

# On-the-job accountability taught in office ethics seminar

By Tara Marion

Nan DeMars, office ethics trainer and author of "You Want Me To Do What? When, Where, And How To Draw The Line At Work," (Simon & Schuster, 1998) will conduct a seminar September 1 from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., in the Radisson Plaza Hotel at Kalamazoo Center, on managing ethical dilemmas in the workplace.

Sponsored by the Kalamazoo Gazette and the Kalamazoo chapter of the International Association for Administrative Personnel (IAAP), the fee for the seminar is \$25. Members of the IAA, the world's leading association for office professionals, receive a discount.

Why does the world need a book on office ethics? "It used to be a me-Tarzan; you-Jane world," DeMars said. "It isn't anymore, and you have to be accountable or what you do."

This new accountability is just the first of many points covered in the interactive discussion and lecture comprising DeMars' seminar. Other issues include identifying moral and ethical dilemmas, judgment issues, loyalty issues, harassment issues, confidentiality issues and building the new, ethical office.

The ethical office, according to DeMars, is a short-hand description of an organizational culture that fosters mutual respect, trust and honest communication among coworkers, customers and vendors.

Furthermore, by building the ethical office, organizations will facilitate higher productivity, better, more frequent communication, greater confidentiality and more accountability among employees. "They can't fall back on those cop-out words my mother used to say: 'My boss told me to do it,'" DeMars explained.

According to DeMars, ethical dilemmas can happen to anybody, anywhere. "Certainly anyone who works in an office," she says, "but I like to say 'workplace' because you can work in a grocery store and have ethical dilemmas."

Still, each ethical dilemma has a solution. It's all about empowerment. "To me, empowerment is nothing but choice," DeMars said. "Everybody has a choice." When employees do not know when, where and how to draw the line at work and subsequently make the wrong choice, they may fall back on one of the top 10 myths about office ethics:

- 1) I do it because everyone is doing it.
- 2) I have to do it to keep my job.
- 3) I made a mistake, so I must be a bad person.
- 4) I am powerless—I cannot solve this dilemma.
- 5) I'm the only person who cares about this ethical dilemma.
- 6) I'm the only one who sees this dilemma.
- 7) Women are more ethical than men.
- 8) I can always trust my company to do the right thing.
- 9) I can always trust my boss to be fair.
- 10) Good employees never do bad things.

By busting myths and exploring ethical dilemmas in the workplace, DeMars hopes attendees leave the seminar with a sense of accountability, empowerment and their own ethical standards. "I feel like I'm on a mission," she said. "I'd really like to awaken everybody to the ethical office."

Having worked as an executive assistant and a corporate secretary for a firm in Minneapolis, DeMars' mission began when she joined the IAAP. She sat on the international board for six years and served as international president in the 1980s. "When I served as president elect, we decided to develop a code of ethics for the (secretarial) profession," DeMars said. "There wasn't much in the '80s, so we wrote the code, and it was adopted the year I went out of office as president.

However, she was still intrigued by the topic of ethical dilemmas in the workplace, so DeMars continued to write, speak and eventually develop a seminar around it—which has been her focus for the past 12 to 13 years.

Over the years, DeMars has appeared on such broadcasts as "The Today Show," "Dateline NBC," CNBC, MSNBC, "Voice of America," National Public Radio and the "G. Gordon Liddy Show."

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Dear Tara - Many thanks  
for sending me (& writing)  
the article on my  
ethics presentations in  
your city - You're a wonderful  
writer! I felt you captured  
the "essence" of what I  
try to present in my  
message - Keep up  
the great work!  
- Nan DeMars

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