

COVER STORY

HAVE YOU THE COURAGE OF YOUR CONVICTIONS?



Do you care about where your coffee comes from?

Going in the right direction

The idea of working with a company that genuinely gives something back is what attracted Siobhan Molloy to Cafédirect. Set up 15 years ago, the organisation's products carry the Fairtrade mark. It buys produce directly from farmers in 11 countries across Latin America and Central Africa.

"The whole ethos is to bring back as much money as possible to those farmers," says Molloy. "The profit they make is enough to send children to school and develop the communities they live in."

According to Molloy, last year some 86pc of Cafédirect's profits went back into training and development in the communities the company trades with so that the farmers can produce an even better quality product.

Cafédirect sells to some of the best-known retailers in the UK and Ireland and competes head on with other suppliers in the marketplace. The main office is based in the UK where some 30 people are employed. The majority of staff are in their late 20s or early 30s and come from the

fast-moving consumer goods sector.

According to Molloy, the organisation attracts like-minded individuals who want to work for a company with the right ethics. "At a personal level, it's really critical for me. I don't want to work in a business where my salary is generated at the expense of other people."

Molloy is Cafédirect's head of sales and says she relished the opportunity to join the company. "I've always wanted to use my commercial skills in a company like this.

I love the cut and thrust of business so to be able to combine that and be part of a whole business that is making a huge contribution to a quarter of a million people is fantastic. We all want and deserve a fair crack at life. I've been given many great opportunities and I believe everybody should get a chance."

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ETHICAL

An ethical workplace can mean more to many people than a snazzy company car or bumped-up pay packet, discovers **Elaine Larkin**

OFFICE location, salary, working hours, opportunities for promotion, company culture and job motivation are all factors that people consider when accepting a job offer.

However, these are not the only things that matter. Bubbling under the surface are issues such as ethics and values. According to recent research, there is a very strong link between a company's ability to foster an ethical corporate culture and an increased ability to attract, retain and ensure productivity among employees.

Whether a company acts ethically is a significant factor in the average individual's willingness to work for an employer, according to LRN, a US provider of governance, ethics and compliance management applications and services. In a survey completed by LRN, a majority of workers — 94pc — say it is 'critical' or 'important' that the company they work for is ethical; 82pc say they would prefer to work for a company with ethical business practices than receive higher pay at a company with questionable ethics. Some 80pc of those surveyed cite disagreement with the ethics of fellow employees, a supervisor or management as the most important reason for leaving a job; and 21pc cite pressure to engage in illegal activity.

Cathal Divilly, project director at the Great Place to Work Institute, says that of the companies that made it into the top 50 Best Companies to Work for in Ireland 2006, 83pc of the total amount of employees who responded to the survey felt their management was honest and ethical.

"What we've seen is that a lot of the top organisations have people as a huge part of their values. People are now becoming an integral part of a company's values and mission statement. The top companies are not just paying lip service to those values, they're actually trying to live and breathe them."

Grainne Madden, founder and senior consultant of GMJ Associates, a corporate social responsibility (CSR) and business ethics consultancy, says

there is evidence that Irish people are becoming more ethically aware. "People are beginning to ask questions about where their food comes from and where the products they buy come from. That tells me there's been a shift in how they are thinking about their own activities."

Time well spent

We spend so much of our time at work, says Madden, it's really important you feel you're doing something worthwhile and are not being put in a position where your morals are being compromised. Human beings do not want double standards in their lives, Madden adds. "You want to be the same person both in and out of work."

Frank Collins, president of the National Recruitment Federation, says that asking a question about a company's ethics might do the interviewee more harm than good. "You can certainly ask a question at interview," he comments, "but you should have done the research beforehand."

As regards ethics, he says, it is important for a job seeker to know exactly what it is he or she is looking for in an employer's ethics. "If you are somebody who is not going to take a job with a company that is not ethical, you need to make that decision before you go for the interview in the first place."

Hurting other people would be the top of the ethical checklist for many people — they wouldn't like to be involved in a company that, for example, supplies the arms trade. For other people it may be to do with health, animals, nature, organised crime, prostitution, people trafficking — the list is endless, depending on an individual's values.

Madden believes ethics in the workplace is all about business behaving responsibly and monitoring how it interacts with employees, suppliers, local community and shareholders.

Finding these things out is not an easy task and may involve detailed research by an individual into what the company's business interests are. Madden suggests people look up company details, see if they have a CSR report which could give a very brave interviewee the basis for questions to



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ask at interview. "The thing about interviews now is it's not just about a company interviewing you to see if you're right for a position; it's also you interviewing the company," she says.

Peter Gaynor, director of Fairtrade Mark Ireland, says one of the things employees could put on their ethical checklist is: does your employer serve Fairtrade Mark products?

Fairtrade allows us to help give people in developing countries a better deal. Millions of people in developing countries are poor, not because they don't produce anything, but because they often receive only a tiny percentage of the value of the goods we buy from them. It is more ethical to choose something that gives them a better income, he says.

"Over the years we have called the top 1,000 companies in Ireland encouraging them to switch to Fairtrade and would have had a success rate of about 5pc. So there are plenty more businesses that could convert."

The main Fairtrade product currently in Ireland is coffee and more than 60pc of Fairtrade coffee sales are through the out-of-home market — this includes coffee shops and workplace canteens.

It's important to also be clear about what CSR is. Madden notes that "a lot of people still have this old-fashioned idea that it's about writing a cheque and donating to charity, but it's not. It's about running a responsible business and if one of the actions you take is to possibly get involved with a charity that's fine.

"But it's more important that you're treating your employees, your suppliers and your customers the right way first," Madden continues. "Companies who start handing out big cheques to charity to get their picture in the paper and who are messing about their employees at the same time have no credibility."

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Published by: Independent Newspapers Ireland Ltd