

# Enhancing the Ethical Culture at Cisco

## ETHICS CAMPAIGN

Cisco Systems, Inc. (Cisco), the worldwide leader in networking for the Internet, also leads the pack when it comes to governance and ethics, consistently ranking high on the lists of best corporate citizens. This is no accident – it reflects a workforce that’s united by strong values and a commitment to maintaining high standards of business conduct.

It also reflects ongoing efforts by Cisco leadership to deliberately engage employees at all levels as committed ethical citizens who function and work in accordance with the values of the organization. In 2006, Cisco was looking for new ways to energize their high-tech workforce and speak specifically to the kinds of ethical situations their employees faced on a day-to-day basis.



Awarded an “A” rating by a panel of experts from *Ethisphere Magazine*, Cisco’s Code of Business Conduct is easy-to-read and helps to foster an ethical culture.



Their research into compelling ethics and compliance communications led them to The Network and its mPower Communications agency. After an analysis of the Cisco employee base and corporate climate, the mPower team created “Ethics Idol,” an interactive, educational flash module that engaged employees in making decisions about ethical situations. This parody of *American Idol*, created a loud buzz about ethics throughout the company, winning the praise of the client and the attention of The American Business Awards, which presented The Network with a Stevie Award in its Interactive Media Professional Education category.

On the heels of the successful “Ethics Idol” initiative, The Network partnered with Cisco again in 2007 to re-write and re-design its Code of Business Conduct (COBC). Another award-winning campaign, the fresh, high-impact Cisco COBC earned an “A” rating by a panel of experts from Ethisphere (a council of independent ethics professionals) with especially high marks for readability, presentation and style.

By delivering customized messaging around ethics and ethical situations specific to Cisco, the company continues to transform its ethics “program” into an ethical culture – where employees are not just informed about ethics, but are closely aligned with the company’s values and driven to do their part to see the company succeed.

## THE CLIENT

With the tag, “Powering the Human Network,” Cisco hardware, software and service offerings are used to create the Internet solutions that make networks possible. With more than 65,000 employees worldwide, building and sustaining an ethical culture is complicated, but the commitment the company has made to an ethical workplace has paid off, earning it the status of “repeat performer” on the Corporate Responsibility Officer’s (CRO’s) 100 Best Corporate Citizens. In the nine years that 100 Best has been tabulated, Cisco is one of only three companies that has appeared on the list every year.

## THE CHALLENGE

Cisco discovered early on that an ethical culture was not the result of a “program,” but a dynamic process and a series of campaigns that kept ethics messaging top of mind and spoke to every employee on a regular basis. Their research into off-the-shelf solutions, however, led them to offerings that were static in nature and directed at workplaces that didn’t look or function like theirs.

Any initiatives launched would need to appeal to a global workforce that was highly-technical and fully computer literate – traditional training courses and standardized print messaging would not be a good fit for the Cisco employee population. The Ethics Office was seeking something dynamic and interactive, something easily accessible from employee desktops and something that would speak directly to situations that were relevant to the Cisco experience.

“‘ETHICS IDOL’ HELPED RAISE AWARENESS AMONG CISCO’S EMPLOYEES THAT EACH ETHICAL DILEMMA IS NOT ALWAYS CUT AND DRY...”

Jeremy Wilson  
Manager, Cisco Ethics Office



The “Ethics Idol” flash module series won the praise of Cisco and the attention of the American Business Awards with a Stevie Award win.

## THE SOLUTION

After initial contact, The Network’s mPower Communications agency entered into a discovery phase to better understand the demographics of Cisco’s workforce, its existing methods of communications and its specific communication objectives. There was discussion around the types of vehicles and messaging that would best appeal to – and effectively engage – Cisco employees. The mPower and Cisco teams also discussed the specific kinds of ethical dilemmas that Cisco employees faced and identified some key situations to use in the campaign.

Based on information gathered, the mPower team proposed a series of four, fun episodes of “Ethics Idol.” Each of the modules introduced an animated “contestant” who told the story of his or her ethical dilemma using action-packed visuals and witty song parody. Once finished, three quirky judges offered their opinion and employees were tasked to vote on which judge provided the most ethical answer.

The episodes were accessible to employees from their desktop and rolled out one-at-a-time for a period of four weeks. Using polling technology, employees could instantly see how their vote compared to how other employees voted. This revealed how making

ethical decisions isn't always black and white. After the voting process, employees were given a detailed explanation from the Ethics Office about the Cisco policy pertaining to the ethical scenario played out in the "Ethics Idol" episode.

The initiative was hugely successful and demonstrated that learning about ethics didn't have to be rote or boring. The scenarios illustrated through "Idol" were complicated and designed so that the proper course of action was not obvious. As Jeremy Wilson, manager of the Ethics Office at Cisco, pointed out, "'Ethics Idol' helped raise awareness among Cisco's employees that each ethical dilemma is not always cut and dry, and if they should have any questions, they should refer to the Cisco Code of Business Conduct for guidance."

The success of "Ethics Idol" prompted Cisco to contact The Network's mPower Communications agency in 2007 to explore a re-write of its COBC of Business Conduct. As the centerpiece of an ethical culture, they wanted to transform their COBC into a highly readable, highly understandable tool for their employees.

The mPower team met with the Cisco brand identity team so that they could craft a COBC that reflected the look, tone and voice of Cisco. Based on information gleaned from its initial discovery, they knew that active voice and user-friendly language were important components of the project.

