

**THE RULES OF CONDUCT : GANDHIAN VALUES  
AND BUSINESS ETHICS**

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Mr Dhirus S Mehta, Director General and Executive Secretary of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Worldwide, delivered a lecture on 'The Rules of Conduct: Gandhian values and business ethics' at William & Ann Conference Room, Deacons Lawyers, Sydney. The event was sponsored by The University of Sydney, Faculty of Economics and Business, in partnership with Research Institute for Asia & the Pacific, Australia India Business Council and Deacons Lawyers. Bhavan Australia supported the event in association with Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies. A summary of Mr Mehta's speech appears below :

Ethics is not what different people define it to be. It is something as fundamental as gravity is. The ancient Indian seers gave it a name. It is Dharma – duty to the society.

Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about business ethics were woven around the concept of Dharma. As such they are as relevant today as they were half a century ago. When we seek to interpret them in the contemporary context his thoughts need to be interpreted afresh as the business world has grown and developed to a dramatic extent during the past fifty years. Let me illustrate: Gandhiji lived almost his entire life in the British Empire. Business was a tool used by countries such as Britain to exploit and plunder countries such as India. Such exploitation was indulged in with impunity, due to their ferocious greed, by the French and by the Dutch as well, in India and elsewhere, wherever they had subjugated people with the power of gun. They have all either gone away or have been driven away but during the past 50 years a new type of colonialism and exploitation that of the MNCs has come into being. Gandhiji would be deeply suspicious of many

of the practices of many of the MNCs and of the MNC as an entity itself. He would insist on the MNCs applying the same logic of the smaller businesses and individuals who tread a straight and honest path.

Mankind however has been consistently plundering and destroying earth's precious resources and has indeed forced many species of other life forms into extinction. Gandhiji would insist that business do not degrade the environment but acted as a trustee of the Mother Earth on behalf of all beings.

Gandhiji's entire pilgrimage on Earth was guided by dharma or ethical and moral values. He emphasized them by contrasting them with what he called the "seven sins". These are:

1. Wealth without work
2. Pleasure without conscience
3. Knowledge without character
4. Business without Ethics which also can be stated as Commerce Without morality.
5. Science without humanity
6. Worship without sacrifice.

When it comes to commerce without morality, as in wealth without work, we indulge in commerce without morality to make more money by any means possible. Price gouging, palming off inferior products, cheating and making false claims are few of the obvious ways in which we indulge in 'commerce without morality'. In more sophisticated language what we are really saying is that those who cannot keep up with the technological changes and exigencies of the times do not deserve to live- a concept on which Hitler built the Nazi Party. If society does not care for such people, can we blame them if they become criminals?

Gandhiji firmly believed in the concept of Trusteeship. He defined Trusteeship thus: Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no Quarters to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

Before I conclude, I will quote talisman left for us by Gandhiji: "I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or self becomes too much with you apply the following test. Recall the face of poorest and weakest man, whom you may have seen, ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him, will he be given anything by it? Will it restore to him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words , will it lead to Swaraj (Freedom) for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melt away".