goal to be achieved, list possible alternatives, and then evaluate the alternative for the best solution. He states this is especially useful when core values are at stake.

Kellar (1988) cites three ethical models that can be used as a guide when faced with ethical decisions: the end-point model weighs the pros and cons for all involved; the rule model says that a person should act according to valid ethical principles; and the social contract model is an agreement that defines basic principles for a particular group or organization.

Research question 4: What measures have been taken in the fire service to strengthen ethical conduct?

Schmitt (1992) notes that firefighters today are very concerned about individual rights and are not reluctant to demand fairness from their supervisors. Schmitt feels that a decision-making model is essential when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Folisi (1995) is a fire service instructor and he found that students all had different perspectives on ethical issues. He discovered that teaching ethics is easier if students understand their own character traits. He maintains that understanding individual traits makes it easier to develop new traits that would help people make better decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Cleveland (1997) wrote about customer service and the importance of core values. The most important core value is an ethical standard that embraces honesty, integrity, trust, and commitment. He felt that without these core values fire department personnel and the fire service are compromised and ineffective.

Marinucci (1992) wrote about the need for a written code of ethics and ethics training. He felt that training and a code of ethics would foster a greater awareness of common ethical dilemmas, leading to the development of higher ethical standards among employees.

Steffens (1994) wrote about the erosion of ethics in the fire service and the threat this poses to the profession. He felt that the fire service is far behind the private sector in recognizing the importance of formal ethics training. He suggested people would benefit from ethics training from local universities, private training seminars, and the National Fire Academy's Company Officer Leadership Program. He further recommended adopting a written code of ethics.

Survey Results

TABLE 1

Ethics Questionnaire

1. Do you feel that most fire-rescue employees act in an ethical manner?	Yes	268	(93.5%)
	No	10	(6.5%)

TABLE 2

Ethics Questionnaire

2. Do you feel that the present rules and regulations are adequate to address questions concerning ethical conduct?	Yes	221	(79.5%)
	No	57	(21.5%)

TABLE 3

Ethics Questionnaire

3. Does Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue need a written guideline for ethical conduct?	Yes	139	(50%)
	No	139	(50%)

TABLE 4

Ethics Questionnaire

4.	Do you feel that as a fire-rescue employee you should	Yes	179	(64.4%)
	be held to a higher ethical standard than people in other	No	99	(35.6%)
	professions?			

TABLE 5

Ethics Questionnaire

5.	Do you feel that all fire-rescue employees should be	Yes	257	(92.5%)
	held to the same ethical standard, regardless of their	No	21	(7.5%)
	own value system?			

TABLE 6

Ethics Questionnaire

6.	Do you feel that accepting free or reduced price meals	Yes	90	(32.4%)
	from local restaurants while on duty is an example of	No	188	(67.6%)
	ethical misconduct?			

TABLE 7

Ethics Questionnaire

7.	Do you feel that lying to a supervisor in order to protect a friend is an example of ethical misconduct?	Yes	242	(87%)
		No	36	(13%)

TABLE 8

Ethics Questionnaire

8.	If ethical guidelines were instituted in this department, do you think that ethical misconduct would decrease?	Yes	106	(38.2%)
		No	172	(61.8%)

TABLE 9

Ethics Questionnaire

9.	Do you think that the citizens we serve expect us to maintain a higher ethical standard than people in other professions?	Yes	238	(85.6%)
		No	40	(14.4%)

TABLE 10

Ethics Questionnaire

10.	Do you trust your co-worker?	Yes	232	(83.5%)
		No	46	(16.5%)

TABLE 11

Ethics Questionnaire

11.	Do you think the employees in this fire department need ethics training?	Yes	154	(55.4%)
		No	124	(44.6%)

TABLE 12

Ethics Questionnaire

12.	Is our mission statement a useful document?	Yes	158	(51.1%)
		No	120	(49.9%)

Discussion

As depicted in Tables 1 and 10, the majority of employees felt that ethical conduct is quite high at PBCFR. This is not unusual, considering the background checks that occur as part of the hiring process. Table 7 supports the findings in Tables 1 and 10. Most people felt lying to a supervisor to protect a friend is unethical (87%).

Tables 2 and 3 show a clear discrepancy in the way people view the need for a written ethical guideline balanced against respondents feeling that the present rules and regulations are adequate to address ethical conduct. Fully 79.5% felt the rules and regulations are adequate, yet 50% felt there is a need for written ethical guidelines.

Table 4 reveals that 64.6% of respondents agree that employees should be held to a higher ethical standard than people in other professions, about the same percentage as the students in the Officer Candidate School. This suggests a lack of understanding among employees about the fiduciary responsibilities inherent in a public sector profession.

Table 5 reveals that 92.5% of respondents felt employees should be held to the same standard, regardless of their own values. This data provides a strong argument for ethics training and the need for ethical guidelines.