"AN ATTRACTIVE CODE THAT PASSES WITH FLYING COLORS."

Ethisphere™ Magazine,  
50 Codes of Conduct Benchmarked

Once COBC topics were defined and sections assigned, each section began with an affirmative statement written in an employee voice – "I Respect Others," "I Protect What is Ours," "I Follow the Law," etc. These simple statements had a powerful effect on the text that followed, leading to a writing style that was conversational in tone, as if it was one Cisco employee speaking to another.

The design was carefully crafted to complement the user-friendly content. Quick-read, callout boxes were prominently positioned to help employees "Connect with the Code," "Learn More" links provided more detailed information and "What If" scenarios customized the COBC to address Cisco-specific issues. A clean look and high-impact images of Cisco employees served to enhance readability. And the COBC was translated into multiple languages and formats (including an online version with interactive links and a hard copy version) to reach every member of Cisco's global workforce.

The screenshot shows a page from the Cisco Code of Business Conduct. It features a blue sidebar on the left with the heading "Connect with the Code" and a list of key principles. The main content area is divided into sections: "Cisco says..." which includes a quote from the CEO and a "Make good choices" section; "What if..." which introduces an "Ethics Decision Tree" flowchart; and a "Learn More" section with links to "Ethics Decision Tree" and "What If Scenarios".

This screenshot shows the "I Share My Concerns" section. It features a large, high-quality photograph of a woman in a professional setting, looking thoughtfully at the camera. To the left of the image is a dark blue text box with white text that reads: "I understand my responsibility as a Cisco employee to do the right thing when it comes to my own actions and to share my concerns when I see or suspect something that could harm my company. I like knowing there are places to turn when I have a question or concern."

Spreads from Cisco's Code of Business Conduct

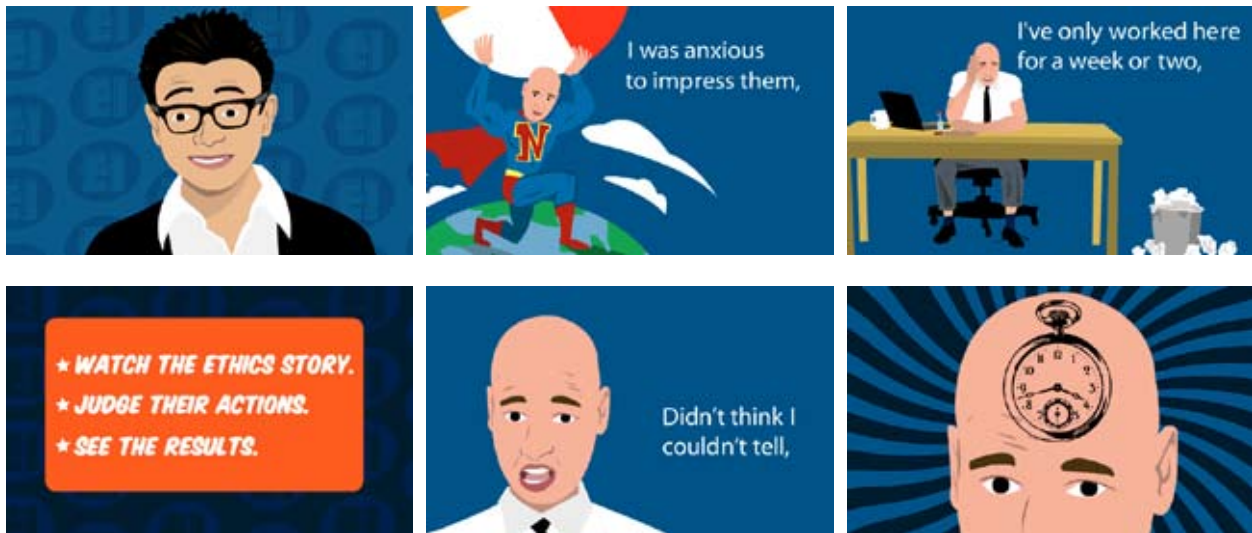
## THE RESULTS

"Ethics Idol" drew rave reviews from both internal and external audiences. To date, over 10,000 Cisco employees have viewed and voted on the ethical dilemmas. Launching this innovative program offered the Ethics Office an opportunity to speak directly to the workforce about key Code of Business Conduct issues. Its fun format and interactive element made it stand apart – and above – traditional ethics offerings and reached out to employees directly from their laptop to entertain, engage and educate. In 2008, "Ethics Idol" earned a Stevie Award from the American Business Awards in its Interactive Media Professional Education category. "Ethics Idol" is still a key communication and training tool for Cisco. The episodes are offered in various orientation and training classes throughout Cisco today.

Cisco's new COBC was introduced in 2008 and was praised for its user-friendly style, its coverage

of key topics and its highly readable content. In a survey among its employees, 94% of employees agreed that the new Code was easy to read and 95% agreed that it was easy to comprehend. Thanks to an effective launch and a multilingual format that made it accessible to all, Cisco's annual COBC certification process was seamless – within the four-week period of the certification campaign, 98% of employees certified that they had received and read the COBC and, within 8-10 weeks, 99.6% of employees certified.

The partnership between Cisco and The Network's mPower Communications agency produced two different campaigns, but both had similar objectives: to increase awareness, build upon an existing ethical culture and give employees the tools they need to make good, ethical decisions on the job every day. Cisco and The Network continue to communicate and consult on initiatives designed to engage employees at every level to do the right thing.



Stills from one of the Ethics Idol episodes



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