# Verizon

Visiting Professorship
in Business Ethics
and Information
Technology

# Reply, Delete…Or Relate?
# IT's Human Dimension

*Francis J. Daly*

Corporate Director, Ethics and Business Conduct

Northrop Grumman Corporation

**CENTER FOR
BUSINESS ETHICS**

**MARCH 31, 2003**

# BENTLEY

BENTLEY is a business university. Focused on education and research in business and related professions, Bentley blends the breadth and technological strength of a large university with the values and student orientation of a small college. An undergraduate education combines business study with a strong foundation in the arts and sciences. A broad array of offerings, including the Information Age MBA, Master of Science and certificate programs at the McCallum Graduate School, emphasize the impact of technology on business practice. Enrolling approximately 3,900 full-time undergraduate, 400 adult part-time undergraduate, and 1,300 graduate students, Bentley is located in Waltham, Massachusetts, 10 miles west of Boston.

The Center for Business Ethics at Bentley College is a non-profit educational and consulting organization whose vision is a world in which all businesses contribute positively to society through their ethically sound and responsible operations. The center's mission is to give leadership in the creation of organizational cultures that align effective business performance with ethical business conduct. It endeavors to do so by the application of expertise, research, education and a collaborative approach to disseminating best practices. With a vast network of practitioners and scholars and an extensive multimedia library, the center provides an international forum for benchmarking and research in business ethics.

The center helps corporations and other organizations strengthen their ethical culture through educational programming such as the Verizon Visiting Professorship.

The visiting professorship in business ethics and information technology at Bentley College is made possible through the generous support of Verizon. The work of the Center for Business Ethics is furthered by this educational initiative, which engages students, faculty and corporate partners in an important dialogue.

The Verizon Visiting Professorship enhances the college's mission of creating an environment that blends business studies and information technology. In addition, it gives prominence to the ethical dimension of business, such that students learn to recognize and understand its fundamental importance.

We were honored to have Frank Daly as our fifth visiting professor in the Verizon series, and the first who is an ethics practitioner. The corporate director of ethics and business conduct at Northrop Grumman, Mr. Daly has taught business ethics at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, and at Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts. His combination of professional and academic experiences made him a particularly engaging and insightful speaker.

The Center for Business Ethics will continue to strengthen the business ethics movement through programming such as the Verizon Visiting Professorship in Business Ethics and Information Technology. We are grateful to the Bentley community, to Verizon, to Frank Daly and to everyone connected with the center, whose support makes these initiatives a success.

W. Michael Hoffman
Executive Director
Center for Business Ethics
Bentley College

(Left to right) **David Raney**: Ethics Officer, Verizon; **Francis Daly**: Corporate Director of Ethics and Business Conduct, Northrop Grumman; **Melvyn Schlosser**: Executive Director of Ethics and Business Compliance, Verizon; and **W. Michael Hoffman**: Executive Director, Center for Business Ethics.

**The Visiting Professorship in Business Ethics and Information Technology at Bentley is funded with the generous support of Verizon.**

**Verizon, formed through the merger of Bell Atlantic and GTE (and before that NYNEX), is at the forefront of the new communications and information industry. A Fortune 10 company with more than 137 million telephone access lines and 34 million wireless customers worldwide, Verizon is a premier provider of advanced wire-line voice and data services, market leaders in wireless services, and the world's largest publisher of directory information. Verizon is also one of the world's largest investors in high growth communications markets, with operations and investments in 30 countries.**

2

**FRANCIS J. DALY**

Frank Daly is the Corporate Director of Ethics and Business Conduct for Northrop Grumman Corporation, a $25 billion aerospace and defense business, based in Los Angeles. He combines considerable practical experience in directing business ethics programs with an educational background in philosophy and theology.

Mr. Daly first became associated with Northrop Corporation in 1984, joining the company's Precision Products Division in Norwood, Massachusetts. His responsibilities were in the areas of Communications, Public and Community Relations and Ethics. In 1994, he became Corporate Director of Ethics and Business Conduct, based in Bethpage, New York. From there, after Northrop's acquisition of Grumman Corporation and Vought Aircraft, Mr. Daly directed the creation of a unified ethics program. He moved to Northrop Grumman Corporate Headquarters in Los Angeles in 1995.

