



eduresourceza.com

Code of Conduct in the Workplace

Interview with Russell Edwards Head of Jnex (HR Consulting Agency) and specialist in Graduate Recruitment.

What constitutes a code of conduct?

A code of conduct must always be underpinned by what we call a set of values, because values drive behaviour. Take a business for example. As management, it would have to be decided how to do business which would include discussing values such as ethics, integrity, respect for customers etc. The code itself then becomes the framework around which conduct in the workplace is governed; all of which boils down to a values charter.

Do codes differ depending on the business?

They do, yes. We're not trying to clone people although that said; some values and therefore points of the code will overlap for example: regarding issues such as honesty, open communication, integrity, respect, loyalty etc. Different business will place different 'weightings' on these various types of issues.

Why do codes differ?

The reason is that each business will have its' own target market, business model, and set of priorities. While some companies are driven by the 'bottom line' and pure profit for example; other businesses find it more important to keep their staff happy and above the bread-line (look at most Ngo's; which strictly aren't a business but rather an organization).

What would be some common issues outlined in the code?

The first issue would be related to dress code. In a bank for example, employees would be expected to present themselves in smart-wear; a suit and tie. Advertising agencies however will sport employees wearing designer wear and maybe a pair of jeans or chinos. As for an engineering company, I suspect they wouldn't be 'too concerned' regarding a particular style of dress, or even really notice (except maybe when it came to management).



As a general trend however, there's no doubt been a move towards dressing more 'business-casual'. In one code of conduct I drafted I included the clause: 'Avoid the extremes of fashion'. Again though, interpretations of this vary.

Ultimately it's about presentation. Don't walk in with a chin- stud and morning- hair. Basic grooming has become quite a problem, as many believe that they (as an individual) desperately need to express themselves as separate from the 'group'; although this is often to their peril.

What would a basic code have to say about the type of language used in the workplace?

There are two things at stake here. The obvious would be foul language, and any code would stipulate against swearing at work. Secondly, the code would stipulate that the employee of the (specified) company should avoid using acronyms and jargon outside of the work place. It's acceptable when you're discussing an issue with colleagues, but some businesses prefer it if employees don't confuse people outside the workplace with said jargon. If you insist on using acronyms, rather just spell it out.

How would the code address behaviour at work functions?

Work functions are usually associated with merriment, but also with raucous abandonment. As a rule (and as part of the conduct) functions should be approached with a certain sense of decorum, both in-house and with clients. If you cross the line, you bring the entire company into disrepute. Individuals therefore should be astute enough to recognize what's acceptable and not.



So how would something like theft and fraud fit into the code?

These actions would be dealt with under something called a disciplinary code, slightly different to the code of conduct. Other issues addressed by a disciplinary code would include the topics of confidentiality, breach of contract, misconduct, working 'under the influence', and linked to that: substance abuse.

Is the 'code of conduct' something unstated but implied, or is it a signed document?

Often employers will expect a certain level of etiquette and for 'new' employees to be aware of the code of conduct, even though the reality is that most remain oblivious. That said, the new employee should be made aware of such a contract/code through orientation, during the interview phase or at least in their letter of employment. If none of these interactions with your future employer present an obvious code of conduct - then my suggestion would be for you to put yourself out there and ask.

With regards to the Hippocratic Oath: would this be considered to be part of a code of conduct or something entirely different?

The Hippocratic Oath is a professional oath taken by medical students which begins as follows: 'I swear in the presence of the Almighty' and ends with 'but should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse (of everything good and promising) be my lot'. (<http://nktiuro.tripod.com/hippocra.htm>).



This then is an oath which binds medics to treat patients to their utmost ability; as well as other promises which if broken: could 'reverse their lot'. Whilst this oath governs the specific profession of medicine then, it too comes down to the same underlying foundation as that of the code of conduct: a value system (to work, speak and present oneself with ultimate morality and integrity).

What is the difference between a mission statement and a code of conduct?

A mission statement basically stipulates the reason for the business' existence, e.g.: to service customers, shareholders, clients etc. The code of conduct however is a statement of values and intent about how they do this business. The code therefore supports and helps a company to achieve its mission statement.

Can someone be dismissed for not adhering to the code of conduct?

Absolutely; there are a few grounds for 'dismissal'. The first is misconduct. The second is if an employee is found to be in breach of the code of conduct - which includes poor performance.

So to conclude, double check the code of conduct at your work to ensure that you know what you *shouldn't* be doing, thereby protecting yourself from possible dismissal.