

Ethics in business

Is trading ethically the key to a successful, happy and sustainable business?

Anthony Jones, chair of the National Federation of Glaziers, addresses the issue ahead of his appearance as a speaker at next month's **Glazing Summit**.

I will begin by making two assumptions. We all seek lasting happiness and that we are most happy when we are acting in an ethical manner. Why is this so? It seems we are naturally inclined as humans to act ethically; we have to make a considerable effort to do otherwise.

Yet, we may notice there is a great deal of unethical behaviour practiced by all types and sizes of enterprises. This is hardly surprising if one studies conventional economics which states that self-interest is the foundation of economic order.

It assumes through "The Theory of Rational Choice" that each of us will choose in any situation what we believe will provide us with the maximum pleasure without reference to anybody else.

There is no reference to ethical behaviour which acknowledges that we are interdependent; we can act independently for only a short period of time.

This fundamental theory is accepted in businesses, without a proper consideration of the consequences. It is this I should like to explore.

It may be said that the purpose of a business describes what it does and its values describe how it achieves it. Our values, of course, guide our behaviour.

Choosing only what is best for our business leads us to consider that the fundamental purpose of a business is to make profits; the larger, the better. From my experience, this is a very narrow view of enterprise. Profits are, in fact, the result of business activity.

Underlying ethical conduct is the question of trust. Trust is the basis of life itself and no business is sustainable which is untrustworthy. Recent events in the glazing industry emphasise how companies can fail time and time again, leaving a trail of mistrust to the detriment of our industry, when unethical practices are exercised. Practices such as high pressure, intimidatory selling cause mistrust and fear to the detriment of honest professional salespeople, not to mention distress and humiliation to decent, trusting people. It isn't satisfactory that this is described as "high volume, low margin" business. This disguises the truth.

The key component of a successful business is providing good service. This acknowledges the importance of integrity, which means seeing the full situation, not the restricted view of self-interest. Giving good service is the expression of ethical

behaviour in practice and recognises the respect for and dignity of every human being. Everyone we come in contact with, customers, suppliers, employees, anyone in our community, society or nation deserves this.

It is also of some concern that we are faced with an unethical situation regarding Part F of the Building Regulations since they were revised in 2022. There are legitimate concerns regarding overheating of homes and the effect on well-being and health that this can cause and advantages of sensible use of trickle vents as a means of to assist with this. However, the blanket imposition which is required does not allow testing of a window with a trickle vent. The problem here is that by installing trickle vents we are compromising the insulation value. We are stating that the window has a certain u value, when with trickle vent(s) this will change. We are not telling the truth. Sadly, we have to lie to be legal.

It sometimes needs courage to hold to the best principles, but wisdom supports us to do what is best, what is best for everyone, including ourselves. This is a larger view of work; to serve everyone, including the society we live in and depend upon for support. Where else do customers come from?

And what of happiness? Our work should be a source of contentment, fulfilment and lasting happiness; an opportunity to express our skills and develop as human beings. Much ill health arises from the stress and concern caused by unethical behaviour. It is quite an effort to maintain such activity!

It is our view at the Federation that an ethical basis is the most important aspect of the business; it is after all a human organisation that works best as a living entity of individuals working with the intention to act fairly and reasonably to everyone. It balances the need for financial stability with social responsibility. This applies to any business of any size.

Why when we recognise unethical behaviour do we accept, make excuses for it or ignore it? Are we powerless to do anything about it? I don't believe we are; there are measures we can take.

On 17 October I will be exploring this at the Glazing Summit, please join us to discuss this and other industry issues at this excellent event.