A Kallman Executive Fellow of the Center for Business Ethics at Bentley College, Mr. Daly is also a member of the Working Group of the Defense Industry Initiative, an industry self-governance organization. He is a past Chairman of the Board of the Ethics Officer Association and a founding member of the Southern California Business Ethics Roundtable. Mr. Daly serves on the Business Advisory Council of the School of Business Administration and has also taught at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He has been an adjunct professor of Ethics in Business at Stonehill College, has written a number of articles and has lectured and presented widely on the topic. Mr. Daly's undergraduate studies concentrated on philosophy, history and theology. He also holds an MA degree from the University of San Francisco.

## Reply, Delete…Or Relate?
### IT's Human Dimension

*Francis J. Daly*
Corporate Director, Ethics and Business Conduct
Northrop Grumman Corporation

I would like to thank Mike Hoffman and the Center for Business Ethics for inviting me to be the fifth Verizon Visiting Professor in Business Ethics and Information Technology. I am proud of my affiliation with the Center for Business Ethics and have been a Kallman Executive Fellow here for almost 15 years.

My predecessors in this role have been academics, all of whom, by the way, have made great contributions to the study and practice of ethics in business. Frequently, I have observed that nowhere is the gap between the concerns of academics and those of practitioners wider than in the field of business ethics. The invitation to me to be the first Verizon Visiting Professor who is a practitioner is one among many indicators of the leadership of Mike Hoffman and the center. Mike Hoffman, perhaps more than any other, has worked tirelessly to narrow the gap and bring together academics and practitioners in the interest of enriching the discussion for both.

Secondly, I'd like to thank Verizon for their sponsorship and the leadership they have exercised in the area of business ethics. In the interest of full disclosure, let me say that I am a Verizon customer.

Throughout, I may lapse into the shorthand "business ethics."  However, having taught a course in the subject a number of times, I always entitled the course "Ethics in Business." This is because I view the field as the application of ethical principles to the environment of business. Those principles are equally applicable in many other fields of endeavor like medicine, journalism or law.

There are some who question whether the environment created by electronic communication, cyberspace or the "Infosphere"[1]  has peculiar elements that require a new set of moral principles. While there are indeed some elements peculiar to this environment, in my experience they are not so different that the ethical principles applied in other fields cannot be applied here.

Use of electronic communication technology has become a feature of life for almost all of us and its many benefits are well known. On a personal level, it has enabled separated family members to communicate easily across countries and continents, connecting parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, and it has kept us in touch with friends we do not see for months, even years. Electronic communications

have revolutionized working patterns and business dealings, though many of us remain ambivalent toward the technology. One often hears complaints about spam, e-mail overload and the fact that the computer will not allow us to escape the office.

Let me share a couple of stories that illustrate this feeling of ambivalence. Last year, I arrived late at night at a hotel in the Washington, D.C. area. It was around midnight when I got to my room, only to hear the fire alarm go off. I gathered up a few things of value — wallet, watch, keys and the like — and proceeded to the lobby. When I got there, I was surprised to see, among other guests, two men wearing nothing but boxers and T-shirts. Each was holding his laptop computer. No wallet, no keys, no pants, but they weren't going to be separated from their laptops. Their priorities were clear but I still can't decide whether they were prudent or oppressed.

The other story has to do with a business trip I took with a couple of colleagues, both of whom were wired with cell phones, laptops and *Blackberries*. One of the sites we visited was a 100-mile drive from our hotel. During the drive, my colleagues were in almost constant communication with their offices. It got me to thinking: before the electronic age, managers who reported to you contacted you only in an emergency or a need-to-know situation. They made the everyday decisions in your absence. The boss's trip became a learning opportunity. Now every decision is shared and one wonders if that learning experience has been lost.

Of course, unforeseen consequences are not limited to this new technology. I would like to explore with you whether one of those consequences is that the medium can defeat the purpose, becoming an obstacle rather than an aid to human communication.

