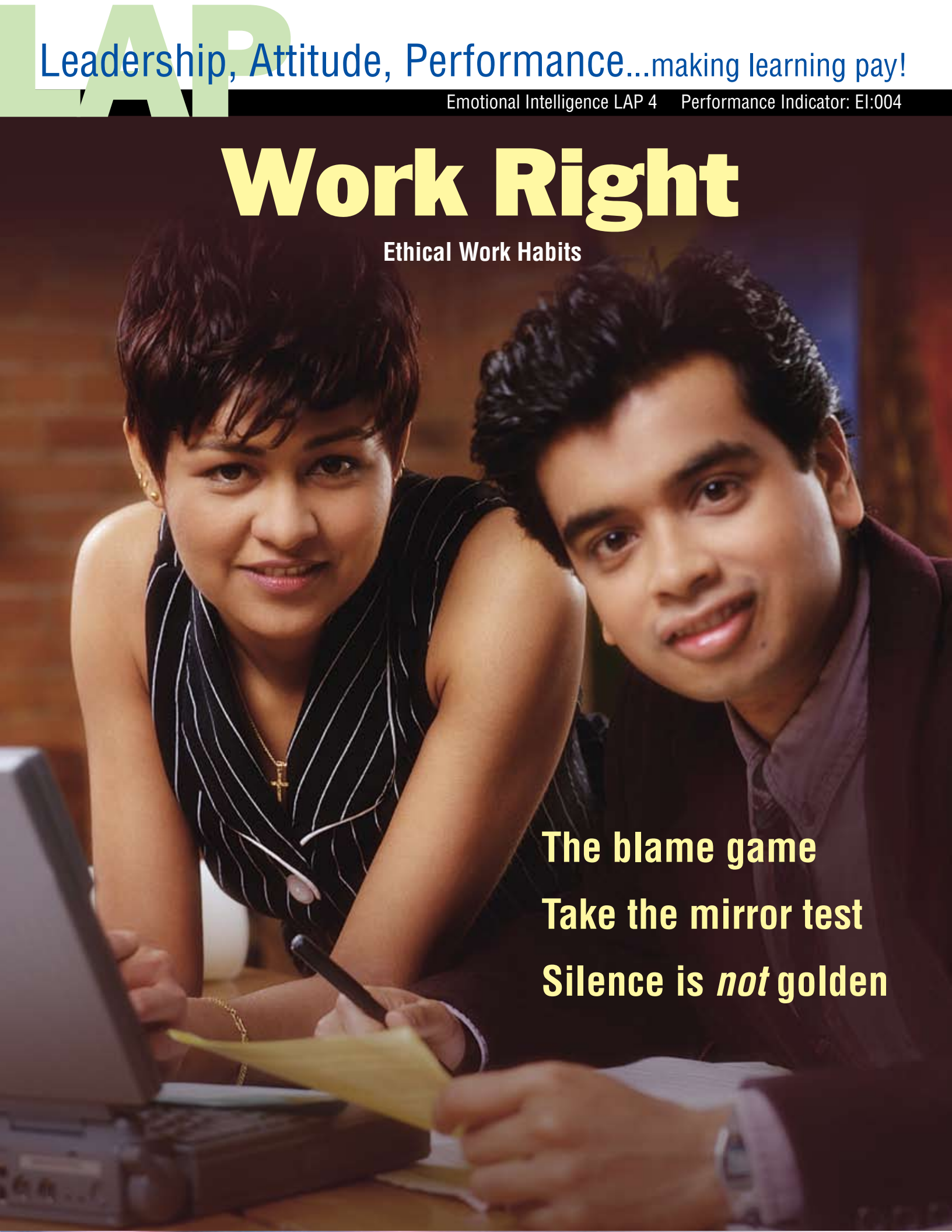


# Work Right

Ethical Work Habits

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a black and white striped sleeveless top, is leaning over a desk. She is looking at a laptop screen. A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit jacket and a purple shirt, is also leaning over the desk. He is holding a pen and looking at a yellow sticky note. The background is a blurred office setting.

**The blame game**  
**Take the mirror test**  
**Silence is *not* golden**

# So What?

From the moment you wake up each day, you face many decisions. Some decisions are very simple—involving a clear choice between right and wrong actions. However, other decisions involve “gray areas,” in which the right choice may not be obvious, and the correct decision may be difficult to make. For example, should you use your employer’s computer equipment and software to help you develop a web page for a friend’s business? Should you work on your own time or during your employer’s hours or break time?

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Over time, you develop personal values that guide your behavior at home and with friends. However, the workplace presents a new set of challenges. In many cases, no one is there to tell you what to do or to help you make the right decision. The choice is yours.

Developing ethical work behavior is your responsibility, but the rewards are great. You will gain the respect of your employer as well as that of your coworkers. You will be thought of as honest and reliable. And, your ethical behavior will lead to success on the job.



