Institute for Ethical Leadership

Executive in Residence Column

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September 2015

When we think of ethical leadership we should think of Ann Buchholtz. Ann, Professor of Leadership and Ethics in the department of Management and Global Business here at Rutgers Business School and Research Director here at the Institute for Ethical Leadership, was taken from us earlier this month. Each of us here at the Institute is dealing in our own way with her passing.

She brought to the concept of ethical leadership two potent characteristics that we all too often fail to acknowledge: compassion and collegiality. I am still new to the Institute but quickly felt myself a member of a team. She welcomed me as a judge in this year’s Aspen Institute MBA case competition. She provided me with advice and counsel as I sought to define my role as Executive-in-Residence here at the Institute.

A cold, forbidding approach to ethical leadership is a recipe for ultimate ethical failure. Colleagues in such an environment cover up, transparency is lost. Each of us at some point in our careers, in our lives, will be faced with ethical dilemmas. When so challenged, we benefit from ethical leaders who combine an adherence to the highest ethical standards with compassionate understanding. Ann Buchholtz was such a person.

Collegiality is also essential to a strong ethical environment. This is far removed of course from lowest-denominator groupism that engenders hazing, bullying and other unacceptable behaviors. I refer rather to a collegiality that celebrates intellectual interaction wherein individuals can find and strengthen their better selves. Ann embodied such collegiality.

She understood the need of all levels of management to participate in ethical leadership. As Ann herself said, "We know that the biggest effect on how somebody behaves at work is the manager right above them, the ones they see every day. And that's why it can be such a challenge to get a culture of ethics." If everyone was like Ann, it would be less of a challenge.

I feel privileged in the short time we knew each other to have worked with Ann here at the Institute. We all feel grievously shortchanged that we did not have her with us for yet many years to come.