In the weeks leading up to this presentation, I spoke to a number of different groups of people. I explained to them that I was coming here to Bentley to address this topic and they all graciously agreed to answer a few questions. So I am not selling this as a scientific survey but more as an indicator of what people think about certain issues. I would suggest my findings can have particular validity where there was unanimity or virtual unanimity on an issue. The groups included college students, ethics officers working in companies and adults attending an adult education program. There were 80 people, 50 of them under 25, many of them university students, and 30 over age 40. When presented with the choice of receiving a layoff notice by letter/memo, e-mail, phone call or in person, 92 percent of them answered "in person." What is it about this subject matter that leads them to make that choice?

It is not uncommon for employees — perhaps especially employees and managers who have issues between them — to opt to communicate by e-mail rather than sitting down and working out the issues face-to-face. Therefore, it should not surprise you to learn

that 74 percent of my sample said "yes" when asked, "Is it easier for a difficult boss, teacher or friend to communicate with you by e-mail?" Clearly, this form of communication can run the risk of perpetuating the problem rather than helping to resolve it.

The phenomenon of "cyberbullying" has now reared its ugly head. I understand this may have been happening in a number of places across the country, but I know for sure of a recent case in Los Angeles.[2] It happened when a student, assisted by one of his parents, created a website on which they would "diss" other students. In essence, they took all the backstabbing and gossip about personality, physical characteristics, etc., that goes on in a school setting and put it on the Internet so that even those who didn't participate in it at school could see it. You can imagine the effect this could have on students who are attacked this way, besides bringing into the circle students who wouldn't normally have been party to this kind of activity. Only after a number of news stories, and repeated attacks by two L.A. radio talk show hosts, was the site shut down. Ironically, the talk show hosts had themselves been criticized months earlier when they publicized private e-mail communications between the Archbishop of Los Angeles and his lawyer that had somehow come into their hands.

Even the standard use of e-mail can have a kind of oppression to it. For example, when I get to the office, the first thing I do is turn on the computer and check e-mail. Some of it is spam, some of it can be answered directly in a sentence or two and some has to be saved for a more considered response later. One asks the question: Who is managing whom? The electronic communication environment has its own characteristics and peculiarities which, as in every environment, can have positive and negative effects on the actors within it. We need to ask, what are some of these characteristics? Do they enhance or detract from healthy human communication? I think most people would agree that the primary characteristics of electronic communication are speed, convenience and efficiency — and most people would agree that these characteristics can be very beneficial.

However, most people can imagine situations in which the characteristics I have mentioned are not beneficial. There is a story about a man with a wheelbarrow full of apples approaching a stranger and asking how much time it would take to get this load to the next town. The stranger replied, one hour if you go slowly, tomorrow if you go fast. In his book, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*,[3] James Gleick points out that there are some realities you can't force. He says, "Who knew that the inconvenience of old-fashioned letter writing provided a buffer? Highway engineers learned that they could ward off freeway congestion by holding back cars at the entrance ramps, forcing them to wait at seemingly pointless red lights — for their own good, in the long run. In the same way, the unavoidable delays to which business communications were subject in the days before fax, FedEx, and before e-mail, served

as pauses for thought. A lawyer could reconsider a rash piece of mail while it was still in the stenographer's outbox. Decisions could ferment during accidental slow periods." How many of us have sent an e-mail, only to know instantly that we wanted it back to add something, change the tone or include someone else which would make it more complete, more considerate or more honest? Can this characteristic of speed drive us and have a negative effect upon how we treat other people? You can't rush love or a soufflé.

We asked our sample a question along these lines and there was ambiguity about the effect of speed on human relationships. Our survey respondents were split in their responses to the question, "Does speed make communications by computer more personal or less personal?" Another characteristic of electronic communication is physical detachment which can facilitate anonymity. While "anonymity" is often more perceived than real, it can have an emboldening effect. We asked our sample: "Does anonymity make it easier to be less than truthful when communicating by computer?" Seventy-two percent said yes. Even though it is often not guaranteed anonymity, the medium sometimes provides a forum where two parties treat each other as practically anonymous, communicating only words to each other but nothing else. As we saw in the previously cited question, the medium enables parties who wouldn't otherwise speak to send messages to each other. What an impoverished form of communication that is. In fact, if you examined the syllabus for a course on interpersonal or social communication, you would be hard pressed to see how electronic communication enhances critical elements of social interplay and understanding like nonverbal gestures, body language, sensory perception and empathetic listening. Many of these elements, by the way, often play a critical role in influencing one to act in an ethical manner. It seems clear to me that electronic communication is a tool that has enhanced human interplay for many people, but it has many pitfalls.

