

**Ethics and**

**Young**

**Professionals**

**in the City of**

**High Point:**

**An in-depth**

**Analysis**



Dedicated to the young professionals of High Point

Your present circumstances don't determine where you  
can go; they merely determine where you start.

- Nido Qubein

# Ethics and Young Professionals in the City of High Point: An In-Depth Analysis

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Business Ethics Students and Dr. Joe Blosser

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## Religion and Ethics

From religion to business ethics classes, the study reveals what influences young professionals.

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The Chamber of Commerce and the City must work together to revitalize the city.

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## Introduction

The study reveals that the Chamber of Commerce can positively impact the ethical decision-making and professional future of young professionals.

This report draws on the findings of a qualitative research study conducted by High Point University students enrolled in Dr. Joe Blosser's Service Learning Business Ethics class in the Fall 2015 semester. The study was initiated by Dr. Blosser and the leadership of the High Point Chamber of Commerce to meet their mutual needs: Dr. Blosser wanted his students to understand

the actual ethical issues people in business face and the Chamber of Commerce

leadership wanted to understand the ethical issues in the High Point business community, and especially, understand how young professionals in High Point viewed the city and the Chamber. The interview questions were created in partnership between Dr. Blosser and the Chamber leadership to meet these overlapping goals.



### How do we get them here?

The High Point Enterprise (2015) recently ran the headline "How do we get them here?" City officials and business leaders have been working for years to develop strategies to revitalize the core city of High Point in order to attract young professionals and new businesses. The following white paper shares the results of a research study into the thoughts and mindsets of young professionals in High Point.



BuzziSpace ribbon cutting ceremony. Photo credit: High Point Enterprise, file photo, March 2, 2015

### The driving questions behind the study included:

- What does the City of High Point need to do to retain young professionals?
- What ethical issues do young professionals in High Point face?
- How do young professionals in High Point solve ethical issues?
- What role do religion and business ethics classes play in ethical decision-making?
- How can the Chamber best serve the High Point business community?

Two years ago Dr. Blosser's Business Ethics students interviewed forty members of the Chamber of Commerce business network. In addition to several of the students getting internships in High Point because of their exposure to the business community here, the study presented a compelling case for the importance of relevant business ethics training in order to prepare young people for the workforce. The major gap in that first study was that it primarily considered the ethics and perspectives of CEOs, business owners, and top-level management. It neglected to focus on the experiences of young professionals.

This most recent study fills that gap through its focus on the ethics and perspectives of young professionals in High Point Chamber of Commerce member businesses. This new study - like the first study - confirms the need for relevant ethics training, but it also sheds light on the unique experiences of young professionals in High Point.

### The Method of the Study

The sample for the study was developed through cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, which provided the names of young professionals in its network. The ten High Point University students - primarily sophomore business majors - worked as research assistants on this qualitative research study. In teams of two, the students conducted face-to-face interviews with 30 business people lasting about 30-45 minutes each. The student teams were assigned young professionals who worked in companies that were in the students' areas of interest. The interviews were assigned by the head research assistant, who was a High Point University student who had been one of the students on the first research project two years ago. Most of the interviews were conducted at the interviewees' places of work. All of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the interview teams.

“I try to do what’s right for my customer, first and foremost every time.”

One student transcribed each interview, and the other student verified the transcription.

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study in order to immerse students more deeply into actual business practice. Unlike a quantitative study, which could be done using an internet survey and would just provide statistics, qualitative research allows researchers “to move beyond the analysis of observable outcomes by capturing the ‘weltanschauung’ (Churchman, 1971), or world view, of the observed” (Liedtka, 1992). It helps students better see the total context - the speed, the pressures, etc. - of the business world that business ethics textbooks cannot provide. And it helps city leadership get a deeper look into what motivates young professionals. The student researchers built relationships and felt more connected to the business world through the study because the study pushed them to listen deeply to the stories that shape the local business community.

The students were provided a semi-structured research protocol to guide their interviews. Practice sessions were held during class to ensure the quality of the interviews. After a series of demographic, multiple choice, and Likert scale survey questions, the heart of the interview protocol was an opportunity for the business people to describe in-depth a difficult ethical decision they had recently made and the resources or approaches they had used to reach their decision. In keeping with Liedtka’s (1992, p. 172) advice,

interviewees were asked to discuss an ethical issue that was both recent and powerful. The interview protocol welcomed business people to speak to the role that faith or religion played in their decision-making, using a range of short answer, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. After all the interviews were completed, the students were formed into five new research teams, each consisting of two students. One team analyzed the basic demographic data and the role of religion, another looked at the role of business ethics classes, a third group analyzed the range of ethical issues people faced, another group categorized how business people made their ethical decisions, and the final group looked at how High Point can retain young professionals and what the Chamber of Commerce can do to help. The white paper is broken into sections reflective of these analysis teams. All five teams had to code open-ended interview responses, meaning that they had to read the interviews and then develop words that captured the central ideas in each response to see if there were similarities or differences across the responses. All of the coding followed the same procedure: (1) each team member had to individually code the data, (2) each team met as a whole to synthesize their codes and agree on their final team codes, (3) Dr. Blosser independently coded all

## A qualitative research study

More than reporting dry statistics, this study looks deep into the motivations and mindsets of young professionals in the City of High Point. Thus, this report includes a lot of direct quotations from the interviews.

the material, (4) Dr. Blosser sat down with the teams to compare his codes with their codes, until everyone agreed to the same codes, and then (5) we collectively recoded all the data. Some teams developed descriptive codes. Like for questions about the kinds of ethical issues the interviewees faced, codes were developed like “email etiquette,” “theft at work,” “conflicts with boss,” “co-worker conflicts,” “negotiating fees,” “personal conflicts of interest,” and so on (Saldana, 2013). Some teams also developed provisional codes based on the conceptual framework of the course material, which included the ethical traditions covered by most business ethics textbooks (Saldana, 2013). These codes included “utilitarianism,” “rights-based ethics,” and “virtue ethics.” The process of coding helped students see the range of decisions in the workplace that have ethical implications, and it pushed students to discern how the different ethical theories covered in the class could be deployed to apply to actual decisions.