## It's Up To You

After graduation, Marilee landed an entry-level position with a well-known advertising agency. For her first project, she was assigned to work with a team of experienced employees to develop a new advertising campaign for one of the agency's top clients. Marilee wanted to do a good job, so she spent a lot of time doing research and studying the client's previous ads so that she could contribute some fresh ideas. And, all of her hard work paid off. Marilee's team members loved her ideas and used many of them in the new advertising campaign.

Then, one day Marilee overheard Josh, one of her team members, talking to company executives and taking credit for her ideas. Being a new employee, she wasn't sure what, if anything, she should do. Later at lunch, she confided in another employee, Heather, and told her what Josh had done. Heather was eager to share office gossip with Marilee, including rumors that Josh routinely took credit for other people's ideas. “But you didn't hear it from me,” Heather warned. “If you want to keep your job, don't repeat this to anyone.”

Now, Marilee was more confused than ever. Should she take Heather's advice and remain silent about Josh's behavior, or should she talk to her supervisor? And, should she have participated in office gossip with Heather? After thinking about it, Marilee wished she had handled the situation differently. What would you have done?

## Objectives:

-  Identify the characteristics of ethical work habits.
-  Demonstrate ethical work habits in the workplace.





## No excuses!

Developing ethical work habits is not always easy. Taking responsibility for your actions often forces you to make a tough choice. When confronted with a difficult decision about how to act, ask yourself if you are making excuses for your behavior. Are you trying to explain away your behavior or justify your actions? If you are, you might not be making the ethical choice.

Making excuses often means you are trying to convince yourself that what you are doing is okay. You may be tempted to think that it's all right to take long breaks because "Everyone is doing it." Or, you might tell yourself that using office supplies for personal business is acceptable because no one else will know. These statements might make you feel better about your behavior for a while. However, deep inside, you know these are just excuses to justify making the wrong choice. For example, Josh certainly knew that it was wrong to take credit for Marilee's ideas. However, he may have justified his behavior by telling himself that this is the way everyone gets ahead in the advertising business. That still doesn't make it right.

Also, you might act unethically because you are afraid of the consequences. You might think you'll get fired for admitting to making a mistake. Or, you might even think that you're helping the business. For example, maybe you give an expensive gift to a customer to make a big sale. You know you shouldn't, but you earn a big commission, and the business makes a nice profit. If no one finds out, it's okay. Not! Can you think of any other reasons why employees might behave unethically?



It was wrong for Josh to take credit for Marilee's ideas. Justifying his behavior by telling himself everyone gets ahead in the advertising business this way doesn't make it right.

## The Gray Zone

Sarah had known for many weeks that she had an important brochure to write for the sales department. However, she had been busy with other, more interesting assignments and put off working on the brochure. With the due date fast approaching, Sarah started to panic. The brochure needed to be ready when a new product was released next month. What a relief it was to find several articles on the Internet about similar products being sold by competitors.

Sarah chose three articles from the Internet. She cut major portions of each article and pasted them together to create her "original" brochure. Then, she carefully

changed a few words in each sentence, and rearranged the order of some of the sentences. Sarah completed the brochure on time and sent it off to be printed. When her boss took it off the press, he was impressed with the quality. A few weeks later, a couple of salespeople noticed that the information in the brochure was very similar to information they had found online. When confronted by her boss, Sarah admitted what she did but thought that was all right because the information was on the Internet and available to everyone. What do you think? Is it okay to present someone else's work as your own? Does changing a few words in each sentence make a difference?

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# Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall



**E**thical work habits take time to develop. They generally don't happen without a lot of hard work on your part. The good news is that you can decide what kind of person you want to be, and you can start today by taking a simple test. You won't need a pencil or paper for this test. Just stand in front of a mirror, and ask yourself these questions, "Am I the best person I can be?" and "Am I satisfied with the way I am behaving at work?" By answering these questions honestly each day, you can begin to develop more ethical work habits.

Developing and demonstrating ethical work habits is an ongoing process. Like any other habit, it may seem unnatural at first, and you may be tempted to revert to your former behavior. But, don't give up. There are ways that you can begin to develop ethical work habits. Let's look at some practical steps you can follow.

## Pick the right people

Sometimes you may find yourself facing a situation at work that doesn't seem to have a clear right or wrong answer. In these situations, it is helpful to have a mentor to whom you can turn for guidance and advice. However, you should choose your mentors or role models carefully. Make sure that you are associating with people who are well-respected in your industry and who are known for behaving ethically.

Furthermore, many people form social relationships outside of the workplace. Because you are known by the same name as your friends at work, you want to make sure that your coworkers/friends are not involved in activities that could jeopardize your career. Ask yourself, "Do I admire the way this coworker conducts himself or herself both inside and outside the workplace?" You might not want to be known as the best friend of the office gossip because others will assume you gossip also, even if that's not true. It's usually easier to exhibit ethical work habits when you associate yourself with people who share your ethical principles.



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**Who influences your ethical behavior? Is it family, friends, and coworkers? Or, do you follow the lead of Hollywood celebrities, star athletes, popular musicians, and politicians? Ask yourself if all of these influences are positive.**