To the extent that electronic communication has become essential to business, it has created an additional dimension to the work environment. Those of us who are business ethics practitioners try to help employees identify the positive values they bring to work; to ensure that there are resources to encourage them to follow those values and to help them when it appears those values and those of the workplace are in conflict. What we try to do in business is to bring ethical principles to bear on the work environment just as we do in medicine, journalism, law, etc.

What I'd like to explore with you is how we can bring those ethical principles to bear on the electronic communication environment, to enhance its use or to offset those elements inherent in it that work against good ethical behavior. In the book *The Leadership Compass*,[4] the authors point out that "Moral behavior is concerned pri-

marily with the interpersonal dimension of our behavior: how we treat one another individually and in groups…"  In my experience, this is a basic concern with virtually all philosophers. Kant taught that people are ends in themselves and not a means to an end. The Utilitarians were concerned about the greatest good for the greatest number of people.  Rawls' concern for justice was based on an "original position" as an intellectual construct for arriving at justice for everyone. And, of course, the "Golden Rule" has been incarnated in various ways in virtually all the major religions, and in many minor ones as well.

I'd like to share with you the thinking of two philosophers of the last century, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel, who have helped me apply this constant concern for the "interpersonal dimension."  By the way, before you jump to any conclusions about the last century, remember that all of us in this room were born in the *last century*. Buber and Marcel were men shaped by their times. Remember, the last century saw events with monumental impact that devalued the human person. At the beginning of the century, with the industrial revolution in full swing, people began to see themselves as cogs in a large machine, easily replaceable by others and thus readily dispensable. It was the kind of phenomenon dealt with earlier in the writings of Dickens, and later by Marx and Pope Leo XIII. Then there were two great wars — failures by the human community to exhaust all other means of settling disputes and avoid the horrendous impact that war always has on people. Then, there was the Holocaust, an unspeakable horror that will forever stain the memory of the 20th century. It was against this background that both Buber and Marcel did their thinking and teaching.

The technology associated with these events made the thinkers of the time ambivalent about technology. Neither Buber nor Marcel were Luddites, in the sense that they were opposed to technology. But they felt that there was a need to be watchful because technology tends to standardize all people into a mold and thus depersonalize them. Another philosopher, Heidegger, used the term "enframement."  Marcel captures this when he says, "It should be stressed that insofar as I accept being treated as a thing, I make a thing of myself, and it is then significant to ask if I am not betraying myself." He felt that the role of the philosopher and ethician vis-à-vis technology should be that of a *veilleur*[5] or "watchman."  He saw himself as a kind of devil's advocate, not dismissing the possible benefits of technology but raising red flags requiring our attention. Marcel observed, "We can be passionately optimistic about some technologies, skeptical and disdainful of others or even both at different times about the same technology. Our goal is neither to champion or dismiss technology but rather to understand it, and apply it in a manner more consistent with basic human values."

Martin Buber also did his writing and thinking in the same era. Buber's most influential work, "I-Thou," points out that there are two ways of looking at reality, which

he called *I-Thou* and I-It.  I-It would cover what I described earlier as standardization or enframement. It objectifies the other, exclusive of any relationship that might or could exist, and in essence, not only misses the richness of the other but also the development of self that is captured in a relationship.

In the movie, *You've Got Mail*,[6] the question is asked, "Can you have a sense of self without ever meeting the other?"  In the context of the movie, the question appears to refer to a physical meeting, although certainly there are undertones of a deeper meaning to the concept of meeting. For Buber, "meeting" explicitly has this much richer and deeper meaning, as evidenced in these quotes: "All life is encounter" and "Relationship is reciprocity."[7]  In other words, the human is a relational being and the self who relates to others with respect has realized its relational and hence human potential. You don't really become who you are until you open yourself to the other, the THOU not the IT.