## The Role of Religion

From its outset as a field, business ethics has always included religious ethicists from a variety of religious traditions (Jones, 1982; DeGeorge, 1987; Stackhouse et al., 1995; O'Brien and Paeth, 2007; Herman and Schaefer, 2001). Yet religious symbols and modes of thinking remain largely on the periphery of mainstream business ethics theory. Collins and Wartick (1995) found that only about 3% of research by business ethics faculty concerned religious values (Calkins, 2000). In this study, only 26% of participants said that religion was discussed in the business ethics courses they took. And yet 86% of Americans claim to believe in God, about 50% claim to attend church or synagogue at least monthly, and 56% believe religion is “very important” to their lives

You remember what got you where you are...You remember the dedication and sacrifices you had to make, and you don't let...anybody try to compromise that.

- Interview Participant

(Gallup, 2015). Wuthnow (1994, p. 55, 101) found that 33% of U.S. workers thought at least a fair amount about how to integrate their faith and work, and 52% of the labor force included “Trying to obey God” as a criteria they used when making a tough decision at work.

Since so many people claim to be religious - and so few business ethics courses discuss it - we wanted to learn if and how people use their religion to make ethical decisions at work. 90% of the people we interviewed were part of a religious tradition. 41% claimed to be Evangelical Christian, 37% claimed to be in a Mainline Protestant denomination (like Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, and so on), 15% were other kinds of Christians, and 7% were from non-Christian religions. The study wanted to see if religion and business ethics intertwined to help make decisions at the work place.

Out of everyone who claimed a religious tradition, 56% attended worship weekly or nearly weekly. There was a high correlation between the people who attended worship more and those who claimed to use information learned from religion to help make ethical decisions in the workplace. The correlations between these two topics did not depend on which religion one claimed, but cut across all the religious



## Basic Demographics

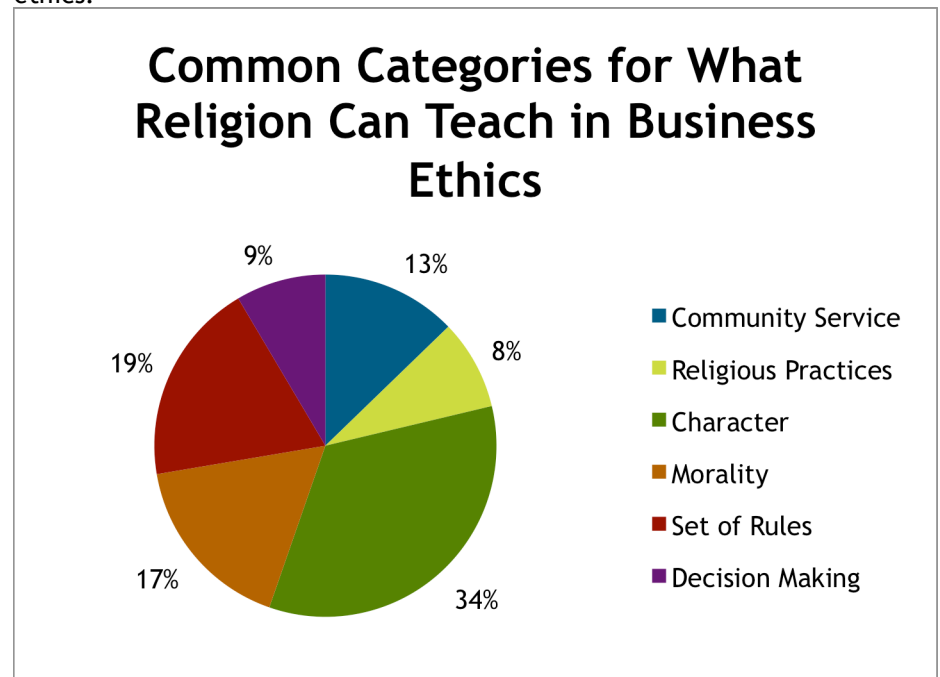
The demographics of a study help one understand the results better. They help connect certain dots so one can find a relationship between different variables. The participants in the study were roughly split male and female with no intentional bias towards a specific gender. There were a total of 30 participants. We mainly aimed at young professionals for our study, so 62% of the candidates were between the ages of 25 to 34 years, with an average age in the early 30s. Given the age of the participants, their leadership roles were mostly in the mid-level management area, with 47% of participants saying they were mid-level management. 20% said they were top-level management, and 23% said they were low-level management.

The survey participants were from a wide range of companies and industries. 63% of the participants worked in a company with size ranging from 26-500. And the two most common industries surveyed were healthcare and financial services, having a combined total of 30% of all participants. Wide ranges of other industries were also represented.

groups. People who attend worship more frequently tended to use religion more regularly to make ethical decisions at work.

When people were asked what religion teaches them about business ethics, they provided a range of responses. The interview teams coded these responses and then grouped the codes into larger categories. The most common category into which participants' answers fell was the character a person can possess. More than anything, people seemed to believe that religion taught character, which included specific codes like honesty, patience, discipline, compassion, integrity, and leadership.

Graph 1: The dominant categories of what religion can teach business ethics.



