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Information Technology Ethics - The Future of Our Jesuit Education

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Today we seek to discuss the future of Information Technology (IT) and the inclusion of Ethics within the framework of the future of Jesuit teachings. The consequence of “doing the right thing” *is* ethics. We all already know that the term “ethics” derives from the Greek word “ethos” - meaning “character.” So when we apply *character* to IT and include ethics, we find ourselves asking “what would one do in the world of IT when no one is looking and no one will ever find out?”

Some have offered that we are born with “character” – some argue that we develop it through education, mentorship and guidance. I am of the latter group of thought, as is one of my former professors and author of the book, *The Nine Natural Laws of Leadership*. Dr. Warren Blank discussed developing the Quantum Leader within the field of IT: “This threefold approach of developing chemistry, character, and culture, or hardware, software, and network, offers a solid foundation to develop Quantum Leadership.”¹

So how do all of us as professional educators, coaches, and mentors ensure that the current and future generations of thought leaders of the highest character, these Quantum leaders that Regis University is training, gain the appropriate ethical perspectives towards a world where technology is becoming more and more complex and the ethical boundaries continue to be blurred?

I offer today that IT ethics drives the navigational course, the highway or seaway, the flight path if you permit me, for future IT ethics education. And within the IT ethics and the resultant foundational education and lifelong learning that must occur to support this navigational course, there are four key areas that we need to consider when leading our way into the future of IT ethics.

These four areas are the basis of all modern and future IT ethics education. They will provide a navigational roadmap, just as we had beacons of light leading our intrepid sailors and early airmail pilots through the weather and darkness of the unknown into the warmth and safety of daylight. These four areas are: technology, diversity, effectiveness, and people. And we will need to consider seeking the correct balance between these areas to ensure IT ethics education is meaningful and relative moving forward.

Technology and its impact on IT ethical problems will continue to grow by leaps and bounds as we embrace more and more emerging technologies. It will be one of the beacons of the navigational course. Whether it becomes an impact of IT ethics in the area of personal privacy, liberty, or safety, technology will indeed have a major impact, and, I add, will continue to be so in the future.

Diversity, as it applies to IT ethics and the educational needs to support the navigational course, is the second key area that we need to consider as the impact of technology and the resultant ethical questions will be perceived differently in the vast diverse cultures of the world. We are all aware that various intensities of technology, and the acceptance of their use, within the mores and values of the society in which they are used, differ greatly. As an example, we have seen the impact, both positive and negative, that social media has had for our news cycles, our governments, our families, and our societies. As the impact of emerging technology grows within the diverse cultures of our world, so will the IT ethical standards and the resultant questions surrounding their use.

Effectiveness is the third aspect of my suggested four areas of consideration. Effectiveness in today’s discussion requires us to consider the fact

that IT is an ever-advancing concern, and there appear to be neither limits nor boundaries to where IT will take us, there is a level of effectiveness that we need to consider in our educational pathways (beacons). IT is a growing field and will continue to grow impacting us as educators and thought leaders. For the future, I offer the notion that the general study of all IT subjects, as a basis for a foundation of knowledge in IT will become increasingly overpowering, therefore, training within a unique specialization, such as we do today in other fields of study such as medicine and law, will be the key to the effectiveness of our student's lifelong learning success. Additionally, the IT ethical concepts will be more focused on the impact – the questions may include: how does the technology work?; does it add value to our society?; and what IT ethical boundaries will need to be re-balanced?

Finally, the sheer impact of these three aspects to be considered will be horribly out of balance unless we include the people. Without considering the people that we educate to include their strengths, their weaknesses, and our own inherent uniqueness as humans – recognizing our own existence--even the most fundamental aspect which separates us from all other living things on our planet, being aware of our own mortality, would always result, in my opinion, as an out-of-balance approach to IT education and the ethical questions that we as humans contemplate when building, implementing, and using IT.


As we move forward into the vast and unknown future that is IT, and ponder where IT will lead our students' needs for education within the sphere of influence that is our human race, we must recognize IT ethics drives the navigational course for future IT ethics education. As I mentioned today, the four areas I offer to consider during this journey include technology, diversity, effectiveness, and the very fabric of our existence – the people. There may be more, as our nation's IT ethics education will be provided a navigational roadmap, those navigational beacons, based on at least these four areas of technology, diversity, effectiveness, and people. These factors are paramount to consider when we as educators enter into the thoughtful discussions of ethics, IT, and the most effective navigational roadmap to

follow as we move into the future state of IT ethics education. Whether it is the question of the ethical obligation of small companies, large national or global companies, countries, or nation-states, to have mandatory reporting of cyber security incidents that impact their customers and/or their populace; or it is the need for discussion of net neutrality within certain situational aware societies; or the impact of Open Source Code to a society and its diversity; or the wretched but real ethical IT questions of using technology as an advantage in war, both physical and cyber. These will be just a few examples of the ever-growing ethical questions that our student's will need to recognize as our society continues to develop in a diverse way, becomes more adept in emerging technology's ethical uses, and the people of the world grow in their understanding and awareness of the impact of technology in their lives.

In closing, I have had the privilege to be educated, learn, and graduate from this fine institution. I have been offered the opportunity to be an instructor and learn and grow with our student body here, and have met and worked with the finest, most insightful and compassionate people I know. These have all been life-changing events for me and my family. And as a dear mentor of mine here at Regis University, Dean Donald Archer, once shared with me during a moment of my personal educational uncertainty and doubt – “Christopher you will get out of the educational opportunities here at Regis University what you put into the lifelong learning.”

We here at Regis University have the history, the religious foundation of Jesuit teaching, and the now ever-growing educational capability with new colleges being formed, the deeply compassionate staff, and the quantum leadership, to prevail through the stormy darkness that is the uncertainty of the future impact of IT. We shall safely and efficiently navigate the roadmap by following these early beacons - technology, diversity, effectiveness, and people – and teach ethical educational IT principles to our current and future lifelong learners. We as a university, we as mentors, and perhaps most powerful, we as compassionate educators being unified in our core beliefs of the Jesuit teachings, shall prevail!

With all of you here today providing the educational leadership built on the highest levels of character we will be sure to provide the roadmap for the safe and expeditious arrival of our students into safe harbors of knowledge. We will use our Jesuit teachings to support their lifelong education within a world of uncertain but safely navigable emerging technologies.

May God bless this institution and all of you, and may God bless America. Thank you. 

Note

¹ Warren Blank, *The Nine Natural Laws of Leadership* (New York: AMACOM, 1995).