Marcel and Buber raise important questions for us in the light of some of the limitations of electronic communication — limitations, I might add, that can be reinforced by business imperatives. For example, if you view a business interaction as a one-time transaction, rather than as a potential for opening a relationship, that will limit you over the long run. While the transaction might yield a return that is satisfactory (and *might* is the important word here), your approach and attitude to the customer might also ensure that this will be a one-time transaction. If, on the other hand, you view the interaction as an opening for developing a business relationship that will endure beyond a single transaction, your approach will be different. In this case, rather than a one-time satisfactory return, you might build an enduring relationship that yields a revenue stream over a much longer period of time, thereby bringing a return again and again. In his landmark 1975 article, "Marketing Myopia"[8] in the *Harvard Business Review*, Professor Theodore Levitt touches on this when he makes a distinction between selling and marketing. "Selling focuses on the needs of the seller, marketing focuses on the needs of the buyer."  I submit that someone focused on selling will be more apt to treat the other as an *it* and the marketer will be more apt to treat the other as a *thou* concerned not so much with "producing products" as with "providing customer-creating value satisfactions."

Now let us examine whether the socio-electronic environment is inconsistent with this view propounded by Marcel and Buber. Does electronic communication contribute to or detract from the development and growth of personal relationships, especially when under workplace influences? Are there also some societal indicators that raise the same question? In a number of contemporary sources, I found indicators that this form of communication has the potential to alienate and work against the success of true dialogue. There appears to be consensus that this is possible.

Our sample gave some interesting and conflicting responses, which I believe indicate the inadequacy of the electronic medium for dealing with very personal issues. There was consensus, though not unanimity, on the possibility of using the medium to build a relationship that has ramifications in your personal core. You remember the layoff question our survey posed. The strong consensus reached by the group suggests that some messages involve the person too much to be delivered other than in person.

In a second instance, when asked "If you are married or otherwise committed, is it 'infidelity' if you are involved with somebody by e-mail?" Movie buffs will recognize this as similar to a question raised in *You've Got Mail*. Sixty-four percent said "yes," 25 percent said "no" and 11 percent had some other response. Clearly, the consensus here is not as strong as with the layoff notice question; the relatively high number of "other" answers probably indicates that intention is the key to answering this question, whatever medium you are using.

There are also a number of societal indicators that raise the question of whether electronic communication contributes to the development of personal relationships. The writing of Stephen L. Carter, a professor at Yale Law School, provides some examples. In his book *Civility*, Carter examines one of the serious effects of the loss of community in our culture and comes to the conclusion that "The rise of cyberspace is the apotheosis of the ideal (if it is an ideal) of individualized experience." Furthermore, he observes that "The appeal of the cyberspace culture is to autonomy…"[9] Carter seems to be saying that the cyberspace environment puts a premium on individuality, while at the same time causing a degree of withdrawal from community. Both conditions would work against an orientation toward the other that Marcel would describe as "Creative Fidelity." John Naisbitt puts it succinctly in his book, *High Tech, High Touch*, when he says "Today, many Americans are living together in isolation."[10]

In his book, *The Magic of Dialogue*,[11] which owes much to Buber, Daniel Yankelovich takes up this same theme. He observes that "Many advocates of civil society also view with alarm the prevailing version of individualism in our popular culture." Yankelovich embraces dialogue as the method to help resolve issues at any level — personal, institutional, international. Dialogue is not merely discussion but an openness to the other that includes equality and the absence of coercion, listening with empathy and bringing assumptions into the open. Electronic communication, being geared to efficiency, usually makes a virtue of brevity. This tends to work against dialogue, which therefore becomes difficult through this medium. Naisbitt recounts the story of the mother who moved to a thoroughly wired planned community in another state: "I have been a Cub Scout den mother and I will tell you that in Richfield, Connecticut, I would spend an entire evening — or two evenings — calling each boy

on the phone every three weeks to explain what we were doing. Here [Celebration, Florida], you put up one notice on the Internet. The ease of relaying information is just fabulous."[12]  Yankelovich laments, "At an accelerating pace, we produce a mind-boggling flow of technological marvels at the same time as our civic virtues of mutual respect, trust, concern, neighborliness, community, love and caring are slowly eroding."[13]  Sounds to me like the observation of a "veilleur."  In fact, the technology may have characteristics that remind us of this isolation and potential loneliness. The economist Herbert Stein, eyeing the new hordes of men and women who walk city sidewalks with cell phones at their ears and mouths, decided that our need for information on demand is as primitive an instinct as any animal can have. "It is the way of keeping contact with someone, anyone who will reassure you that you are not alone. You may think you are checking on your portfolio but deep down you are checking on your existence"[14]  (a theme in *You've Got Mail*). I rarely see people using cell phones on the sidewalks when they are in the company of other people. It is being alone that they cannot stand."

