

Book Review Editor's Note

Questions of deception and ethics are often in the air during political campaign season. Here are two books on the general area, one written by a Phi Kappa Phi and the other reviewed by a Phi Kappa Phi. Next issue: two works by Phi Kappa Phi authors.

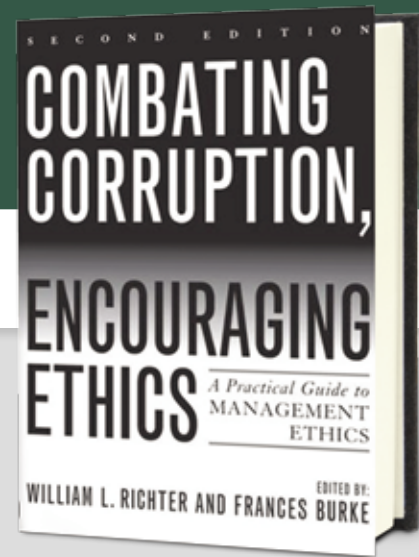
– Neil Luebke, PhD

> Combating Corruption, Encouraging Ethics:

A Practical Guide to Management Ethics (Second Edition)

William L. Richter and Frances Burke, eds. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. in cooperation with the American Society for Public Administration, 2007. 304 pages. \$34.95 paperbound.

Ethics can be seen as a set of ideas—concerns, rules, principles, virtues, values, and decision processes—that allow people to live together and successfully pursue their common and individual interests. Its origins may be divine intervention or human insight and its expressions have been refined and transmitted throughout history in societies and social institutions.



ETHICS ALLOWS US TO DECIDE NOT just what is the case but what should be the case—what is right or wrong, good or bad, worthy or unworthy of human action or aspiration.

In *Combating Corruption, Encouraging Ethics: A Practical Guide to Management Ethics*, editors Richter and Burke are furthering this important human activity at a time of definite need. The 2007 National Business Ethics Survey (www.ethics.org) indicates that unethical actions in business, professional, and not-for-profit organizations have returned to disturbing pre-Enron levels. Fifty-six percent of employees surveyed saw conduct that violated their organization's ethics standards, policy, or the law. This high rate of misconduct, plus a low level of management awareness (two in five employees do not report it), and the absence of fully developed ethics and compliance programs (only one in four companies) equals a treacherous ethics landscape for organizations, employees, and the public. Previous surveys have shown that not-for-profits and public entities have as many problems as businesses.

The editors' response to this environment is to examine the ethical challenges of a specific area of practice—the work of public servants at all levels of government and not-for-profit organizations. This is an effective strategy since the problems and

ethical guidance in any area of work usually arise from the actual circumstances and ways of thinking common to that activity. Occasional recourse to the more abstract concerns of how human morality as a whole should operate are helpful to guide decision-making at work and to provide a broader perspective. The book provides insights into both.

For the concrete concerns, the reader experiences a wide but carefully selected set of readings on the challenges public administrators face: the obligations created by public responsibility and accountability; the new challenges of globalization; the ethical problems of fraud, waste, and corrupt practices; graft, bribery and conflicts of interest; lying, cheating, and deception; privacy, secrecy, and confidentiality; and abuse of authority and “administrative evil.” Each problem is illuminated by essays, anchored by a brief case and questions for discussion, and extended by a list of further readings. The practical concerns of public administrators are illuminated in the final section by a discussion of tools and strategies a manager can use to encourage ethical and discourage unethical behavior when “the angels are missing.” A reader's view of his/her work as a public administrator would certainly be affected by reflection on this material. → → →

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Addressing the more theoretical level, the editors provide a brief discussion and readings on several traditional approaches for making ethical decisions: cultivating virtues or character traits, judging by the best consequences, and judging by ethical principles such as the golden rule, justice, or treating others as ends rather than merely as means. While not extensive, this discussion is clear and is helpful in suggesting that all three approaches can be used without contradiction. The editors give an intriguing list of reasons why people fail to act ethically.

The book may find its greatest use in public administration classes and as a resource for Human Resource trainers. The thoughtful introductory essays and the careful editing of the readings to eliminate the unnecessary will also make the book inviting to any public administrators who wish to reflect upon and improve their profession in addition to working in it. My only complaint about this very useful book is that its title may not direct it into the right hands. A corporate manager buying it without a careful reading of the back jacket may be surprised to learn that this “Practical Guide to Management Ethics” is written specifically for public administration managers. Public administrators on the other hand may miss its wisdom because they are unaware it is directed toward them. If this was a marketing decision by someone in the beleaguered publishing industry trying to ensure the widest possible audience, it fails the best consequences test, and the principle of treating others as ends by providing information they need to choose what they value. ■

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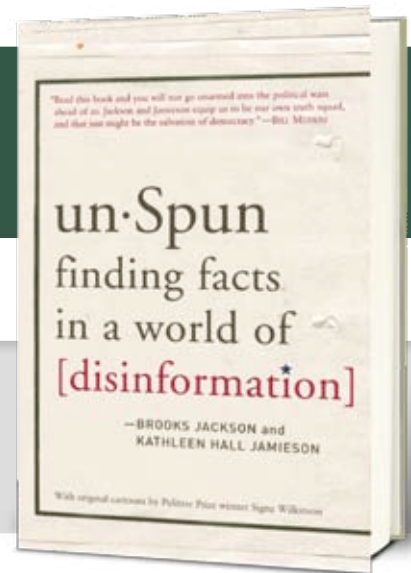
> un·Spun:

Finding Facts in a World of [Disinformation]

Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007. 208 pages. \$12.95.

The paperback *un·Spun* is the everyman’s guide to avoid suffocation in a world of misleading ads, self-righteous politicians, and non-thinking citizenry.

THE AUTHORS IMMEDIATELY DEFINE “spin” as a polite word for deception and assert that “spin paints a false picture of reality by bending facts, mischaracterizing the words of others, ignoring or denying crucial evidence, or just ‘spinning a yarn’—by making things up.” With example after example, they illustrate how voters and consumers need to recognize spin when it is used against them because, if they don’t, they risk not only making poor decisions at the voting booth or in purchasing but simply spending their lives running around with false notions in their heads. → → →



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