

Business beware! Conducting a responsible business

Lesson plan description

As part of a unit of work on marketing, students will explore a range of scenarios relating to ethics in business. They will rate the conduct of the businesses using a five-point scale ranging from 'acceptable' to 'unacceptable'. Students will then discuss their decisions with the rest of the class, leading to a discussion of ethics.

Students will then undertake research into the concept of 'misleading or deceptive and unconscionable conduct' in business. A key question is whether business managers should follow the letter of the law, or whether there are other principles that apply to their conduct. Students will then reflect on how a business should act when faced with a decision that is legal, but potentially irresponsible.

Year levels

Later Adolescence (16–18 years)

Duration

50 minutes

Explicit values focus

- Responsibility
- Honesty
- Integrity

Key Learning Area

- Business Studies

Lesson plan

Getting started

Activity 1: A guided discussion

Students form into groups of three or four. They are given one of the following four scenarios.

Scenario 1

A publican asks a young person for ID and can't decide whether it is real or fake. They give the customer the benefit of the doubt and serve them alcohol.

Scenario 2

A business develops a herbal supplement for losing weight. Scientific studies on the herb's effectiveness and side effects vary in their results. The business puts the disclaimer 'seek advice from your doctor before using this product' in small letters on the label and launches an advertising campaign featuring the words 'shown by scientific studies to improve ...'

Scenario 3

A mobile phone company continues with plans to withdraw sponsorship from a famous athlete after they are arrested in a violent brawl but acquitted by a court.

Scenario 4

A restaurant receives unfavourable reviews in several restaurant guides but continues to advertise itself as 'the best modern Australian cuisine in town'.

Ask each group to discuss the actions of the business in the scenario, and to try and reach agreement on where on a five-point continuum from 'acceptable' to 'not acceptable' they would place the behaviour described. They should consider the scenario from the perspective of business owners or managers. Each group should explain why they have made their judgement, and should seek to articulate the primary values implicit in that judgement. Groups can consider more than one card if they have time.

The class forms a circle, with two cards 'acceptable' and 'not acceptable' placed at either end of a continuum in the middle of the floor.

A group representative places their card along the continuum. It may be the case that the same scenario is placed in two different positions by two different groups.

Before beginning the class discussion, discuss with the students the norms for the conduct of a discussion – for example, active listening, open-mindedness, respect for others' points of view, being responsible for their own views, allowing others a fair go and supporting the group's exploration of an idea – and ask them to name the values implicit in these norms – for example, respect, inclusion, responsibility, freedom, and care.

Begin by asking each group to explain why they placed their card on a particular part of the continuum. Help the students to uncover assumptions, to name and explore the operative values at work, to seek dissenting opinions, to ask for examples that illustrate a different view, to identify important threads of discussion, to consider the consequences of a particular view, and to examine whether the thread of discussion makes sense.

At the end of the discussion, ask the students to reflect on the values that were shared by the group and those that were not, in relation to the business behaviours they have been exploring. Also, ask the class to reflect on the quality of the discussion, including how well the norms were met and what could be improved next time. In what ways is the business of running an effective class group similar to the ways of running an effective business team? What ethical behaviour might be shared between the two groups?

Discovering

Activity 2: Research

In pairs, students are given the following Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) publication to research:

'Don't take advantage of disadvantage: a compliance guide for businesses dealing with disadvantaged or vulnerable consumers'.

Questions to guide research:

- What is 'deceptive or misleading conduct and unconscionable conduct'?
- What does the Trade Practices Act say about such conduct?
- What is 'good conscience'?
- Is 'good conscience' an appropriate guide to behaviour in business?
- What are the reasons given as to why businesses should act responsibly?
- Do you agree that these are strong reasons?
- Is the fact that certain conduct may be against the law the most important thing to consider in the conduct of a business?

Consider one of the case studies in the brochure. Each pair should briefly describe what happened, and give their reasons as to whether or not they agree with the verdict of the court.

Bringing it together

Activity 3: To advertise or not

Students are presented with the following case, drawn from 'Alcohol and junk food crackdown remains in play' by Julian Lee, *The Age* 9 April, 2010. In their response, they are expected to reflect on their research and on earlier discussion.

The Australian Food and Grocery Council claims that its Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative has led to the virtual cessation of junk food ads during children's (C) and preschoolers' (P) programs and those classified General (G) that are directed primarily at children under 12 years. Such advertising is not against the law, but the Council claims that this is unnecessary, as it regulates itself.

According to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) 'Criteria for a Children's program', C and P-rated programs are those made specifically for children. G classified programs are not necessarily intended for children but are thought suitable for them to watch unsupervised. Programs classified as PG (Parental Guidance) are those which are regarded as suitable for children to watch with supervision. However, as children tend to 'view-up' and watch programs that are intended for older viewers, some programs that are popular with children are not directed primarily at them, and may also be popular with teenagers and adults. Students consider whether junk food producers should voluntarily withdraw advertising from such programs.

In small groups, students prepare a response in one of the following formats:

- a speech to the Australian Food and Grocery Council
- a letter written to a takeaway food company by a concerned shareholder or concerned parent
- a dialogue between two board directors of a snack food company, one of whom agrees that the ads should be withdrawn and the other who disagrees.
- interviews with a child, a teenager and an adult viewer.

Students then present their responses to the class.

In addition, students could draft a set of core principles, similar to those in the company action plans, for the regulation of advertising in their school.

Notes for teachers

The ACCC resource 'Don't take advantage of disadvantage: a compliance guide for businesses dealing with disadvantaged or vulnerable consumers' can be downloaded from: www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/704340

A full list of resources from the ACCC for business is available at www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/815390

'Alcohol and junk food crackdown remains in play', Julian Lee, *The Age*, 9 April 2010

www.theage.com.au/business/alcohol-and-junk-food-crackdown-remains-in-play-20100408-rv8d.html

Australian Food and Grocery Council Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative – www.afgc.org.au/industry-codes/advertising-kids.html

ACMA: Children's Television Standards Review

www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_310262

For information on classification of programs as C or P programs see 'Criteria for a Children's program' at www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_91815

Wikipedia: Television content rating systems: Australia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television_content_rating_systems#Australia

St. James Ethics Centre has a responsible business hub that can be found at <http://thehub.ethics.org.au/>

Further support in the teaching of ethics can be found at the Federation of Australasian Philosophy in Schools Associations – www.fapsa.org.au