

Message from the Chair



The Welcome Burden of Ethics

BY JOHN B. POLLARA, CMA

It's a pretty big burden being an accounting and finance professional. Because everything an entity does eventually flows through its financial statements, we stand as the first line of defense against egregious errors and fraudulent behavior. Of course, we all know the

consequences—and the heavy monetary price that we're now paying—for those companies and individuals who failed to uphold these responsibilities. That's why it's more important than ever to stand up for what's right at the expense of our own personal well-being—in short, to act ethically.

Ethics is a word that's thrown around a lot these days, and its definition can vary. For accounting and finance professionals working inside organizations, the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA®) has done the defining for you with its *Statement of Ethical Professional Practice*. This concise Statement summarizes what's expected of all IMA members and serves as a benchmark for ethical behavior in the profession.

Although the fundamental principles of ethics have remained steady since IMA developed its first ethics statement more than 25 years ago,

some of the specific challenges have changed. The advent of advancing technology, for example, has made it more tempting to cross ethical lines as well as make unintended ethical breaches. Because these situations are evolving, IMA recognizes the importance of ongoing ethics training, something now required annually for every Certified Management Accountant (CMA®).

In 2006, to assist these CMAs and other professionals who want to support an ethical culture in their organizations, IMA introduced a new multimedia, Web-based ethics education series. The first in this self-study sequence, titled *IMA Ethics Series: Success Without Compromise*, offers an introductory overview detailing the history of ethics at IMA. It also focuses on specific ethical challenges and pressures management accountants face in applying the Statement's principles and standards.

IMA recently released the second title in the series, *IMA Ethics Series: Fraud in Financial Reporting*, which considers the same ethical dilemmas from the first course and shows how the same situation creates different problems for different people across the organization.

And because, when it comes to ethics, we can learn a good deal from hearing others' experiences, IMA also just developed its *IMA Ethics Series: Success Without Compromise Group Study*, which is now available to IMA chapters and will be featured at IMA's 89th Annual Conference & Exposition in Tampa, Fla., this June. This offering turns the self-study course content into a live group educational session, including small and large group discussions.

Along with these educational resources, IMA continues to offer its Ethics Helpline. By dialing a toll-free number, (800) 245-1383, IMA members in the U.S. can discuss with an objective third party ethical issues that they can't resolve on their own. This Helpline is available in 24 different languages and allows callers to remain anonymous if they wish.

Individuals outside the U.S. and Canada may have to dial another

toll-free access code first before dialing the Ethics Helpline. They should go to the AT&T website at www.usa.att.com/traveler/index.jsp, select their country from the drop-down menu (in the box for AT&T USADirect ACCESS NUMBERS), and dial the numbers provided before they dial the Ethics Helpline number.

By choosing to act ethically, we stand in a unique position to protect our companies, our employees, our shareholders, our financial markets—even our countries. It's a burden let's all share.

I welcome your comments at jpollara@imanet.org. ■