The next most common category was “Set of Rules,” which included seven references to the golden rule and one to the ten commandments. One of the many participants who mentioned the golden rule illustrated the tension between that ideal and the realities of the business world:

I probably sound like a broken record, but...treating people the way you would want to be treated. And making sure you know...there's an end result in that business. [Business people] have to better themselves, better their lives. Everybody these days, I know, everybody's out to make money. And so sometimes people want that, that end result. You know, they want more money or they want, you know, more material things. So sometimes people will not make the best decisions. They may choose to make, I guess, an unethical decision to get to that result, to get more money. They may, you know, think they can save more money and cut costs by doing away with an employee or

money. They may, you know, think they can save more money and cut costs by doing away with an employee or something that they in fact really need, but they are in fact going to cut back to try to make more money, and so I guess in a way you do business, sometimes you may have to make decisions that are not always the best decision. It may affect someone else; it may hurt someone else. You may have to - I don't want to say - lie, but sometimes those things happen in business. But I guess you always have to go back and just, look at, again, like your upbringing, what you've learned as a child, and try to be the best person that you can. And try to make decisions that wouldn't always negatively affect other people, I guess.

Given the difficult decisions of the workplace, many participants articulated the role of religion as giving them a firm foundation from which to make decisions. As one participant said: "I think we all have a certain level of moral compass internally. It's just a matter of how willing are we, how receptive are we to be able to respond to it, and, you know, be able to stand up for what we know is right whenever the time comes."

The full listing of responses to the question of what religion can teach about business ethics shows that participants articulated a wide range of ways in which religion can influence ethical decision-making in the workplace. It would be of value, therefore, for people who teach and study business ethics to include the importance of religion in their courses and training.



Table 1: Rates of response to the importance of what religion can teach in business ethics. Categories are highlighted, followed by the codes in each.

Codes	Frequency
<b>Community Service</b>	
Serve others	2
How to treat others	2
Being respectful	2
<b>Religion</b>	
Church	1
Tithe	1
Pray	2
<b>Character</b>	
Honesty	3
Patience	2
Discipline	1
Compassion	2
Integrity	1
Leadership	1
<b>Morality</b>	
Moral compass	2
Right and wrong	3
Moral judgment	1
Moral foundation	2
<b>Set of Laws</b>	
Set of rules	1
The golden rule	7
The ten commandments	1
<b>Decisions</b>	
Decision making	1
Free will	1
Impact of decisions on others	2
<b>Misc.</b>	
Protecting reputation	2
Raising kids	1
Religion aligns with work	1
How to confront business pressure	1
Fulfilling work	1

We cannot leave the topic of religion in business ethics, however, without raising one possible contradiction in our study. Based on the answers we received, religion may not play as big of a role in ethical decision-making at work as people think it does. When asked to respond to the statement, "I think it is important that business people learn from their religious



traditions to help them make more ethical decisions at work,” 70% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Yet, we found that not even one person mentioned the importance of religion in connection with the business ethics classes they took. And, perhaps more dramatic, only three individuals mentioned using religion when they were asked to focus on one of the ethical issues they had faced in the last year and describe how they handled the issue. Even though 70% of the people we interviewed said religion was important to their workplace decision-making, almost no one actually explained how they used it. This may suggest a large disconnect between what professionals think is important, and what they actually use in practice. Or it might suggest the business people we interviewed did not know how to talk about the impact their religion has on them, or they might not have felt comfortable articulating the role of religion in their ethics. It is difficult to know why this perceived contradiction exists, but our findings do seem consistent with a secular culture that has largely pushed religion out of the workplace.

Finally, it should be noted that the group of High Point’s young professionals that were interviewed stands outside the national norm regarding religion. According to the Pew Forum survey of Religion and Public Life (2015), about 25% of people under 30 in the US claim no religious affiliation, and 19% of people in their 30s claim no religious affiliation. In this study all but 4 of the interview participants claimed a religious tradition. And while the Hartford Institute of Religion Research (2015) reports that nationally 40% of people claim to attend worship weekly, 56% of the participants in this study claimed to attend worship weekly. Even if these numbers are overblow, which is typical when people self-report their religious attendance, it shows a highly religious cohort of business people compared to the national average. It suggests that young professionals in High Point understand and use the language of faith, and that young professionals who come to High

Point - from perhaps less religious places - will need to learn how to conduct business in a highly religious local business culture.

## The Importance of Business Ethics Classes

In an attempt to understand how business ethics classes affect people in the workplace, the study asked business professionals about their experiences taking business ethics classes. 97% of professionals involved in this survey agreed or strongly agreed that people should take business ethics courses to help them make more ethical decisions at work. Of the professionals in our study, 77% said they completed a business ethics course at the college level or above, and of that 77%, 83% of them said that they had used information learned in their business ethics classes to make an ethical decision at work in the past few years.

Given the apparent importance of business ethics classes for ethical decision-making at work, the research participants were asked what they thought these courses should teach. After reviewing all the data, we grouped the responses into four main categories: values, relationships, professional responsibility, and decision-making.

The first category of “Value” includes a range of codes, like truth, respect, equality, and integrity. People believed these were essential things taught in a business ethics course. Truth was the most frequently mentioned theme in this category. As an example, one professional said, “you assume that most people have the value set of honesty and integrity and doing what your supposed to do but they don’t always.” Respect is another item mentioned

### *Professional Responsibility*

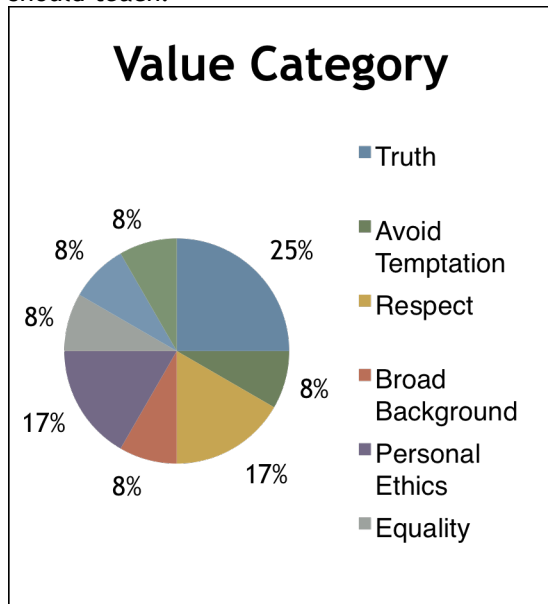
### *Relationships Values*

### *Decision-making*

“You assume that most people have the value set of honesty and integrity...but they don’t always.”

