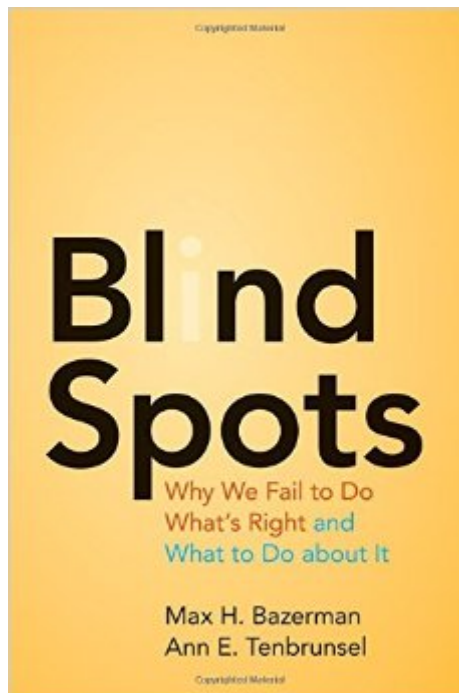


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# Blind Spots: Why We Fail To Do What's Right And What To Do About It



## Synopsis

When confronted with an ethical dilemma, most of us like to think we would stand up for our principles. But we are not as ethical as we think we are. In *Blind Spots*, leading business ethicists Max Bazerman and Ann Tenbrunsel examine the ways we overestimate our ability to do what is right and how we act unethically without meaning to. From the collapse of Enron and corruption in the tobacco industry, to sales of the defective Ford Pinto, the downfall of Bernard Madoff, and the Challenger space shuttle disaster, the authors investigate the nature of ethical failures in the business world and beyond, and illustrate how we can become more ethical, bridging the gap between who we are and who we want to be. Explaining why traditional approaches to ethics don't work, the book considers how blind spots like ethical fading--the removal of ethics from the decision--making process--have led to tragedies and scandals such as the Challenger space shuttle disaster, steroid use in Major League Baseball, the crash in the financial markets, and the energy crisis. The authors demonstrate how ethical standards shift, how we neglect to notice and act on the unethical behavior of others, and how compliance initiatives can actually promote unethical behavior. They argue that scandals will continue to emerge unless such approaches take into account the psychology of individuals faced with ethical dilemmas. Distinguishing our "should self" (the person who knows what is correct) from our "want self" (the person who ends up making decisions), the authors point out ethical sinkholes that create questionable actions. Suggesting innovative individual and group tactics for improving human judgment, *Blind Spots* shows us how to secure a place for ethics in our workplaces, institutions, and daily lives.

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## Customer Reviews

You are not as ethical as you think you are. That is the basic message from behavioral ethicists of this book. It's an interesting mix of cognitive research with anecdotes on why it is that people in business do unethical things. An easy read for the most part, but with plenty of substance. Can be a bit redundant. Really good for people who want to understand why, despite their best intentions, we still end up making mistakes and doing things we know are unethical, even after the fact.

Recommended.

This is a short but enlightening book. It provides ample objective evidence to prove that we are oftentimes unable to live up to our very own ethical standards. Worse, we are habitual revisionists and very skillful in rewriting our past to cover up our moral blunders. The underlying causes are not totally unexpected: conflict of interest, egocentrism, overreliance on consequentialist analyses, and being exposed to an unethical culture or milieu. What is important is that many unethical behaviors are in a sense unconscious and unintentional. Key examples are drawn from mainly the business world, but the principles illustrated can be generalized and extrapolated. The authors spend the last crowning chapter on suggesting ways to combat these moral flaws. Awareness of the problem is, as usual, the very first step to take.

Bazerman and Tenbrunsel describe why people with good intentions may fail to act in accordance with their own ethical standards. Relying on studies from the field of behavioral ethics, psychology, and other social sciences they demonstrate presence of "blind spots," or ethical vulnerabilities which are often outside of their own conscious awareness. "Without an awareness of blind spots, traditional approaches to ethics won't be particularly useful in improving behavior" (p. 37). They note that approaches such as developing ethics codes, or giving mandatory lectures on ethics are often ineffective. Fortunately, they offer specific strategies to help the readers avoid "ethical sinkholes." They ask the readers to consider, for example, whether a problem is defined as an ethical issue or a non-ethical issue (such as a business decision or an engineering decision); whether prejudices that are outside of their conscious awareness may motivate their behaviors; whether informal or unwritten forces within the organization encourage employees to ignore or minimize the ethical implications of a decision; or whether isolation, uncertainty or time pressures may increase the likelihood of an unethical decision. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel look at ethics from the standpoint of individual, institutional, and societal decision making. Their book is clearly written with good examples and research results that are clearly explained and it has applications for business

owners, employees, professionals, and everyday individuals.

Even if I wasn't in a business ethics class, I would consider reading this book. It is very insightful and allows the reader to uncover the ethical blind spots between how ethical you think you are and how ethical you actually are. A learning experience.

The book's subtitle is very accurate on its subject: why we fail to do what's right and what to do about it. The authors outline their case and walk through different drivers of ethical lapses (ethical bounding, ethical fading, etc.) as they are manifested in different levels of organization: self, person-to-person, groups and society as a whole. It's a very helpful framework for starting to think about the gaps that exist between what we should do and what we end up doing. I wish it were better edited to sharpen up terminology, reduce redundancy and give the book a bit more life (many of the illustrating stories would benefit from a bit of Gladwell-like attention to narrative just to help with pace), but the core of the book is the data and accompanying framework -- and those are both solid and useful. I would highly recommend any managers trying to build more ethically-consistent organizations read this early on in their efforts.

This book is an easy and fairly short read, with quite deep ideas. It has almost nothing to do with the subject of 'Ethics' in its traditional meaning - what is the right thing to do? Instead, it concerns decision making, why we fail to do the right thing even though we want to. If you have done reading already in cognitive biases (psychology of decision making) or behavioural economics, there will be no new knowledge here. However, the application is novel and interesting, because the book describes how these same biases undermine our own belief systems (whatever they may be) instead of the more common description of how the biases undermine rationality. It is clearly targeted at managers - referring to business decisions throughout - with a minor nod also to policy decisions. However, the book should have broader appeal, since it is also relevant to personal decision making. Note that the examples would be familiar to US residents, but less familiar to the rest of us.

It seems that every month an ethics scandal has overtaken the headlines. But politicians and CEOs are no worse than anyone else. It turns out that people are quite good at recognizing right from wrong in the abstract, but at the moment, we overvalue ourselves, overlook the obvious, and make bad decisions. This book, written by two leaders in their field, is an excellent introduction to the

human psychology behind poor ethical choices, why they are so pervasive, and how we can place ourselves in a position to succeed.

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