On the one hand, the technology can help us salve our loneliness by reaching out to others. The "veilleur," however, must ask if this technical reaching out is a true meeting, one that encourages the encounter with a "Thou" or which creates a fidelity that goes beyond just something to do because doing nothing is too painful.

As a final thought, there is evidence that this search for meaning, for true interconnectedness, has spawned new initiatives in the workplace around "spirituality."  There is an increasing recognition that, for all the marvels of communication that the modern workplace affords, it doesn't answer the question which people are increasingly asking at work: what does this all mean?  Those who are beginning to answer this question  "…claim that the core principles of spirituality — the belief that all individuals have dignity, that we are all interconnected, and that a transcendent being or force defines purpose in human affairs — dovetail with contemporary management thinking about what drives great companies."  In other words: "Spirituality is in convergence with all the cutting-edge thinking in management and organizational behavior."[15] Electronic communication is a tool whose potential for being beneficial or harmful for healthy human relationships has to be evaluated. Any of us can come up with a number of benefits and harmful aspects. On balance, we need to arrive at that decision by making our evaluation against the interpersonal values proposed by two great thinkers of the last century; or a more down-to-earth folksy one from this century: "While all this razzle-dazzle connects us electronically, it disconnects us from each other, having us 'interfacing' more with computers and TV screens than looking in the face of our fellow human beings. Is this progress?"[16]

### References

[1] Floridi, Luciano and J.W. Sanders, "Mapping the Foundationalist Debate in Computer Ethics," *Ethics and Information Technology,* Vol. 4, 2002, pages 1-9.

[2] Los Angeles Times, April 26, 2003: "Teenager Has No Regrets Over Insult Web Site," p. B1

[3] Gleick, James, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything,* Vintage Books, New York, 1999, p. 89.

[4] Wilcox, John and Susan Ebbs, *The Leadership Compass,* cited in "Selections from 'Issues in Ethics,'" a publication of the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University.

[5] Gendreau, Bernard A., Xavier University, "The Cautionary Ontological Approach to Technology of Gabriel Marcel," presented at Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, MA, August 10-15, 1998.

[6] Warner Brothers movie, 1998, starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan.

[7] Buber, Martin, *I and Thou,* Simon and Schuster, New York, Touchstone Edition 1996.

[8] Levitt, Theodore, "Marketing Myopia," *Harvard Business Review*, September-October 1975, p.7.

[9] Carter, Stephen L., *Civility: Manners, Morals and the Etiquette of Democracy,* Harper Perennial, New York, 1998, pp. 193-202.

[10] Naisbitt, John, *High Tech, High Touch: Technology and Our Search for Meaning,* Broadway Books, 1999, p. 22.

[11] Yankelovich, Daniel, *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation,* Simon and Schuster, New York, 1999, p. 207.

[12] Naisbitt, ibid.

[13] Yankelovich, ibid.

[14] Gleick, ibid.

[15] Gunther, Marc, "God and Business: The Surprising Quest for Spiritual Renewal in the American Workplace," in *Fortune* magazine, July 16, 2001, p. 80.

[16] Hightower, James, former Texas railroad commissioner.

***Question:***

From your 'bio' it appears that you have experience in academia as well as in business. Can you compare and contrast the practice of ethics in a business environment and in an academic institution?

***Frank Daly:***

My academic experience has been as an adjunct professor, teaching evening courses while working at my other job. So I don't have a lot of experience; but I'm sure academia has its own set of problems. Why don't you tell me what some of those problems are?

***Question:***

Well, for instance, an academic institution might have problems because department chairs are saying one thing to the faculty but doing another. There seems to me to be a real danger in focusing on ethics in business without examining some of the formative influences on future businesspeople — the values they learn, or do not learn at business school, for example. This is something that I feel we need to address.