by professionals. “[When you’re in a work environment] consideration for others and respect for others when you make decisions is imperative.” Students need to be prepared for understanding the environment around them. Realizing the importance of respect in the business world will open doors and help build networks. According to one young professional, it is important for students to “learn where the line is of being respectful and stepping back and when it is ok to push ahead and ask for information.”

Graph 2: Codes included in the “Value” category for what business ethics classes should teach.



Another category was “Relationships.” Business has always been built on relationships, but the complicated hierarchy of business may be difficult to manage. The golden Rule was mentioned several times throughout our interviews:

“It goes back to the golden rule. Treat people the way you want to be treated.” Or as another business person put it, “Boil it down to simple things like would you want that to be done to you.”

Part of good business relationships requires an understanding of different cultures. In an age where businesses are involved throughout the world, it is crucial that business leaders understand how other people think. And what may be ethical in one culture may not be in another: “[A business ethics class] needs to touch on different cultures and how they think and act.” With an understanding of this, a young professional will be better able to navigate the complexities of doing business in North Carolina’s International City: “Dealing with cultures is very different and I think it has ethical importance because what one culture perceives as a compliment might be an insult to someone else you know.” The professionals we interviewed understand the importance of recognizing other people’s beliefs and being able to act accordingly.

Professional responsibility was another category that participants thought business ethics courses should cover. Legal obligations, repercussions and accountability were all articulated as important codes for young professionals to know: “Focus on the moral concept but also the legal repercussions that if you do this...somebody’s got a trigger

“It goes back to the golden rule.  
Treat people the way you want to be treated.”

finger and a couple of mistakes could put you out of your home and just ruin you.” Many young professionals were worried about protecting themselves. Ethically, how do you protect yourself from making mistakes that can cost you your job or your business? From one business professional,

[Business ethics courses] should cover laws, understanding the different regulations that impact industry and potential and passed litigation. Business professionals are forced to understand their surroundings and comprehend different dimensions of law, so that they can react and take advantage of opportunities. As a result, many students need to be prepared for the repercussions of these actions.

Or as another professional put it, “I think that it is important [that] people understand how a product is made and how it affects people. Its long term effect on people or [the] environment.” Many of the suggestions we categorized as professional responsibility focused on the need for business people to be prepared and to understand how to protect themselves from preventable mistakes.

Lastly, many business people articulated concepts that should be studied in a business ethics class that were grouped together in the category of “Decision-making.” Business people thought these skills were necessary because of the many gray areas in business, and they thought case studies could be a useful tool to teach this skill. Case studies show the difficulty of the questions students will face, and they force students to start solving complex, real-world problems. As one respondent said, “not everything is black and white. A lot is black and white, but there are some things you can also understand [to be more complex], like, you know, if people can’t afford to feed their families so they steal to pay for food.” Such cases were perceived to be important to the classroom because the basic ideals driving the case may be wrong, but the practical action being taken to feed one’s family might be justified. Case studies might also help “prepare you for any situation you might

think you could find yourself in.” Responses in this category emphasized teaching students to use all the resources available to them to solve the problems that arise in the gray areas of life. “There are a lot of decisions that are maybe gray in what’s right and what’s wrong. I think that [if] you’re on the side of the customer your going to be right more often than not, but again that is a difficult question.” It might be relatively easy to master specific theories, but the real value - and struggle - of a business ethics course is in how to get students to learn realistic techniques for tackling difficult gray issues in the workplace.

Based off the responses of these business professionals we suggest that business ethics classes - to prepare students for the workplace - must teach the importance of *values, relationships, professional responsibility, and decision-making*. These skills will allow students to navigate the transition from school to work with steadier morals and be better capable of making ethical decisions.

## The Ethical Issues Faced in the High Point Business Community

Both the Chamber of Commerce and the High Point University Business Ethics students wanted to understand what specific ethical issues young professionals in High Point face. For the students, this would give them a heads-up of what is to come and provide real-world case studies for their class. For the Chamber, this helps them see where they can best support their member businesses and, specifically, the young professionals that work in them.

The study asked business people to list some ethical issues they had faced in the last year. The most commonly cited ethical category was “Corporate Culture.” It was the largest category with 26 mentions of the codes in this category. The codes included

things like, co-worker conflicts, conflicts with boss, representing the business, professional standards, and more. One ethical issue in this category regarded both the everyday task of sending an email and conflicts with a co-worker: “I asked her for an email of one of the people, and she wouldn’t send me these contacts after asking her. How do I go about getting it? Then I face a decision whether I tell my boss that she’s not getting [me the] email address or ask someone else for it. Just finding a way to work with people sometimes can be difficult.” This is the kind of case study that is relevant to young professionals, which cannot be found in a textbook. One interviewee discussed a case involving her attempts to protect her company’s reputation: “there were graphics and things going up on Facebook saying [Company X] supports Planned Parenthood. Well, obviously, that would not be a favorable statement in this community because it’s a very traditional community. Our thought was, ‘gosh we don’t give any money locally to Planned Parenthood. You know that this is not true for [Company X].’” One participant talked about the old boy’s club at her first job, which pushed her to find a new place to work. We asked her “were you the one female on the sales staff,” and she replied, “Yea. But it was a boys club. I just didn’t fit in. I was always butted out of the group, and I felt like I didn’t matter, and so that’s why I left.” We considered all of these conflicts and cases part of “Corporate Culture” because the ethics of the corporation tended to influence how the ethical issues were framed and solved.

