

Ethics in Tourism

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Abstract:

This presentation will review the use of a case study to stimulate discussion about the complexities of ethical decisions in Tourism and Hospitality Management courses. As a service industry, tourism and hospitality management is characterized by human relationships which can interfere with a seemingly simple ethical decision. A true case about the management of international workers in the spa industry has been effectively used to teach students that the application of ethical principles in the real world may be subjective and driven by the decision-maker's own values.

Students are put in the position of the decision-maker as layers of the case unfold adding increasing depth and consequences to the decisions. The first layer presents a Spa Manager who desires to hire an employee who is temporarily lacking the credentials to legally work in the country. After hiring the employee under a provisional contract, the second layer begins when it becomes apparent that the worker's inability to obtain credentials is no longer temporary. The third layer is when the decision-maker is faced with legal consequences that affect their own employment and freedom.

Students are assigned to small groups and participate in discussion after each layer is revealed. Each group will evaluate the decision within a specific ethical framework. The utilitarian perspective would consider the greatest good, even at risk of bending the rules. The Kantian perspective would be less likely to consider bending the rules at risk of abandoning moral duty. The libertarian approach would prioritize the obligation for the business to earn profit above other concerns.

Each student group representing an ethical framework will present their perspective to the class and then a discussion will follow to consider whether their own personal values would influence their decision. This particular case results in a wide variety of student responses and they are often surprised at the different ways others reason with the case and come to their own decisions. The case provides a context of balancing outcomes related to profitability, human connections, and legal responsibility.

Keywords: case study, international workers, spa management