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Dressing to Make a Good Impression

Correct attire for business may vary by the situation and the culture. Therefore, the question of how you should dress to make the best impression in a variety of business settings can create some troublesome dilemmas. The first thing you need to know are several common terms often used to note the type of dress that is expected. To help you demystify these terms, take a look at the following definitions:

Formal wear: dinner jackets (tuxedos), evening gowns, or cocktail dresses.

Business attire: Suits with collared shirt and conservative ties or tailored dresses and suits with conservative blouses.

Business casual: Slacks with sports coat and button-up shirt or dresses and pant suits.

Dress-down day: Slacks or skirts (no shorts or well-worn denim) and shirts with collars or blouses (no tee-shirts or tank tops).

Opinions about appropriate on-the-job or off-the-job attire often vary by parts in different regions of the country, so—when in doubt—it is always a good idea to ask what is appropriate for the situation. In addition, most organizations have a dress code, whether published or not. When it involves your job, you should find out what it is and follow it. The following basics will let you play it safe when deciding what to wear and how to look:

Guidelines for Everyone

- Strive for a tailored and professional look.
- Solid colored shirts and blouses are a safe bet in almost every setting; don't mix stripes and patterns.
- The proper length of your suit or sport jacket should be about 3/4 inch longer than your thumb (when your arms are straight down).
- Sleeve cuffs should be approximately five inches from the tip of your thumb and show about on-half inch of material below the coat sleeve.
- Don't wear anything that can be identified with educational, social, political, or religious organizations.
- Wear clean, polished shoes; never sneakers.
- Remove any facial or body piercings (excluding earrings for women) and wear clothes that cover any tattoos.
- Be freshly bathed and wear clean, wrinkle-free clothes.

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- Stand and sit up straight; walk with pride and purpose in all that you do.

Guidelines for Men

- Wear a suit with a long-sleeved, collared shirt, and a conservative tie.
- Never let any shirt show between the tie and the waist of the pants.
- Choose a belt to blend with or match your shoes.
- Wear mid-calf socks so that your bare leg does not show when you cross your legs.
- If you wear a double-breasted suit, be sure to keep it buttoned.
- If you wear a hat, remove it as soon as you enter a building.
- Remove change and keys out of your pocket to avoid unsightly bulges and jingling noises.
- Be freshly shaved or trim facial hair neatly.

Guidelines for Women

- Create a professional image. For example, choose a solid suit and a conservative blouse.
- Always wear hose with skirts or dresses. Carry an extra pair with you in case you develop a run.
- Select hemlines and necklines with modesty and professionalism in mind.
- Carry a small portfolio, a purse, or both.
- Don't wear backless or open-toed shoes.
- Practice moderation when applying fragrances and makeup so that it is you who gets noticed—not the “extras” that you have added to your appearance.

Introducing Yourself and Others

Introducing yourself or to others is a common business practice. Luckily, the rules of introductions are fairly simple. The first is to show respect for the most important person in the setting by mentioning that person's name first. The second is to try to include a brief comment about each person being introduced so that they have some basic knowledge of each other. These brief introductory statements provide opportunities to begin conversations as well as help associate names with faces, which improves name retention. It takes practice to remember names, but mastering this skill pays dividends as it builds meaningful relationships.

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Introducing Yourself

Often, you will need to introduce yourself. In these situations, simply approach the person you don't know, extend your hand, smile, and say, "Hello, I am Tien Chen Wang," adding something appropriate given the circumstances, such as "I'm the host's assistant," or "I'm here representing the City of Seattle." Take notice of your setting before introducing yourself and don't intrude on someone who is in conversation with another person.

When you see someone you have met before, help them remember you. Say something such as "Hi, Micah, I'm Khoon Koh with Asian-American Imports. We met at this conference in Hong Kong last year." This simple gesture takes the pressure off the other person, who may be trying to remember your name and place your face. It also provides a conversation starter. A typical response would be something simple like "Oh, yes, weren't those Chinese meals great?"

Introducing Others

Introductions of people you know or to whom you would like to show special respect (such as your company president or your manager) have a special twist. The rule is to introduce the "less respected" person (lesser authority, rank, or age) to the "more respected" person (higher authority, rank, or age). In other words, say the "most respected" person's name first. As a matter of courtesy, clients should always be granted the status of holding the "most respected" position.

