



Ethics: Speaking Up When It Matters

YOUR KEY TO THE TAX COMMUNITY

Speaking Up When it Matters

The Real Test of Ethics – Making Decisions in Uncertain Times

“When you have something to say, silence is a lie”

Jordan Peterson

Caryn Maitland CA(SA) RA

Caryn is a qualified CA(SA) and RA with a rich academic and professional background. She lectured Advanced Financial Accounting at UKZN and other institutions until 2011, and coordinated the module on the Pietermaritzburg campus. Additionally, she served as Section Head of Financial Accounting and Deputy Head of the School of Accounting at UKZN, as well as an Associate Professor at Limpopo University.

Since 2006, Caryn has conducted independent workshops and seminars for professional accountants and consulted on various technical issues. In 2011, she transitioned to her own business as a technical freelance consultant and trainer. She specializes in financial reporting (IFRS, IFRS for SMEs, and general accounting), assurance, legislation, and ethics.

Caryn serves SAICA in various capacities, including Deputy President of the Eastern Region Council, Vice Chair of the National Small Medium Practices Interest Group, NSMP representative on National Council, a member of the Legal and Compliance Committee, and technical advisor to the SAICA Eastern Region District, including the Midlands District Association which she chairs.

She has a passion for Corporate Governance and has advised various Boards of Directors. Since 2018, she has worked extensively with commerce and industry, assisting directors to understand their compliance obligations, as well analysts, and other users of financial statements to interpret, prepare, analyse, and forecast financial results.



*In the midst of chaos, there
is also opportunity.*

Sun Tzu

Why This Topic Matters Now?

- Ethics are most tested during times of uncertainty.
- Global Economic Uncertainty: Inflation, rising interest rates, business failures.
- Geopolitical Turmoil: Wars, trade restrictions, and supply chain disruptions.
- South African Challenges: Load shedding, fiscal pressure, tax shortfalls.
- Regulatory Shifts: SARS tightening compliance enforcement.

*It is not the strongest of the
species that survives, nor
the most intelligent, but the
one most responsive to
change.*

Charles Darwin

The Pressures Tax Practitioners Face

- Economic Stressors: Business closures, job losses, tax revenue decline.
- Regulatory Ambiguity: SARS' evolving stance on deductions and tax treatments.
- Corporate Failures: Economic strain leading to ethics lapses.

SAIT's Ethical Code – Your Guiding Light in Uncertainty

*Waste no more time
arguing what a good man
should be. Be one.*

Marcus Aurelius

- Integrity – Stand firm even when pressured to compromise.
- Objectivity – Avoid bias and conflicts of interest.
- Professional Competence – Keep up with tax law changes.
- Confidentiality – Protect client information.
- Professional Behavior – Uphold compliance, even when competitors cut corners.

Applying Ethical Decision Making Models

*To know what is right and
not do it is the worst
cowardice.*

Confucius

- Consequentialism: What leads to the best outcome for society?
- Deontology: What does SAIT's Code require, regardless of consequences?
- Virtue Ethics: What would a respected tax professional do?

Scenario: A client pressures you to bend VAT reporting. How do you respond?

Case Study: Tax Planning vs. Tax Avoidance

*Ethics is knowing the
difference between what
you have a right to do and
what is right to do.*

Potter Stewart

Scenario: A client asks you to shift profits offshore to avoid SA tax.

- Is it legal? Maybe.
- Is it ethical? Does it violate the spirit of the law?
- Does it align with professional integrity?

Do what is right, not what is easy nor what is popular.

Roy T. Bennett

Case Study: The 'Gray Area' Tax Deduction

Scenario: A client wants to claim an expense that SARS has not explicitly disallowed.

- Would you sign off if SARS audited this in two years?
- Would you defend this in front of a judge?
- Does this compromise your integrity?

Case Study: Pressure from Firm Leadership

*The only thing necessary for
the triumph of evil is for
good men to do nothing.*

Edmund Burke

Scenario: A partner instructs you to be 'flexible' on tax interpretations for a key client.

- How do you respond?
- Push back with ethical reasoning.
- Seek peer guidance or SALT ethics consultation.
- Document all discussions for protection.

Strategies for Ethical Resilience

Live so that when your children think of fairness, caring, and integrity, they think of you.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

- Clarify Your Ethical Boundaries: Know your red lines before a crisis.
- Develop Courage to Say No: Ethical drift starts with small compromises.
- Stay Informed and Connected: Keep up with SARS rulings and tax trends.

Final Thoughts

*When the wind of change
blows, some build walls
while others build
windmills.*

Chinese Proverb

- Turbulent times test ethics more than ever.
- Following the law is not enough—principles matter.
- Tax practitioners are gatekeepers of integrity in the financial system.
- Today's ethical choices determine tomorrow's professional reputation.

Final Thoughts

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