

Guidelines for Ethical Business

The George S. May International Company provided consulting services to businesses in a wide variety of categories for over 85 years, serving more than 500,000 clients in over 3,000 different industries. Although written many years ago, the original George May Guidelines for Ethical Business Operations continue to provide a sound basis for ethical business practice:

- **Laws.** Laws are created to help society function. Is the action you are considering legal? Do you know the laws governing the activity? In general, ignorance of a law is no excuse for breaking the law.
- **Rules and Procedures.** Companies create specific policies and procedures to help the business function appropriately. Typically, these rules have developed as ways to keep the company successful and avoid problems. How does your planned action compare to what is stated in the company's policies and procedures?
- **Values.** These social principles help to create society's laws and a company's policies and procedures. In turn, laws and policies reinforce the values. One example of values in operation is to ask yourself, "Does the action I'm considering follow not only the letter of the law, but also the 'spirit' of the law?" Is your action in agreement with the overall purpose of a law or rule? Or are you attempting to find a loophole?
- **Conscience.** This internal sense of right and wrong develops from an early age. Your conscience recognizes certain principles that lead to feelings of guilt if you violate the principles. Will your actions make you feel guilty? Can you truly justify your actions?
- **Promises.** Business is based upon trust. It is the belief that what is stated will be delivered. Will your actions live up to the commitment that you made to the other person (customer, client, supplier, employee, employer) in the business relationship? Will your actions build more trust?
- **Heroes.** Every person has at least one individual who is a role model in some way. A hero may be a parent, teacher, coach, mentor, or friend. Is your action what your hero would do in the same situation? How would your hero act?

Source: George S. May International Company.

As you read the guidelines carefully, ask yourself how these may be applied to your own practice of real estate.

The first guideline is Laws. We have local, state, and national laws that affect our real estate business. Every state requires that real estate professionals be licensed and complete a specified number of hours of continuing education for license renewal. Most states have laws requiring disclosure to the consumer of agency relationships, property condition, and environmental issues. There are federal laws governing areas of communication by way of telephone, email, and fax.

Next are Rules and Procedures. Florida Statute 475, F.S. and the Florida Real Estate Commission are a source of laws and rules for obtaining and renewing salesperson or broker licenses, establishing of brokerage offices, handling of escrow funds, and numerous other aspects of operating a real estate business. Local REALTORR associations have regulations regarding MLS entries and use of lockboxes and keys. Individual companies should have printed policies and procedures regarding agency representation of clients, in addition to procedures to be followed for all listings and sales.

Values and Conscience begin at the top. The sense of values and social conscience of the principal broker/owner is usually reflected in the actions of the agents affiliated with that particular office.

Promises are best described by the saying, "Under-promise and over-deliver!" The sure way to gain someone's trust is to promise what you will do. And then do it.