In addition, use titles to show respect and convey information to those whom are introducing. Here are a few example to show how this introduction hierarchy works:

- "Ms. Senior Executive, let me present Mr. Junior Executive. Mr. Junior Executive, this is Ms. Senior executive."
- "Ms. Gonzales, I would like to introduce Letitia Cosby, who will help you complete the paperwork for your loan. Letitia, this is Ms. Gonzales."
- "Dean Dolphin, I would like you to meet Nicholas and Helena Mithras. Their son Alex will be attending our school this fall. Mr. and Mrs. Mithras, Dean Dolphin is the dean of the business school."

Shaking Hands

Handshakes are the norm in the western world, so be prepared to shake hands in business settings. In other cultures, however, handshakes may only be part of an introduction. Just as people size you up based on your appearance, they will make judgments about your handshake and when and how you use it. Because this gesture

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of connectivity is as common, knowing and practicing a little handshake etiquette will put you and others at ease.

How to Shake Hands

- Extend your right hand with your thumb up.
- Shake firmly but considerately. Gauge your handshake to the strength of the person whose hand you are shaking.
- Pump the other person's hand once or twice.
- Break from the handshake quickly after a few seconds. Do not continue to hold the other person's hand during the entire introduction.
- Make eye contact with the person, but do not stare.
- Always keep your drink in your left hand. That way you never have to fumble around to shake hands or, even worse, extend a cold and clammy hand.

When to Shake Hands

In general, shake hands when you are:

- Meeting someone for the first time,
- Meeting someone you have not seen in a long time,
- Greeting your host or hostess,
- Greeting your guests, or
- Saying goodbye when you want to show extra respect.

Interviewing Basics

Nowhere are first impressions more important than in a job interview setting. You are on stage from the moment you enter the job search process. Whether unemployment rates are high or low, employers are always seeking to attract the best talent. Take the necessary steps to set yourself apart from others in the interviewing crowd and be recognized as the best. Remember, in the job search process, you are competing with other applicants as you attempt to sell your knowledge, skills, and abilities to a targeted and informed audience—a prospective employer.

You can conduct much of the initial job search process at a distance through employment agencies, networking, letter writing, emails, and telephone calls. Each of these contacts—from your cover letter and resume to telephone calls and emails—creates an impression of your qualifications, as well as your level of interest and

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attention to detail, setting the stage for success. However, the most important hiring decision usually depends on a face-to-face encounter: the personal interview.

Preparing for an Interview

As you prepare to sell yourself in the interview process,

- Read and learn all you can about your prospective employer and what they do. Show that you are informed.
- Think about your work-related achievements and how you can make them come to life with concrete examples.
- Take the time to practice answering questions before you arrive at an interview. Try to anticipate the questions an interviewer might ask. Ask a friend or associate to conduct a mock interview with you. Remember, during the interview, you are on stage: the interview is show time—not the time for a dress rehearsal.
- Be prepared to answer thought-provoking questions (such as those listed here) to demonstrate your personal preparation and familiarity with the job and the organization:

1. What skills could you bring to our organization? 2. Why do you want to work for us? 3. What do you see yourself doing for our organization in five years? 4. Who was the most difficult person you ever worked with, and why was he or she difficult to work with? 5. What is your greatest weakness, and what have you done to overcome it? 6. How do you plan to achieve your career goals? 7. Which is more important to you, salary or the type of job? 8. What have you learned from your mistakes? 9. How has your education prepared you for your career? 10. Is there anything else I should know about you?

Dressing for the Interview

Before going to an interview, find out how people dress where you will be interviewing. When the interview is being scheduled, ask how you should dress. Otherwise, when in doubt, you can never go wrong by slightly overdressing for an interview.

- In any case, unless the atmosphere is very relaxed, a business suit with a pressed white shirt and a tie is always safe for men.
- Women should wear a solid colored, knee-length skirt with a tailored blouse and pumps.
- If you are told not to dress up, a neatly pressed shirt or blouse and pants or skirt would be appropriate.

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- Leave your briefcase at home. Instead, take a file folder or portfolio containing several copies of your resume and some paper for notes. Your resume may not have been given to every one you will meet; this is a great tool for helping people remember your name and it serves as a conversation starter.