The next most common category of ethical problems was “Legal Issues,” which included 18 different codes. The most common code in this category was theft from work, which made up 5 out of the 18 Legal Issues cases, and it was the second largest issue addressed in the entire study. The cases involving stealing in the workplace ranged from fraud to stealing food and drinks. One interviewee said, “[I was] in this position. I do have a co-worker who will...help herself to sodas or beers

or whatever after...um...events and I just find that to be odd.” Abusing employee benefits, such as company credit cards and employee discounts, made up 40% of the theft in the workplace codes. In one of these cases, the employee told the truth and gave the money back that had been charged on the company credit card. In another company credit card case, the participant voiced both a cold “corporate” solution and a solution based in their religious beliefs: “I’ve had a situation where I’ve caught an employee stealing from me, using an employee card for personal use and [found] out about it...Ethically, the best thing for me to do is just cut him out, fire him, press charges, which would be a felony or whatever. But then you bring your faith back in and say what can I do to show Christ in this situation.” Such a case helps students see how a person’s faith can affect ethical decision-making at work.

“Confidential Information” was another code in the Legal Issues category, which was mentioned twice. One example of confidential information arose when a financial agent was going to an attorney to get information, but the financial agent was conflicted because it was easy to “name drop” and have the problem solved, but they could not give too much information away: “I had to be very careful with how I worded things to get the information that I needed from him without giving him too much confidential information about my client.” The other confidential information code arose in the context of the healthcare industry.

Another Legal Issue code was “Fraud,” which likewise appeared in two of the interviews. One interviewee described it as such: “I have had a client whose employer committed fraud, so just watching that side of it has been interesting. Basically, there was a case of alleged embezzlement. It was someone who was with the company for a while and had their trust...[I] think it just got away from them. We did not audit them, just did a brief review. [It was] not our work

that found the fraud. They were smart. If we were to find anything, we would bring it up to the president or whoever's case it may be." Similar to fraud was the code of "Forgery." In that case a customer was forging a signature for a high-level management officer. "We request a [signature] twice, and the second time that they came in - or the hard copies came in or something - it looked different. And I looked at it, and I noticed the first set that he sent me all the letters matched...his writing on a different piece of paper, and I knew it was him...it was offensive to me."

Another important category of ethical issues that showed up in 27% of the interviews was Customer Relations. Since the demographics of the study include mostly mid-level management whose job is often to deal with customers, it is not surprising to find a prevalence of customer relations issues. Examples of codes in this category included negotiating fees, contracts, commission and sales, and elder abuse. Other ethical issues included conflicts of interest, faith at work, finding the right job, and so on.

By studying young professionals, students in the class were exposed to the kinds of ethical cases they will soon face on their own. The Chamber of Commerce would do well to think of how they can support the young professionals who are making these decisions. Workshops that are led by people who are able to talk about faith at work would seem to be useful. And the Chamber may want to focus on workshops that deal with how to manage relationships with co-workers, bosses, and clients, as these were the most commonly faced ethical issues.

## Ethical Approaches in the High Point Business Community

Understanding what ethical issues young professionals face is just the first step. Next, we need to understand how they solve these ethical issues. After asking participants to

### *3 models of ethical decision-making*

Utilitarianism  
Rights-based Ethics  
Virtue Ethics

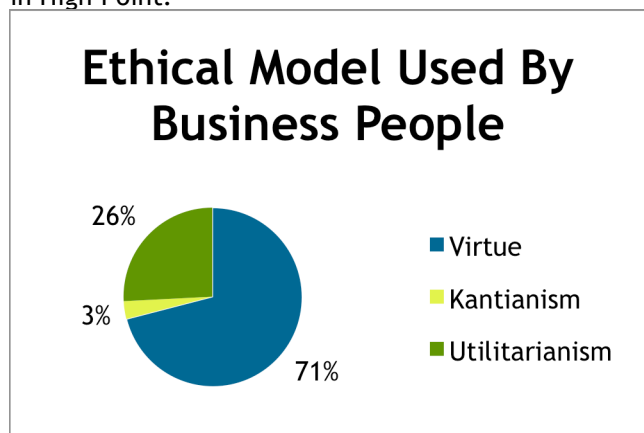
list the ethical issues they had faced, we asked them to focus on just one issue and walk us through how they solved it. What resources did they use? Who did they talk to? What approach did they use? The study also asked participants what were the biggest influences on their ethical decision-making. Using responses to these and other questions, we coded which ethical model best captured the approach of each business person.

Philosophers, since before the time of Aristotle, have studied how people make ethical decisions in the workplace. The three dominant schools of ethical thought today are utilitarianism, rights-based ethics, and virtue ethics. Utilitarianism is based off the idea of producing the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people. This ethical theory uses experts and pro/con lists to decide which course of action will produce the greatest good. There were three main codes that arose from the data that seemed connected to utilitarian ideals. These were profit, self-interest, and consulting mentors. When a utilitarian does not know which course of action will produce the best outcomes, they often consult people who have been there before and know how best to proceed. As one utilitarian put it, "I called a mentor of mine...and she

kind of laid out the whole thing...suggested what we say. If we wanted to say something and then she gave us advice.”

In the beginning we hypothesized that utilitarianism would be the most commonly used theory among business people in High Point, based on the study done by High Point University students two years ago. In the recent study, however, only 26% of the responses from the business professionals showed utilitarian traits. Instead, virtue ethics yielded the most results with 71%.

Graph 3: Ethical models used by the business people in High Point.



