

In Memoriam

W. Michael Hoffman

A few special individuals are made for their time. One such person was W. Michael Hoffman, Hieken Professor of Business and Professional Ethics and the founding executive director of the W. Michael Hoffman Center of Business Ethics at Bentley University, who, after a brief illness, died at the age of 75 on December 6, 2018, just a few months before his scheduled retirement. Mike was a friend to many of us in business ethics and a pioneer in the field that he helped define. At each inflection point in the development of business ethics Mike was there, saw what was needed, stepped up, and made a difference for the better.

Mike arrived at Bentley College (it became Bentley University in 2008) as an associate professor after spending six years as an assistant professor at Hiram College and two years after receiving his PhD from the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. Bentley, which had become a college offering a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1971, could hardly have imagined what a treasure they were getting in hiring Mike, whose specialty was Kant's theory of freedom, as chair of the Philosophy Department. Having joined a school known primarily for its business degrees, Mike immediately saw the need for courses in business ethics, and under a National Endowment for the Humanities grant he developed courses in business ethics before there was any such academic area. He understood the importance of institutions and so founded one of the first centers specifically for business ethics in 1976. He had a vision of business ethics and what it could do that went far beyond academic teaching and research, although he engaged in and promoted and facilitated both on the part of others. The purpose of business ethics, as he saw it, was to change how business was done. He saw more clearly than most of those who had a hand in forming the newly emerging field of business ethics that to effect change one had to engage businesspeople in the enterprise as equals. From the start, the Bentley Center extended a welcoming hand to those in business who were already running ethical companies, and Mike found willing partners.

In 1978, there were a number of more or less isolated philosophy faculty members working on business ethics. Cognizant of the importance of organizations, Mike knew the time had come to allay that isolation, and when contacted by Tom Donaldson, he jumped at the idea of forming a society for those engaged in the emerging field. He and Tom invited three others to join them in starting what was to become the Society for Business Ethics (SBE). Today, the society is thriving with members from twenty countries. In 1991, SBE published the first issue of *Business Ethics Quarterly*. Mike was on the SBE Executive Committee that established the journal, on the editorial advisory board at its inception, and then on the editorial review board until 2005.

When in 1991 the United States issued the Federal Sentencing Guidelines for Organizations, it offered a possible reduction of millions of dollars in fines if a firm could show it had a structure in place overseen by a high-level executive (later called an ethics officer) that included ethics training, monitoring, and enforcement.

This was a new concept for most companies, which were uncertain how to proceed. Mike, together with two colleagues at Bentley, Bob Frederick and Ed Petry, and Craig Dreilinger (from The Dreiford Group), saw a need and responded by inviting fifteen corporate executives to share what they were doing in their corporations. The meeting was so successful that they formed the Ethics Officer Association (now the Ethics and Compliance Initiative). The members chose the Bentley Center for Business Ethics as the facilitating institution, with Mike as the first executive director. By 1995 the association had grown to 500 members, most from Fortune 500 companies. At that point it outgrew the space available at Bentley and moved off campus, but it did not sever its ties with Bentley. Under Mike's direction, the Bentley Center had started a week-long course, *Managing Ethics in Organizations*, for people interested in becoming corporate ethics officers, and for those who already had such obligations and wanted to learn best practices and share their experiences, successes, and failures. The course is still offered annually. Mike recruited instructors from both academia and business, and the Bentley Center has trained over a thousand business people, extending the influence of business ethics throughout the business world both here and abroad.

Mike did not stop there. He knew he had to reach more business executives. What better way than to have successful CEOs present their experiences running their firms in an ethical way? In 1998 the Bentley Center inaugurated a biannual CEO lecture series, now the Raytheon Lectureship in Business Ethics series (funded by Raytheon). Mike did not forget students, and in 1999 the center started a visiting professorship lecture series, known as the Verizon Professorship in Business Ethics series (funded by Verizon), which brings a noted academic in the field not only to give a lecture but also to meet with classes and present a workshop for faculty and staff over a several-day period. The lectures in both series are published and distributed free of charge to over 6,500 academic and business leaders, including all of the Fortune 1000 companies. Such wide distribution of corporate leaders sharing their views and experiences with their peers has certainly helped bring the message of ethics to business.

Under Mike's leadership the center ran one of the first business ethics conferences (1977), and it was notable for the mix of government officials (including then Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil and former US Attorney General Elliot Richardson), corporate CEOs, and academics. It has since then run ten such conferences and published and distributed the proceedings. The center has an extensive library of books, journals, and other materials in business ethics and welcomes scholars from around the world who wish to do research in business ethics, utilizing the center's library and associating with the faculty at Bentley. Mike not only fostered and encouraged work by others but published sixteen books, often with others in both academia and business, and authored or coauthored more than 100 articles, which appeared in such scholarly journals as *Business Ethics Quarterly* and the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and in business, trade, and popular publications. In 1998, he and Bob Frederick took over the *Business and Society Review* as the Bentley Center's journal (with Bob as editor) and arranged for Blackwell (now Wiley) to publish it on a quarterly basis.

Mike's untiring and groundbreaking work in the field was widely recognized both nationally and internationally, and he received numerous awards. Most notably, in 2016 at the center's fortieth anniversary celebration, the board of trustees announced that the Bentley Center for Business Ethics would be renamed the W. Michael Hoffman Center for Business Ethics. Many universities name their centers after a wealthy and generous benefactor. Bentley named theirs after the center's founder, who had built the center into an internationally renowned one, and who put Bentley on the business ethics map. His other awards include a Lifetime Achievement Award for a Career of Outstanding Service to the Field of Business Ethics from the Society for Business Ethics (2011) and a Lifetime Achievement Award in the field of Ethics and Compliance from the Ethics and Compliance Officer Association (2012).

Especially in the early years in the development of business ethics, Mike served as a consultant to several dozen corporations and other organizations, including such firms as Johnson & Johnson (1996–97), Houghton Mifflin Company (1996), and General Electric Company (1993), and such diverse organizations as the Treasury Board of Canada (2002), the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (1999), and the US Congress Office of Technology Assessment (1989). In addition, he consulted for over sixty law firms as an expert witness in business ethics, and gave expert reports, depositions, and trial testimony in numerous cases covering such areas as product liability, intellectual property rights, wrongful discharge, and violation of fiduciary responsibility. He brought business ethics issues to public attention through over sixty feature interviews in such outlets as the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *Washington Post*. His expertise was widely sought. He gave over 150 lectures and conference presentations and he has been quoted on business ethics topics in dozens of newspapers and magazines including *Business Week*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *USA Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Throughout his career Mike was helpful to students, a collegial and respected colleague, an admired champion of the field, and an apostle of business ethics to the business community. Mary Chiasson, longtime senior associate director of the Bentley Center, reports that within a very brief period after Mike's death she heard from "hundreds and hundreds" of people from all over the world expressing their deep feeling of friendship for Mike, noting that he was welcoming, down-to-earth, passionate about his work, an inspiring and supportive teacher, a friend, and a mentor to corporate ethics officers around the globe; the words "open minded, warmth, humor, and kindness" are repeated over and over in comments about him, and many CEOs and corporate executives cite their admiration for how his actions exemplified the values he sought to promote in businesses.

Mike Hoffman made the most of being the right person at the right time. His legacy and influence on corporate ethics officers, on CEOs and executives, on business, and on the field of business ethics will long endure.

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