



Ethics: Are You Solomon?

By Marlene LeFever

Why Christian Publishers Need Wisdom

“We’d like you to ghost write a children’s book for [famous author]. We’ll pay you, but your name won’t appear on the book. We’re convinced that God will use this book to guide children to a deeper understanding of Himself, and with our [famous author’s] name on it, the book will sell thousands.”

I turned down the offer for several reasons. I am not a children’s book author. More importantly, for me personally, ghosting is unethical. For me, ghosting violates the biblical principles: Thou shalt not lie or steal. Ghosting is giving someone total credit for someone else’s work. I have no problem with books that list the famous person and tell the reader that the work is “as told to” another person, the actual writer. I have no problem with the famous person’s name listed first and the writer listed in smaller type following an “and.” I have no problem with a writer listening to a famous speaker, putting that speaker’s words into an article and using only the speaker’s name. In this case, the concepts and illustrations belong to the famous speaker.

Some of you, I’m sure, will disagree with my stand. You may feel that if a well-known Christian’s name encourages more people to read the Christian message, a talented ghost writer should help meet that goal.

Christians deal with ethics in two different ways. The first is “Ethics by Code.” The second is “Ethics by Principle.” Both have advantages and disadvantages. Ed Anderson,

Ph.D., when he was professor and head of the Department of Pharmacology, University of Illinois College of Medicine, compared both. “Ethics by Code” is a list of dos and don’ts. When no ambiguity exists, the Christian feels secure. It is easy to teach the code to others. However, Anderson says, “Codes stunt people morally. If people are not allowed to develop their ethical-judgment muscles by making their own decisions, they will never reach moral maturity.”

The second way to deal with ethics is “Ethics by Principle.” Anderson explains, “Find an ethical principle behind a moral teaching, and apply that principle to specific cases.” Anderson points out this method is flexible enough to adjust to new situations, and it builds ethical maturity in people by giving them the experience of living with the consequences of their decisions. On the flip side, it is hard to deal with ambiguity, like that in my ghostwriting illustration, or take full responsibility for a decision instead of appealing to an authority, such as the publisher. Once again, I return to Anderson for guidelines for leaders—see the sidebar.

This issue is a dangerous one. You won’t all agree with the positions taken by the Christians who write in this issue. The editor cut some comments that were so controversial that they may have kept the reader from “hearing” anything else in the article. But your thinking hasn’t been done for you. As you read, ask “What are the

ethical issues in my business, and on what biblical principles am I building my decisions?" And please, give us feedback on this issue by emailing us at ccmintl@ccmi.org.

In ethical issues you are today's Solomons. May God give you reasoning skills and the courage to follow where you believe God wants you to go.

Guidelines for Modern-Day Solomon's

- Be sensitive to the development levels of your people. A person raised by ethical codes can't be expected to be an expert at reasoning from principles.

- Stretch your people's awareness. In ethical development, complacency leads to stagnation. The tension between where we are and where we could be stimulates growth. Set high goals. A quick fix can deprive an employee of a chance to grow.
- Expect conflict.
- Be humble. No one has all the answers. And, yes, I do sometimes wonder if God would have blessed that children's book I was asked to write.
- Be patient. Principled morality isn't taught from a text; it's caught within the context of a community.
- Give the Holy Spirit room to work.

For Group Discussion

1. What is your view of ghostwriting? Should you credit work-for-hire authors? How about translators or editors? When and why should a company name those who worked on a product?
2. Does the culture of your company support ethics by code, or ethics by principle? How does this impact day-to-day staff interaction?
3. Are "incentives" expected in your country? How do you handle such situations?
4. What self-inflicted unethical practices apply to the Christian publishing industry in your region? What can be done about them?
5. Do your staff, freelancers, customers, peers, and suppliers have any ethical concerns regarding their interactions with you? Can these be resolved to your mutual satisfaction?
6. How do Christian publishers' ethical standards compare to those of other publishers in the country? How do mission organizations compare to national ones?
7. How does your company's solvency—or its ability to compete—impact your ethical decision-making?
8. What cross-cultural differences affect how your company and its ethics are perceived?
9. What ethical dilemmas do you face due to the religious context in which you operate?
10. What are the ethical challenges faced by your staff in each of their specific areas of responsibility—from editorial to production to sales?

—Kim Pettit

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