Virtue ethics encompasses ethical approaches where people make decisions based on character and the kind of person involved in the decision. Virtue ethicists ask questions like: What kind of person would make this decision? What are the goals or purpose of this company? What kind of person is this company producing? Virtue ethicists see ethics as something that develops over the course of a lifetime as people develop good habits. It is also closely aligned with many forms of religious ethics.

We found that a majority of the business people we coded as virtue ethicists credited their ethics to their religion, family, education, or a combination of the three influences: “I mean, your religion gives you that base, and that base is always there, like a foundation, but once you get to school, you know, you take your ethics classes and what not and you learn in school, the social aspect of school, and what it’s going to be like when you get out in the real world.” Another interview participant

articulated virtue ethics as pushing back against a sole motivation toward profit: “It would be very easy for me to go out and sell the most expensive policies because I’m gonna make more money on it, but I don’t do that, can’t do that.” The key here is “can’t do that.” For a virtue ethicist, they have formed good habits that are so deeply engrained that acting against them is basically impossible. Yes, this business person knows how they could make more money, but it’s against their character to do it, making it an impossible choice.

The three most common codes associated with virtue ethics are family, religion, and education. This is unsurprising since these are three of the most powerful influences on the habits people form. Many people learn ethics from a young age and stick to their beliefs throughout their lives. When we are children, our family’s thoughts are the first that we hear, we are told to learn from our education system, and we practice a religion we believe is correct.

Finally, there was one rights-based ethicist in the study. This means that a person decides on what to do in the workplace based on their analysis of basic rights and duties. Rights-based ethicists are concerned with what motivates people to act, not the consequences of action. In this study, someone was categorized as demonstrating rights-based thinking when they used key ideas like protecting reputation, the golden rule, respect, and compliance. While many people used the golden rule or other ideas associated with rights-based ethics, it was determined that only one person in the study used these as their primary mode of ethical thinking. The golden rule was by far the most commonly cited rights-based language. As an example, one person said, “It hurts you and it hurts the other person, so treating other people the way they’re supposed to be treated. My parents were very big on the golden rule.” As an example of rights-based thinking, this response shows the primacy of respect for others.

There were multiple codes or key phrases that helped to classify the ethical

approach someone was taking. For instance, a key code for someone who used utilitarianism would be something like self-interest or comparing the pros and cons of a decision, whereas people who use virtue ethics would talk more about how family and religion shaped their character to help them make controversial decisions. Rights-based ethicists focused on doing the right thing or acting based on duty.

Table 2: Key codes associated with each type of ethical thinking.

Utilitarianism	Virtue	Kantianism
Profit	Religion	Protection
Self-interest	Education	Do the right
Long-term	Family	thing
thinking	Up-bringing	Golden rule

After coding all the data, virtue ethics clearly dominated the results. There are surely a number of reasons why the first study of ethics among High Point business people was dominated by utilitarians, and why this recent study was dominated by virtue ethicists. Some explanations might include: the last study involved mostly men and this study included a more even gender balance; the last study was primarily older, more established business people, and this study is primarily younger business people; both studies are small so they can not be fully representative; and so on. What the student researchers hypothesized, however, is that younger workers tend to rely on what they know when making ethical decisions, and what they know is what their parents taught them, what they learned in school, and what their faith teaches. It might take them several years to learn the art of utilitarian decision-making, a version of which seems to dominate the business landscape today. If this hypothesis is true, it should remind older business people of their responsibility to help young professionals learn how to make ethical decisions in their field, and it should teach young professionals to be aware that they are entering a business world that makes decisions in a way that will be new and challenging to them.

One more result from this part of the study took the research team by surprise: that is, the difficulty the researchers had in deciding how people were making ethical decisions. Only 12 out of the 30 respondents clearly fell into one of the dominant ethical theories. This suggests one of three possibilities: (1) many business people are not able to describe clearly and coherently how they make ethical decisions, (2) the dominant theories of ethics do not adequately capture the way business people make ethical decisions, and/or (3) we do not know enough about the theories or the business people to be able to categorize them properly. No matter which - or all - of the options are true, more seems to be required by business ethics classes, either to teach the theories better or to revise the theories to make more sense in business.

## Retaining Young Talent in High Point

In any city, the ability to attract and retain young, professional talent is paramount to the prolonged growth of the city. Every city has certain things that are liked or disliked by its population; High Point is no exception to this. Gauging these likes and dislikes is a key step to addressing these issues and realizing the strengths of the city, giving us a more concise direction in which to develop.

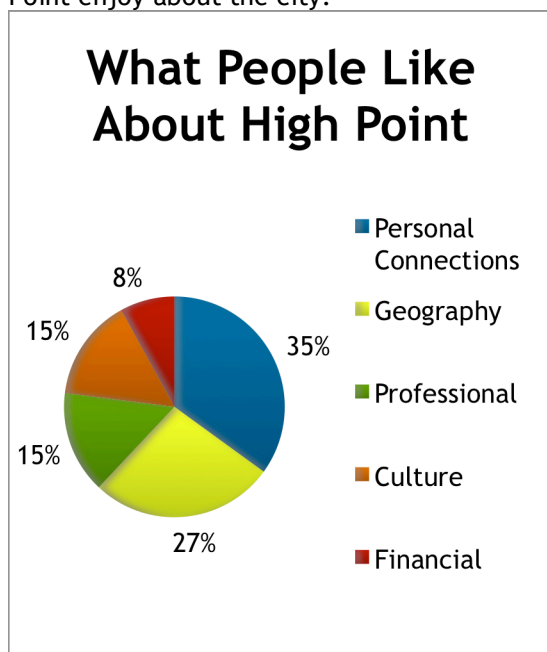
### What People Like about High Point

Of the people we interviewed, 60% or 18 of the participants lived in the City of High Point. When we asked those 18 if they were satisfied with the city, 14 of them said yes. We then followed up and asked those 14 people, "What do you like about High Point? What keeps you here?" The most popular response to this question was that they liked the small-town nature and family-friendly atmosphere of High Point. Participants were quoted saying things such as, "I really enjoy the small town feel of High Point. Everyone knows each other, and it's very easy to do

## “I really enjoy the small town feel of High Point. Everyone knows each other, and it’s very easy to do business...”

business here.” And, again, “it’s really a very warm community, people who live here really look out for each other.” Coinciding with this data, many of the participants also said that their family and other personal connections, as well as their job, were key factors in living in High Point. This information suggests that people in High Point have a strong sense of community; however, this strong sense of community might also make it hard for new people to feel like they can fit in.

