When an organization creates a baseline expectation for ethical behavior, it can begin to realize business results and protect its reputation.

You may have noticed that nowhere in The Thrivent Way do we specifically call out ethics. Rather than use the word “ethics,” we instead defined its essence. The Thrivent Way provides parameters for our employees to make ethical decisions and is visible throughout our offices. It truly is in our DNA, and it guides all of our decisions.

Set an example

If leaders live The Thrivent Way and champion ethical culture, employees will feel empowered to always do the right thing. Thrivent’s CEO was our voice for creating The Thrivent Way. Executives had and continue to have conversations with their teams about the importance of ethical behavior. It’s not uncommon to participate in an employee meeting and hear messages about the importance of ethical behavior from our senior leaders on stage.

The board of directors has taken an active role in ethics at the organization. Thrivent has a Code of Conduct Office with dedicated staff, and the board of directors has oversight. The board believes ethical behavior is foundational to building trust with our members. To demonstrate our commitment to ethics, the board takes the same Code of Conduct training required for all Thrivent employees.

As part of the Code of Conduct Office, our workforce can use the resources at thriventcodeofconduct.com. This includes an external hotline that can take concerns at any time via web form or phone. We also have internal communication channels. We also have employees with questions or concerns can raise questions or concerns. The Code of Conduct Office has made Thrivent’s Code of Conduct and other resources available publicly only because we want to further the conversation and share how we are continuing to build our culture through the resources we provide.

These examples of leadership add up—we find that our culture promotes a greater service to our members, propelled by The Thrivent Way.

Create a stage for conversation

We are committed to offering training resources, manager toolkits, and opportunities to report unethical behavior and ask questions in a variety of ways for our workforce.

Our research at Thrivent tells us when employees are faced with dilemmas, they usually have a conversation with their immediate managers. Recognizing that managers are an important part of creating and reinforcing an ethical culture, we created a manager toolkit with resources to help guide them when employees present questions. We also provide training for all managers so they are equipped to recognize when questions or concerns need to be elevated or reported. Ultimately, if managers are equipped and confident in handling ethical concerns and questions, our culture will be stronger.

When our Code of Conduct office is active in communicating about our ethical culture, employees will feel confident they are receiving the support they need. Thrivent’s Code of Conduct manager writes periodic blogs and articles for our employee communications channels. Thrivent hosts events with internal and external guest speakers to ensure we’re providing new and interesting ways to think about and promote ethical behavior. When we communicate about ethical behavior, we are sure to use real-life examples and not just negative ones. We want to highlight positive ethical decisions and avoid creating an environment that is perceived only as punitive.

Celebrations are another great way to create conversation around ethical behavior. Our internal employee recognition program offers a way for employees to be rewarded for ethical behavior. If someone witnesses an employee demonstrating significant ethical behavior, he or she can nominate that person to receive a monetary award. And of course, we always experience a sense of pride and celebration when an employee is named a World’s Most Ethical Company.

Start building now

At Thrivent, we know that we must be diligent as we continue to build and maintain a corporate culture that exemplifies ethical behavior. Perhaps your organization is already well on the path to embodying ethical behavior, or maybe you are just beginning the journey of cultural level-setting. Of one thing I am certain: building an ethical culture requires intentionality and persistence, but will bring a ten-fold return on your investment.