Making a Good Impression

In the interviewing setting, first impressions are crucial. You may be the perfect person for the job, but research shows that if you don't create a powerful first impression on the interviewer, you may not get the job—regardless of your abilities. Remember, the organization at which you are interviewing is seeking the best employee from a qualified pool of applicants. In other words, they are attempting to eliminate candidates in their quest to fill the position. Don't be eliminated from consideration by your timing, dress, posture, or handshake.

- Demonstrate enthusiasm and respect by arriving a few minutes early. Show your respect for others by respecting their time. Plan to arrive before the scheduled appointment; however, if you arrive more than ten or fifteen minutes early, tell the receptionist that you do not want to disturb your host and will wait until the scheduled time. Be sure to leave extra time between appointments for unexpected delays.
- Introduce yourself to the first person you meet, tell them why you are there, and ask for directions to the person you are scheduled to meet. Don't forget that everyone is an interviewer. Even the receptionist who greets you may be forming an impression of you as you sit in the waiting area. Never be casual; always assume you are being observed.
- Show your interest in the job by reading company literature, trade publications or professional journals—not the latest sports or glamour magazine.
- At the beginning and end of each interview, wait until the person in charge extends a hand then follow the previously-discussed rules for shaking hands. Don't worry if your hand is a little damp. Nervousness can create sweaty palms and it only shows that you are truly excited about the job prospect. However, if your hand is really moist, discretely wipe it on your pants or skirt before shaking hands.
- Walk confidently as you move through the interview process from one person to the next. Sit up straight at all times, even when you are not being interviewed. Maintain eye contact with the person conducting the interview and provide brief but complete answers to all questions.
- Think before you answer questions. Once you have given an answer; there is no way to take back what you said.

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- Simple “yes” or “no” answers to questions don’t give any clues to the interviewer about your knowledge, skills or abilities. When responding to questions, take the opportunity to explain how you can benefit your future employer.
- As you answer questions, take time to think about questions you want answered. This is your opportunity to learn more about the organization and the job for which you are applying.

Writing Thank-You Notes

At the time of the interview, you should always thank your interviewer for their time and the opportunity of exploring how you might fit into their organization. However, a verbal

“thank you” is not enough. When you begin the interview process, jot down the names and titles of everyone involved. Once you return from interviewing, write a short thank-you note to each of these individuals.

- Address your letter to the key person (include his or her title) who handled your visit.
- Begin by thanking them for their time and reminding them who you are and for what position you applied.
- Next, tell them why you want the job and how your skills and abilities will contribute to the organization’s success. If you forgot to highlight anything important about your qualifications during the interview, do it now. Tell the person that you would like to become a member of their organization.
- Include a comment from your interview that personalizes your message.
- Finally, close by saying you are looking forward to hearing from them soon and, if appropriate, that you are enclosing any requested materials.

If you don’t hear from a prospective employer after you send a thank-you letter, it’s ok to follow up with one telephone call. It shows that you are persistent, interested, and enthusiastic about the opportunity. However, don’t be impatient. Wait a couple of weeks and then call, but not on Monday, the most hectic day of the workweek.

Ethics and Integrity in the Workplace

In the long run, few things will contribute more to a successful career than integrity. On the other hand, few things can undermine a career more surely than a lack of integrity. Living a life of integrity—which includes your behavior at work—means living according to a set of core values by which you determine right and wrong. People with integrity are honest. They will tell the truth and do the right thing in every

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situation, even when doing so hurts. People with integrity are said to be ethical. Ethical people are those who live a life of integrity and who are willing to sacrifice if necessary to do the right thing.

Several factors can make living a life of integrity a challenge. Two of these factors are typically at the root of most unethical behavior in the workplace. These two factors are misguided self-interest and human desire for immediate tangible rewards. Often, the tangible rewards of integrity are realized only in the long run, while the perceived rewards of unethical actions are immediate. In order to gain immediate benefits, people will sometimes take unethical actions. When this happens, their decisions are usually influenced by misguided self-interest.

The intangible rewards of integrity such as a clear conscience and personal satisfaction are immediate, but tangible rewards such as recognition, promotions, salary enhancement, bonuses, and increased business often are not. This fact, coupled with the ever-increasing workplace pressures that have resulted from the globalization of competition can make maintaining high standards of ethics and integrity difficult for people at work.

