Integrity Essay
By: Tyler Vogel

Judging from today’s news, the business world appears to be nothing but a host of cheats, liars and con artists. It seems as if businessmen lack any validity, trust or honesty and have no concept of ethical values. However, the vast majority of businessmen today operate in an ethical manner, but ethical actions don’t make headlines, criminal behavior does. The people who make the headlines tend to be involved in benefiting themselves, while the ones we seldom hear about work in business to benefit their customers and clients. One of those who helped spread the idea of business integrity was Mr. Scott Mecham. When Mr. Mecham served as president of the Better Business Bureau, he helped institute a code of ethics that should be help up in all forms of business. In my own experiences, I’ve known several businessmen who work everyday using a firm foundation of ethical behavior.

One recent news story that demonstrated a massive loss of ethical behavior was the Ponzi scheme orchestrated by Bernard Madoff. In a Ponzi scheme, the organizers concoct a ruse in which they convince investors of some sort of insider knowledge and promise returns well above normal. Madoff’s Ponzi scheme began in the early 1990’s, when he began convincing his friends and acquaintances to entrust their money to him and continued to do so for many years. In the classic style of a Ponzi scheme, the circle of investors slowly grew by word of mouth through executive circles, swallowing up even charities. Just last night, I saw a short news clip about a 90 year old man who lost everything he had to Madoff and is now forced to work as a greeter in a grocery store. Through gaining people’s confidence and using connections to prominent names in the investing world, Madoff was able to con people into putting billions of dollars into his crooked operation. The circle of investors continued to grow and eventually crossed oceans into Europe, Asia and the Middle East. The money placed into Madoff’s hands reached nearly $55 billion before the scheme finally collapsed. Madoff didn’t simply steal from those who trusted him, he also spent millions of dollars that belonged to others on a lavish lifestyle and the remainder of the supposed investments have disappeared, thus ending his career and destroying thousands of estates for some who could not afford such losses. Madoff, throughout the past several years, denied his clients any semblance of honesty and ethical treatment. This has been one of the worst periods in the investment world, demonstrating a total lack of ethics; however, this can be juxtaposed with other examples such showing ethical behavior including that of my own father.

My father was an Investment Broker and Financial Manager for military families. For years he helped his clients invest, but it was his business ethics that stood him apart from others in his field. My dad made sure his clients understood the basics of financial management before he started down the path of financial planning with them. My father felt that financial planning was more teaching than investing. He always said, "There is not point in owning it if you don't understand it." This included teaching families the fundamentals of financial responsibility, like how to budget their paychecks and then helping many of them work their way out of debt by learning to live within their means, having and emergency savings account and finally setting up a regular savings account. Only when his clients achieved positive control over their finances, would he then help them start investing. It was with this mode of business that my dad received recognition for his clients’ success and this is how he demonstrated his strong business ethics. He would be completely honest.
with the investors as to where their money went and what they should do with it. I strive to uphold this same code of ethics, and I feel I am already starting to do so.

I have found that ethics doesn’t simply demonstrate itself in the business world; I have also seen it shown in classrooms everyday at school. I am sure it would be easy for a teacher to just sit behind their desk all period while the kids watched a movie or something. The teachers I have had teach from bell to bell, trying to maximize student learning. Why do they work so hard? In one word: “ethics.” These teachers get up everyday, knowing they don’t have the most glamorous job, and certainly not the highest paying job, but a job in which they feel responsible for the education of tomorrow’s workers, leaders, businessmen and teachers.

So, why is a strong sense of ethical behavior important to me and what part does it play in my life? Last year, I was elected as the Treasurer of the Junior Class and in turn a member of the Student Council. This position entails raising money for such charities as the Children’s Miracle Network and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, as well as being responsible for all the financial aspects of the Junior/Senior Prom. When I was elected to the position, I had no idea that I would have to handle thousands of dollars myself in fundraising and budgeting for the Student Council. Luckily, I had the advice of my father to point me in the right direction when making definitive spending decisions. Integrity was the word I held in mind when handling the position, knowing that others were counting on my honesty to maintain the Student Council’s finances and have a successful prom. I did my best to make those around me proud and in doing so, I felt I had strengthened my moral standards and strive to push others to do the same.

In all levels of society, there are business ethics. From a national scale encompassing billions of dollars to the money raised by a local school from fundraisers, people are expected to base their decisions on honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. There will always be those who manipulate others for their own gains, such as Madoff, and there will always be those who put others’ well being first, such as my own father. Business needs to be based on integrity to the highest degree, and as Henry Ford once said, “A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business.”