Graph 4: This graph represents the main things that people who like living in High Point enjoy about the city.



### The Dislikes

We asked the four people who live in High Point and are not satisfied with the city, along with the 12 other people in the study who do not live in High Point, what they did not like

about the city. The same “dislikes” were raised repeatedly. The fact that these same “dislikes” commonly appeared in the responses may indicate that these particular issues are concerns of the populace at large.

The dominant “dislike” was the downtown area. About 40% of those asked this question mentioned the need to revitalize downtown. Several participants used the phrase “ghost town” to describe the downtown area at “any other time than furniture market.” For instance, one participant said, “Get rid of the showrooms, or at least find a way to make a two-week leasing period work.” In addition to this, another key “dislike” was the lack of entertainment. For example, while talking about the downtown area, one participant said, “I work downtown, so I feel like I can say that, with some validity, there’s nothing to do downtown. I can’t walk somewhere to have lunch downtown. You can’t meet up with friends downtown.” Solving these types of issues could help bring more people to High Point, thus revitalizing the city’s aptitude for prosperity and growth.

One interesting “dislike” that appeared was contempt for strict building regulations. One participant described the city’s building regulations, saying “It’s just [as] hard to build a building of any sort in High Point [as] it is to get into the White House...It’s almost to a level of communism...where they

The downtown is a “ghost town.”  
“I can’t walk somewhere to have lunch downtown. You can’t meet up with friends downtown.”



just prohibit to the point where people are saying they won't open a business in High Point but go down the road to such and such city and build a building there with no problem.

Though “red tape” is a necessary part of any building permit approval process, it should not be convoluted to the extent that it disrupts businesses from being able to revitalize old structures or build new buildings. In other words, regulations must not constrict healthy economic growth.

Another key “dislike” was the public school system. A participant was quoted saying, “I would never dare to send her [daughter] to a public school. It's scary. I think that's something that young people really think about when deciding whether [or] not to settle down here.” Indeed, school systems are likely to play a key role in whether or not families move to an area. Improving any public school system is a complicated issue to tackle; however, if public schooling were to improve, it would benefit High Point in many ways.

The last main “dislike” is the community of High Point's devotion to furniture. A participant was quoted saying, “they need to pull back their focus on solely the furniture market. A life exists beyond the furniture market.” This sentiment was often connected with both the lack of entertainment options downtown and the lack of diversity in the job market, making it difficult to attract young professionals of all stripes to the city. The lack of industry diversity is not only a skill set limitation, but it also limits the number of positions that require college degrees and professional skills.

***With all of these challenges facing young professionals and the City of High Point, how can the Chamber of Commerce work to attract and retain young talent?***

## ***Retaining Young Talent***

Many sectors of the City of High Point want to attract and retain young professionals. To help better understand the challenges the city faces, we asked the young professionals who are already here if they see a future for themselves in High Point. While three of the 30 said no, 17 of them or 57% of those we interviewed agreed that they saw a future here and 9 or 30% strongly agreed that they saw a future here. We pushed deeper and asked what the City of High Point, and the Chamber of Commerce, in particular, need to do to attract and retain young talent. One of the first responses we received was that the city needed to feel proud again:

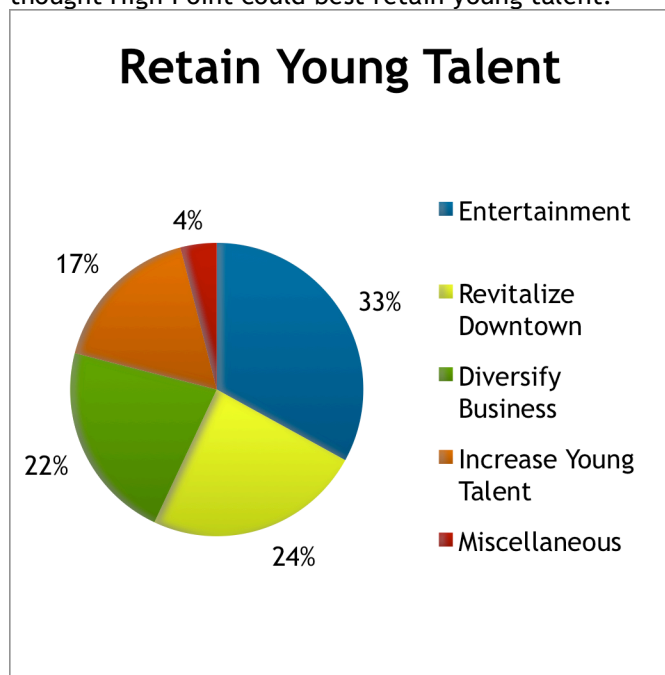
I feel like the first thing we need to figure out [is how] to [get] people back together feeling proud of their community, and in communicating with each other. Not just with their church, not just with their school, but High Point as a community in general. I don't know how to do that, but I think that's the first thing that needs to be done.

People want to feel a positive energy in the city. That energy could be related to revitalization, new entertainment options, and/or a more vibrant and diverse business community.