Table 6 shows that 67.6% of the respondents did not feel accepting free meals was an example of ethical misconduct. This is an indication that employees do not understand the quid

pro quo relation that can be part of such a transaction. Table 9 shows 85.6% of respondents felt employees should be held to a higher standard than people in other professions. This somewhat supports the data in Table 11, which reveals 55.4% of respondents felt ethics training is necessary.

Table 12 deals with PBCFR's Mission Statement (Appendix A). This document is in every fire station, but the number of people who felt it is a useful document was only 51.1%. The ambiguity about the Mission Statement reveals, at the least, disinterest about how people should be treating each other within the organization. It may also be an indication of other problems within the organization.

Although the results of the survey do not directly support the idea that ethics training and a written code of ethics would strengthen employee conduct, fifty percent felt that PBCFR did need a written guideline for ethical conduct and over fifty percent felt that ethics training was needed. This is significant because employee buy-in, as noted by Kellar (1988), is important for such changes to be successful. The results do show PBCFR's employees have a limited understanding of the important role high ethical standards play in the public sector.

The literature review showed the benefit of both ethics training and a written code of ethics. Lewis (1991) described the unique relationship between public sector employees and the public they serve and defined this relationship as a fiduciary trust because public sector employees work for and are funded by the citizens they serve. Because of this trust, public sector employees are held to a higher standard than people in most other professions.

A written code of ethics and ethics training were both shown to be important components of developing higher ethical standards within an organization, both in the private and public sector. Top management's role was found to be crucial for implementation of any type of ethics training and/or a written code of ethics to be effective (The Business Roundtable, 1988; Marinucci, 1992; Shea, 1988; Steffens, 1994).

Adopting a written code of ethics and instituting an ethics training program would be a cultural change at PBCFR. Changing the culture of an organization is a task that has to occur a little bit at a time. As Kidder (1995) found, recognizing that core values are the cause of most dilemmas, training in ethics and instituting a written code of ethics would help make such a cultural change a smoother process.

The ethics training that was held during the Officer Candidate School revealed the students' limited understanding of the high ethical standards expected of a public sector employee. In particular, there was almost unanimous disagreement about the need to hold fire-service employees to a higher ethical standard than people in most other professions.

This research was conducted to determine whether a written code of ethics and ethics training would strengthen PBCFR employee ethical conduct. It is clear to this researcher that both are needed in this fire department and would serve to strengthen employee ethical conduct. Disciplinary problems experienced within this department verify the conclusion Lewis (1991)

reached about relying on rules and regulations to govern employee behavior, rather than developing better ethical behavior through a written code of ethics. The responses from the survey showed a poor understanding of the fiduciary responsibility inherent in a public sector profession such as the fire service. The literature review showed the complexity of ethical theory and ethical terminology, further emphasizing the need for training in the field of ethics.

This research revealed that organizations, both private and public, could benefit from a written code of ethics and from ethics training. As Kidder (1995) reported, the ethical standards of people and of nations are deteriorating; the ethical standards required of people and nations are increasing; and the ethical standards of the twentieth century will not be adequate to face the global ethical issues of the twenty-first century.

The implications from this study for PBCFR are clear. A written code of ethics and ethics training would help strengthen the ethical conduct of the employees at PBCFR. This fire department is no different than any other organization (Appendix C) examined in this study, either private or public. Written guidelines on ethical conduct and ethics training should be viewed as the rudder on a ship. An organization can either be pro-active and keep employee behavior on course with a written code of ethics and ethics training, or an organization can simply rely on rules and regulations to govern employee behavior and continue to drift into dangerous waters.

Recommendations

As first discussed in the problem and purpose statement, PBCFR recognized that individuals within the organization all have different values and beliefs that could lead to different feelings about ethical conduct. PBCFR recognized, however, that as a public sector agency, its employees have been given a fiduciary trust that holds them to a higher ethical standard than employees in most other professions. This standard must be consistent for all employees, regardless of their own values.

The literature reviewed suggested that ethics training and a written code of ethics strengthens ethical conduct of employees in an organization. The survey results showed that PBCFR employees do not have a good understanding of the role that ethics plays in a public sector organization. Because there is no written code of ethics and no ethics training, there is no benchmark to measure the conduct of people within this organization. As Lewis (1991) noted, organizations can rely on rules and regulations to govern employee conduct, or an organization can raise ethical standards, thus lessening the need for such reliance on rules and regulations.

If PBCFR decides to implement a written code of ethics and provide ethics training to its employees, there must be support from the administrator of the fire department. The study conducted by The Business Roundtable (1988) clearly showed the necessity of top management's role in any type of ethics training and adoption of a written code of ethics. Support of this type cannot be emphasized enough. PBCFR has only been in existence for fourteen years. Consolidation of ten small departments in the early 1980's resulted in the clash

of ten different corporate cultures. PBCFR has been struggling ever since to develop its own identity, but it still does not have a single corporate culture with which everyone can immediately identify or take pride. Establishing a high ethical standard that comes from top management would do far more than just raise ethical awareness; it would return the pride we all felt in our respective departments prior to consolidation.