Integrity and Ethics Defined

Integrity means living in strict accordance with a set of core values. People with integrity are consistent in living and working in strict accordance with their most deeply held beliefs. Integrity or the lack of it manifests itself in the choices people make on a daily basis. *Ethics* is the practical application of morality. Society's ethical standards reflect its views of morality. The ethical standards broadly subscribed to by society provide guidelines for determining right and wrong in everyday life. The concept of ethics, although related to it, is broader than the concept of law. A given action can be perfectly legal and still be unethical. However, if something is illegal it is also unethical. This is one of the reasons that determining what is ethical in a given situation can be more difficult than determining what is legal. Determining what is legal requires nothing more than searching through applicable statutes, but determining what is ethical can require searching the soul. Living an ethical life is about doing not just what is legal in all situations, but doing what is right.

When ethical dilemmas arise in the workplace, key constituent groups are typically two or more of the following: owners, shareholders, managers, employees, customers, suppliers, and society in general. These are the *stakeholders* in most ethical dilemmas—the people who have something to gain and something to lose. Ethical dilemmas in the workplace are often caused by conflicts that arise when what appears to serve the interests of one stakeholder does not serve the interests another. For example, the owners of a business might take action that is good for them but bad for employees (e.g. terminating long-serving employees just prior to their retirement as a cost-cutting measure.) This action would save the owners a lot of money that could be put to good use making the business more competitive, but it would be

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unfair and harmful to the terminated employees. Management might ask employees to undertake a project that is good for the company's bottom line but bad for the environment. This action would help the company—at least in the short run—but harm the environment and, in turn, society. In each of these cases, there was perceived interest on both sides of the issue and the interests clashed. Deciding what is right and then actually doing it are the two challenges faced by people involved in situations like this, and such situations occur all the time in the workplace.

Integrity and Perceived Self-Interest

The various factors that, taken together, can make living a life of integrity a challenge fall under the broad heading of *perceived but misguided self-interest*. The term “perceived” is important here because what looks like a good idea in the moment can turn out to be a bad idea in the long run—something people who make unethical decisions often learn the hard way. Experience has shown over and over that in the long run the individual's personal interests are best served by doing the right thing spite of pressures to the contrary. However, an unfortunate fact of life is that it will often appear, at least in the short run, that self-interest is best served by unethical choices. The elements of misguided self-interest that most often lead to unethical choices are *greed, impatience, ego, fear, expedience, and misguided ambition*.

Driven by greed, people might inflate their monthly expense accounts so as to increase their income. Driven by impatience, people might take shortcuts that endanger their fellow workers in an attempt to get a job done faster. Driven by ego, people might sabotage the careers of colleagues they view as competitors on the career ladder by circulating rumors about them. Driven by fear of retribution, people might turn a blind eye to the unethical behavior of a superior or colleague. Driven by expedience, people might implement a temporary fix instead of a permanent solution to a serious problem. Driven by misguided ambition, people might lie about their experience during an interview for a job. From these examples, it should be clear that living a life of integrity means constantly doing battle against misguided self-interest and winning the battle.

Characteristics of People with Integrity

People with integrity have an internal moral compass by which they are guided in matters of right and wrong. When questions of right and wrong arise, they rely on this moral compass rather than ever-changing socio-cultural trends, workplace pressure, or misguided self-interest. People with integrity can be recognized by their actions because they:

- *Exhibit humility.* People with integrity are not braggarts or “credit hogs.” Rather, they remain humble in their interactions with others, do their jobs without seeking recognition, and share the credit for their successes with their team mates.