A large percentage of participants mentioned the need for more jobs for college graduates and young professionals. One participant emphasized, though, how new jobs must go hand-in-hand with quality of life issues: “The first school of thought is jobs. That was my first answer, but...recently, I've thought of quality of life. Like, if you have a quality of life that makes it attractive to be here, and people want to be here, then the jobs will come.” This perspective seems to be consistent with the thinking of a large portion of the participants since they frequently mentioned the overwhelming need for different forms of entertainment, like restaurants with live music. In fact, about a third of the responses

on how to retain young talent said that High Point needed to become more like Greensboro or Winston-Salem when it comes to quality of life.

Graph 5: This graph represents how respondents thought High Point could best retain young talent.



We can fairly easily determine that entertainment is important to the young professionals in the study. As one participant commented, “if you want to build all the professional jobs, you need to have a vibrant downtown that’s going to attract young folks.” One way to build a vibrant downtown was suggested: “No more showrooms on Main Street. If you want a showroom, that’s wonderful, but you got to have it off the main street. Main Street is reserved for restaurants and bars, theaters and entertainment.” Whatever approach is taken, the desire among young professionals is clear: the city needs more youth-oriented businesses.

Bringing in restaurants and other entertainment-related businesses would also mitigate a few other issues that participants connected to retaining young talent. For instance, these businesses would provide “jobs for graduates” and help to “diversify business,” both of which were frequently repeated ideas, representing about a

third of the responses each. Other popular suggestions were “investing in young professionals” and “younger leadership,” which could both be improved through a focus on new entertainment-related businesses.

Given the substantial economic and cultural impact of the furniture market, it is impractical to reclaim downtown in the way some respondents suggested. Two of the respondents, however, mentioned that a multi-purpose stadium in the downtown area might help achieve the same goals, and one respondent suggested that the Uptown area could be revitalized to satisfy the desire that many have of a walkable district in High Point.

### *Where the Chamber Comes In*

At the conclusion of the survey, we asked participants if they knew what the High Point Chamber of Commerce was and what it did. About 63% of the participants responded that they knew about the Chamber and its purpose. These 63% were then asked to give a description of what the Chamber does, using their own words. The participants’ general view of the Chamber’s purpose was that it was “responsible for growing the city and maintaining the city and protecting the businesses of High Point.” This view of the Chamber’s purpose was held by over half of the respondents who claimed to know what the Chamber does. One respondent went into the detail of the Chamber’s purpose by describing the “Four pillars” of the Chamber’s work: providing “networking opportunities,” being a “business advocate,” doing “workforce development,” and “improving education.” Two respondents who claimed to know what the Chamber does seemed to confuse its work with that of the Convention and Visitors Bureau. The program most associated with the Chamber was Leadership High Point, which was mentioned by three people. One respondent also mentioned Business After Hours.

Participants were asked how the Chamber could best communicate its value to young professionals. A number of the responses suggested using social media, specifically tools like Facebook and Twitter, to communicate value. One respondent stated that social media could “make them a little more approachable, and make the work that they are doing a little more understandable.” Another respondent said that the Chamber could “tap into the younger talent, and reach out to young talent through social media,” because “social media is a free and easy way to reach out to people.” Social media is an emerging frontier of communication that will play a major role in future business communications, as it is a free and easy way to reach massive numbers of people.

A significant portion of the responses also called for the Chamber to advertise itself better. One participant commented that the Chamber should focus on “just getting their name splashed all over the place. Like High Point University splashed purple flags all over the place.” Throughout the responses, participants felt that the Chamber needs to do more to create personal relationships with people in the business community. People want to know the Chamber staff and board personally. One participant said the Chamber needs to “do a lot of communicating outside of their location with young professionals, [going to] where [young professionals] work.” Such personal relationships could improve the impression some young professionals have of the Chamber. One respondent remarked: “They have that old school kind of stigma of just being...bankers and attorneys, those kinds of people [that] use the Chamber...You have to have the young blood on board.”

In conclusion, respondents felt the Chamber really needs to reach out to young professionals. They suggested the Chamber do this through email, social media, networking events, and meeting young professionals where they work and live. This could make the Chamber seem more approachable and less intimidating to young

The Chamber could  
“tap into the younger  
talent, and reach out  
to young talent  
through social  
media.”

- Interview Participant

professionals. It could help young professionals understand what the Chamber does and see its value. It could help them see that the Chamber could be a powerful tool to enhance young professionals’ likelihood of finding jobs, deepen their community ties, and advocate for other incentives, policies, and community changes that could help retain young talent in High Point.

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*I feel like the first thing we need to figure out [is how] to [get] people back together feeling proud of their community, and in communicating with each other. Not just with their church, not just with their school, but High Point as a community in general. I don't know how to do that, but I think that's the first thing that needs to be done.*

*--Interview Participant on what High Point needs to do to retain young talent*

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Success doesn't come to you; you must go to it. The trail is well-traveled and well-marked. If you want to walk it, you can.  
-- Nido Qubein

# Ethics and Young Professionals in the City of High Point: An In-Depth Analysis



Using a community-based research model, the report studies a problem identified by the High Point Chamber of Commerce: how can the Chamber of Commerce better serve the young professionals in High Point's business community. The study suggests that the Chamber needs to make an intentional effort to reach out to young professions through social media and by making personal connections. The young professionals in the study also called on the Chamber of Commerce to support community revitalization efforts, diversify local business, attract more entertainment-related businesses, and improve the public school system.

The analysis and commentary in this study were completed in cooperation with High Point University students. So both the data and the interpretation of the data should give the reader insights into how young professionals are thinking about the High Point business community.

*A qualitative  
research study  
conducted by High  
Point University  
students for the  
High Point Business  
community.*

*This study was reviewed by the High Point University Institutional Review Board.*

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