Regionalization of fire-rescue service is occurring within Palm Beach County. As PBCFR absorbs more fire departments into its system, the number of employees and the complexity of issues facing all employees have increased dramatically. A fire department's primary responsibility is to provide professional emergency service to the public. Adequately preparing for this mission requires ongoing training. Providing ethics training for all employees and developing a written code of ethics should now be part of that preparation.

References

- Bayles, M. (1989). Professional ethics (2nd ed.). California: Wadsworth.
- Bourke, V. J. (1968). History of ethics. New York: Doubleday.
- The Business Roundtable. (1988). Corporate ethics: A prime business asset. New York: The Business Roundtable.
- Cleveland, E. A. (1997). The quality of a leader's path: A self examination of core values. Voice, 26, 20.
- De George, R. T. (1995). Business ethics (4th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Folisi, K. (1995). Teaching ethics, can we, should we? Voice, 24, 25-26.
- Guy, M. E. (1990). Ethical decision making in everyday work situations. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Kellar, E. K. (Ed.). (1988). Ethical insight ethical action. Washington, D.C.: International City Management Association.
- Kidder, R. M. (1995). How good people make tough choices. New York: William Morrow and Company.
- Kidder, R. M. (1995). Universal human values: finding an ethical common ground. Public Management, 77, 4-9.
- Lewis, C. W. (1991). The ethics challenge in public service. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Marinucci, R. A. (1992). Ethics: an issue for the '90s. Fire Engineering, 34, 77-81.
- Moore, T. M. & Stevens, G. (1959). Principles of ethics (5th ed.). Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott.

Schmitt, B. (1992). Ethical issues in the fire service. American Fire Journal, 44, 22-26.

Shea, G. F. (1988). Practical ethics. New York: AMA membership publications.

Singer, P. (1979). Practical Ethics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Steffens, J. T. (1994) Ethics: the silent threat to the Fire Service. Voice, 29, 25-26.

APPENDIX A
MISSION STATEMENT

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue

Mission Statement

We, the Personnel of Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue, are committed to assuring the residents, guests and visitors in our community a secure and superior quality of life. We accomplish this by maintaining the highest state of readiness, dedication and compassion in order to minimize emotional, physical, and economic loss.

In our organization we strive to make a difference in our people by creating an atmosphere of teamwork and fellowship while recognizing the individual attributes and responding to the needs of each other.

We acknowledge that empathy toward human suffering requires special individuals who realize the importance of their unselfish contribution and personal commitment to the welfare of the team and community.

APPENDIX B
SURVEY

Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue

Inter-Office Memorandum

To: Survey Recipients**Ronald J. Beasley, Battalion Chief
Management Services****December 17, 1997****Ethic's Survey**

The Espirit Decor Committee will be conducting an Ethic's Survey in connection with an EFO project being administered by District Chief Kit Howes. The participants in this survey have been selected at random from the entire departmental compliment. This survey will be used to facilitate a better understanding of the general sense of ethics within Palm Beach County Fire Rescue, both by the committee and by District Chief Howes for his project. We would greatly appreciate your completing this survey and returning it to my office by January 15, 1998, so that we may tabulate the data. Upon completion of this tabulation, the information will be posted in a form of a report from the Espirit Decor Committee. Should you have any questions with this matter, or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or District Chief Howes at Station 55A.

Thank you in advance for your participation in our survey.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON ETHICAL CONDUCT

Please circle your response to the following questions:

- Yes / No 1. Do you feel that most fire-rescue employees act in an ethical manner?
- Yes / No 2. Do you feel that the present rules and regulations are adequate to address questions concerning ethical misconduct?
- Yes / No 3. Does Palm Beach County Fire-Rescue need a written guideline for ethical conduct?
- Yes / No 4. Do you feel that as a fire-rescue employee you should be held to a higher ethical standard than people in other professions?
- Yes / No 5. Do you feel that all fire-rescue employees should be held to the same ethical standard, regardless of their own value system?
- Yes / No 6. Do you feel that accepting free or reduced price meals from local restaurants while on duty is an example of ethical misconduct?
- Yes / No 7. Do you feel that lying to a supervisor in order to protect a friend is an example of ethical misconduct?
- Yes / No 8. If ethical guidelines were instituted in this department, do you think that ethical misconduct would decrease?
- Yes / No 9. Do you think that the citizens we serve expect us to maintain a higher ethical standard than people in other professions?
- Yes / No 10. Do you trust your co-workers?
- Yes / No 11. Do you think the employees in this fire department need ethics training?
- Yes / No 12. Is our Mission Statement a useful document?

APPENDIX C
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

PALM BEACH COUNTY FIRE-RESCUE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