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- *Put aside their personal agendas for the good of the team.* People with integrity are not self-promoters who use the team to promote their personal agendas. Rather, they put the interests of the team first and act in ways that benefit the team.
- *Tell the Truth.* People with integrity tell the truth, even when it hurts to do so. Whether the message they have to convey is good news or bad, they tell the truth. When conveying an unwelcome or hurtful message, people with integrity are tactful—they consider the feelings of the recipient—but they tell the complete truth in terms that ensure it will be understood.
- *Keep their promises.* People with integrity do what they say they will do. When they make a commitment or a promise, they follow through and keep it. This characteristic is why people with integrity can be trusted and counted on in all situations.
- *Treat people fairly.* People with integrity are unbiased and impartial in their decision making. They refuse to play favorites or align themselves with cliques. They make their decisions on the basis of what is best for the team and organization.
- *Take responsibility.* People with integrity take responsibility for their actions and their share of responsibility for the team's performance. In addition, when they see work that needs to be done they pitch in and help rather than saying, "That's not my job."
- *Respect others.* People with integrity treat others—regardless of their positions in the organization or society—with respect. They seek the input of others and listen to it. Even in those cases where the input is not accepted or acted on, they hear the input and give it due consideration. Further, people with integrity discipline themselves to treat others with dignity and respect, even when others are rude, impatient, or demanding.
- *Help others succeed.* People with integrity try to help others continually improve and succeed. They provide mentoring, training, advice, feedback, and other kinds of assistance to help their team mates, peers, and colleagues do better and be better. In addition, they are supportive of the success of others. When a team mate is recognized for outstanding performance, people with integrity join in the celebration.
- *Act when they see unethical behavior.* People with integrity do not have a neutral gear. When they see unethical behavior, they take action immediately. That action might be to speak directly to the person on question or to seek the intervention of higher management. Regardless of what action they take, people with integrity understand that to ignore any unethical acts they might observe is to condone them.

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- *Forgive forget and move on.* People with integrity do not hold grudges. When people who have wronged them are willing to admit their transgression and atone for their behavior, people with integrity will give them a chance by forgiving, forgetting, and moving on.

Why Integrity in the Workplace Is So Important

People in organizations typically work in teams. Those who perform will eventually become team leaders—supervisors, managers, and executives. Consequently, it is important for those who aspire to successful careers to understand that a leader without followers is no leader at all. This is another reason why integrity is so important in the workplace. A leader can lead only if people will follow, and people will follow only if they believe in, trust and respect the leader. People who are in leadership positions can give order with the expectation that they will be carried out. However, leaders who fail to win the trust and respect of their followers will not trust and respect of their followers will not get the kind of whole-hearted commitment from them that leads to peak performance. Instead, they will get reluctant compliance—a half-hearted effort that will not help the team excel.

Trust, respect, and credibility are all essential ingredients in the formula for success in today's hyper-competitive global environment, and they all depend on the integrity of the leader. Without earning the trust of their followers, those who lead teams will have no followers. Integrity builds trust and credibility, both of which are critical to success in the workplace.

Making Ethical Decisions

People at work sometimes struggle with deciding what is right and wrong in a given situation. In some cases, the struggle is the result of misguided self-interest. When this is the case, those involved actually know what the right thing to do is, but influenced by misguided self-interest the want to do something else. However, there are times when even the most ethical people will be legitimately at a loss concerning the right thing to do in a given situation. For example, what is the right thing to do in the following scenario? A homeless man is starving. He has had nothing to eat in the last week. The man stumbles onto a hunting lodge in the forest. The lodge is locked and the owner is nowhere to be found, but looking through the window the man can see its shelves are full stocked with plenty of food. Obviously the owner is well off financially. His choice is to break in and take the food he needs or continue on his way and hope to find a kind person who will give him some food. What would you advise this man to do? What would you do in this situation?

Obviously, questions of ethics can get complicated. Sometimes it is hard to decide what is really right or wrong. People who find themselves in this position can use the following test to help sort things out:

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How would I feel about my decision in this situation if all the details about it were printed on the front page of my local newspaper to be read by my family, friends, colleagues, and teammates?

This is called the *front-page test*, a simple and down-to-earth test that can be effective in guiding people to the right solution when facing an ethical dilemma. The front-page test is an effective tool for cleaning away the “ethical fog” surrounding complex issues. It is not perfect, but it will help separate right from wrong in most cases.

Extenuating Circumstances in Ethical Dilemmas

When dealing with ethical dilemmas, extenuating circumstances often cloud the issue in question and undermine the judgment of decision makers. For example, assume that an employee is reporting over-time hours he has not worked to increase his income. Looking into this, the supervisor finds that the employee in question has a gravely ill child in the hospital and is struggling to keep up with the medical bills. Until learning about the extenuating circumstances of the sick child, there was no ethical dilemma. The supervisor thought it was an open-and-shut case of cheating. But the extenuating circumstance of the sick child cast the situation in a different light.