***Frank Daly:***

I think the problem of people saying one thing and doing another is fairly universal. Clearly, ethical dilemmas arise in all areas of life. As for ethics in academia, there are those who say that there are factions in business schools who have been shutting business ethics out of the curriculum. I read an article recently about a prominent business school that makes me think that this might be true. Not long ago there was a piece in *The New York Times* about a professor of law from a university in the Southwest, I believe, who said, "We don't need ethics in business; we need people understanding more laws." Well, I agree that people need to understand their legal obligations. But Enron wasn't just about law. It was about stealing and lying, and a lack of accountability. These are altogether more basic things, and the relevant principles are applicable right across the board. For a professor in a business school to say one thing and do something else might be on a different scale but it is still an example of behavior that we would not want our young people to think is acceptable in business, or indeed anywhere else.

***Question:***

We all face ethical dilemmas in our lives everyday and I am curious to know what has been your biggest ethical challenge. How did you overcome it and what were the lessons learned?

***Frank Daly:***

I didn't know I was going to get into a tell-all session here [audience laughter]. Deciding to leave the priesthood was my biggest personal ethical challenge. However, you move on and I have been blessed with a wonderful wife and two beautiful children. So, how do you get through any difficult challenge? I think you have to have some principles, goals and ideals that are important to you, and that guide you in making a decision that you believe in, no matter how difficult.

***Question:***

In your survey, 71 percent of the people said they found it easier to lie by e-mail [than in person]. But lying by e-mail creates a permanent electronic record of the lie, even if you delete it from your computer. For this reason, we are told in business to be very careful about what we write in e-mails. Can you talk a bit about this form of communication — especially the fact that what is said does not go away when the communication has ended?

***Frank Daly:***

I think a large number of people don't understand that it does not go away. They believe that once they delete it, at least within a fairly short period of time thereafter, it will be gone. But any lawyer would tell you that is not the case. When documents and e-mails are being subpoenaed in legal proceedings there are ways for them to be retrieved. There is actually quite a problem in business today with employees abusing e-mail and Internet facilities provided by their employers. Most employers these days are monitoring employee usage of these facilities (and they usually let this be known), yet large numbers of employees are sending inappropriate e-mails and viewing unsuitable websites. There seems to be a common perception that the chances of getting caught are slim but, in fact, many companies have fired people for this kind of misconduct. The Center for Business Ethics has carried out a survey of companies on the subject of e-mail and Internet monitoring. I understand the results will be published later this year.

***Question:***

I would be interested to hear your thoughts on how the evolution of communication technology is changing the way we interact with each other. It seems that whenever one technology succeeds another, there is initial skepticism or alarm and then we become more comfortable. I'm presently researching an historical figure at the turn of the 19th century, when letter writing was the principal means to communicate over distance. Then we had the telephone, which people took some time to become comfortable with, and now we are embracing even more sophisticated forms of electron-

ic communication. Perhaps you could put e-mail and the like into some sort of historical context and tell us how you think it is changing our relationships with each other.

### Frank Daly:

I'm not an expert on the history but it's clear that there are always overlaps. We have preserved elements of earlier times because they have special meaning to us. When my children were at college, I would usually write letters to them while on business trips, taking hotel stationery with me on the airplane. Before I came here, I asked them if they felt differently about those letters than if I'd sent them e-mails. Both said yes, and my daughter said, "I saved all of mine." So it seems to me that even after the arrival of e-mail, there are elements of letter writing that remain important to us — and not just a typed letter, but one that is hand-written. I don't think we have really been able to transfer some of the things that letters include into e-mails — because of speed, because a degree of anonymity and because of the fact that screens do not make us want to read lots of text. So everything has to be presented in bullets. And if I get a long narrative in an e-mail, I'll print it out; I'm not going to read it on the screen. So, yes, e-mail has clearly altered the way in which we communicate, and good things have come of it — like instantaneous global communication — but we should also remain conscious of its limitations compared to letters. That said, I wouldn't preclude the possibility that, in future, the art of e-mail communication will be much more highly evolved.

### Question:

I think I hear you saying that technology is depersonalizing communication. But I would like to ask you to respond to this: I remember that my college roommate, the son of a business executive, used to get typed letters from his father, with "Dad" typed at the bottom. It was obvious that the father's secretary had typed the letter — because she put her initials on it! So it seems to me that depersonalized communication predated the computer. Do you think it is really the technology or is it the business environment that is depersonalizing communications and relationships?

### Frank Daly:

First of all, I am not saying that the technology, in and of itself, depersonalizes. I am saying that it has the potential to depersonalize, depending on the way it is used; and we have to be careful because that potential influences us. The need for speed can influence us to act in ways that we would not act otherwise. The potential for anonymity can influence us. People who are caught accessing pornography on the Internet at work have been doing so under the impression that no one could see what they were doing. But depersonalization is not inevitable. Let me tell you about some-

thing that happened with a manager I work with, and with whom previously I didn't have a particularly close working relationship. Not that long ago, one Friday afternoon he came into an office while I was talking to someone else, and with a trembling in his voice he told us that on Monday morning he was having surgery for cancer. I was terribly taken aback. The next week, when he was out of the hospital, I called his office. I told his colleague I wanted to send a card and the colleague said, "He's at home. Why don't you send him an e-mail?" So I did. You should have seen the response I got back from him. It clearly meant so much that people were thinking of him. That led directly to a real improvement in the quality of our relationship. So there's an example of technology having a very beneficial effect. As for the business environment, I don't think that, in and of itself, it is abusive. I do think there are situations that occur in the business environment that can lead people to be abusive. It's a question of whether there is an ethical culture in which the right messages are being transmitted. If you honor the person who's on schedule, and on the money all the time, but leaves blood on the floor and bodies lying everywhere, then you are sending a message as to what kind of culture you encourage.

### Question:

Are there any criteria we can apply to make sure that we don't allow technology to depersonalize, rather than emphasize, our relationships with each other?

### Frank Daly:

I don't think the criteria for dealing with people electronically are any different from the criteria applied in any other kind of communications; although I accept that speed is a factor, for better or worse, in electronic communications. How we *treat* people is at the root of what I'm trying to get at here, bearing in mind that the communication technology gives us opportunities to treat, honor and respect other people in ways not previously possible. But, at the same time, it allows us to mistreat people in ways that we weren't able to before. Don't you agree?

### Mike Hoffman:

Yes. You're saying, look again at [the writings of] Buber, Marcel and Kant, and see what they were telling us. They were telling us that, in order to remain human, we have to maintain this "I/Thou" relationship, because we don't understand who we are without a relationship with another. We need to see where this is breaking down and try to prevent it, or at least ameliorate it in some fashion. We also need to look for the ways in which we are enhancing our relationships through technology, and try to encourage these.

***Question:***

As you know the overwhelming majority of corporations today monitor employees' e-mail and Internet use. It has been a somewhat controversial practice. In Europe, I think they are horrified that we do this. Do you think that monitoring depersonalizes the employees or that they feel depersonalized?

***Frank Daly:***

In my company, we monitor for Internet abuse but not for e-mail. I think there is something of a difference here. I think people are entitled to feel a real sense of violation if their e-mail is being monitored as a matter of course. I am not comfortable with that, especially if the company allows occasional personal use of e-mail. The company has no right to know the content of one's correspondence with one's doctor or one's mortgage company, for example. This presents a new twist on an old problem. What if I go down to the benefits office at my company and ask, "What would my benefits be if I retired three months from now?" After giving me the information I need, should the benefits office call the relevant vice president and say that Frank Daly's thinking about retiring? I don't think that is what would, or should, happen. But if we allow permanent and indiscriminate monitoring of employee e-mail, that would effectively be the result. It seems to me that there is a difference between monitoring Internet abuse, where the company can be put in jeopardy. I like to tell people that the real issue there is people wasting company time — essentially stealing money. However, in some cases the abuse presents a threat to the company itself, either from outside, or through the creation of a hostile environment, as would be the case with pornography. If an employee has become the subject of an investigation for whatever reason, and the employer expects to find incriminating e-mail evidence on the company server, then that is a special case. There is then a reasonable cause for monitoring. It's a sensitive and very complicated area and the last thing we should be doing is creating a sense of alienation in the workplace.

# BENTLEY

**Center for
Business Ethics**

175 Forest Street
Waltham, Massachusetts
02452-4705

*www.bentley.edu*

Center for
Business Ethics

Tel: 781/891-2981
Fax: 781/891-2988
E-mail: cbeinfo@bentley.edu
On the Web:
www.bentley.edu/cbe