Fortunately the supervisor in this case received some wise counsel from a more experienced manager. The advice of this experienced manager was to approach ethical dilemmas in two steps:

1. Separate the unethical action from the extenuating circumstances surrounding it and decide what is right. Then do the right thing regardless of circumstances.
2. Identify ways to deal responsibly and ethically with the extenuating circumstances.

Applying this two-step approach, the supervisor confronted the employee in question, stopped the unethical practice, placed a letter of reprimand in his personnel file, and worked out an arrangement whereby he would repay the unearned wages he had received. This was step one. The supervisor carried out step two by sponsoring a company-wide fund drive to raise money to offset the employee’s hospital bills. The fund drive was picked up by a local civic club and it soon became a community-wide event which raised more than enough money to pay the bills with some left over to pay for follow-up treatments.

This two-step approach is an effective way to respond when facing ethical dilemmas. Separate the questionable action from the extenuating circumstances and approach the problem in two steps. Do not let extenuating circumstances cloud your

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judgment or affect what you know is right. Do the right thing in terms of the behavior in question and then find responsible, ethical ways to deal with the extenuating circumstances.

Corporate Code of Ethics

The American work place is the most diverse in the world, and that diversity is reflected in the values of people in organizations. Put simply, in a diverse workplace we do not all share the same value system. It is common to find different values in people of different age groups, geographic locations, cultural background, religions, races, genders, and nationalities. This can prove problematic when dealing with ethical dilemmas. The people involved on different sides of an ethical dilemma may understandably ask: *“Whose values are we applying in this situation?”*

For this reason, most organizations adopt a corporate code of ethics that contains the guiding principles used to define ethical conduct in the organization. All personnel receive a copy and an explanation of the organization’s code of ethics during their new-employee orientation. In addition, the code of ethics is typically displayed prominently throughout the organization’s facilities. What follows is a sample code of ethics:

At XYZ, Inc. all personnel are expected to uphold the highest ethical standards. As we interact with each other, customers, clients, suppliers, and the general public, we will be guided by the following principles:

- *We will tell the truth in all situations.*
- *We will fulfill all promises.*
- *We will be selfless in dealing with others.*
- *We will accept responsibility and accountability for our actions.*
- *We will endeavor to earn and maintain the trust of each other, customers, clients, suppliers, and the general public.*
- *We will refuse to rationalize unethical behavior.*
- *We will obey all applicable laws, regulations, and rules—federal, state, local and organizational.*
- *We will endeavor to deliver the highest quality products and services to customers.*
- *We will treat all stakeholders—clients, suppliers, personnel, and the general public—as partners.*

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- *We will endeavor to continually improve our products, processes, personnel, and work environment.*
- *We will provide our personnel with a safe and healthy work environment that is conducive to peak performance.*
- *We will be a good corporate neighbor in all communities, where our facilities are located.*
- *We will take all appropriate and necessary steps to protect the environment.*

In this organization, these guidelines help determine what is ethical behavior. Of course, no code of ethics can cover every possible dilemma that might arise. When an organization's code of ethics does not cover a given situation, resort to using the *front-page test*.

A Final Word about Integrity and Ethics

No human being is likely to ever achieve perfect integrity. It is important to understand this fact or the challenge might become overwhelming. On the other hand, neither can the argument that nobody's perfect become an excuse to stop trying. While it is true that people are not likely to achieve perfect integrity, it is equally true that the more persistently they try, the closer they will come, and the closer they come, the more successful they will be in the long run. When struggling with ethical questions and feeling pressured to look for ways to rationalize making the wrong decision, remember this unalterable truth: *There is no right way to do the wrong thing.*

Building Skills for College, Career, and Life Success

In a group of three or four, consider the following ethical dilemma. John is a good student. He usually does his homework and has passed all tests this term with a "B" or better. Unfortunately, he might not pass the final exam in the last course he has to have to graduate. John has not had time to study for the final exam, because he has been helping a friend who was struggling in college complete his assignments in another course. If John fails the final exam, he will not graduate. As the teaching assistant for the course in question, you know what the exam will cover, John approaches you and asks you to -just this once—let him have a copy of the exam. He knows this is cheating but he is desperate. The group is to discuss this ethical dilemma and decide how to handle it.