

Simply Having A *Belief* Does Not Excuse Our Responsibility For Actions

We obviously have a variety of beliefs. They can be religious, cultural, personal or other, and they can be an important solid foundation for families and groups. We not only take pride in them, we sometimes use them to justify our actions. We hear ourselves and others say “I believe...”, and we take this as something to be respected. But, can beliefs sometimes cause ethical problems for us and others? Yes, of course they can.

The problem can come from the actions that follow from our beliefs. We can have any belief that we want, however strange or odd. They are only in our minds. We can even think that the moon is made of green cheese, and if we don't tell anybody about this, no one will know and there won't be any consequences. But some beliefs can be potentially harmful to others. An idea in itself does no harm, but, when we *say or do* something that is harmful, then we have an ethical problem. Of course, it is realized that many hurtful actions such as appropriate punishment are necessary. But, we are concerned here with those that can be avoided or fall in a “grey” zone in our interpersonal interactions.

Consider a simple, even if extreme example, the actions of terrorists. Terrorists' beliefs as such do not harm anybody, but if the actions that follow cause harm, then there is a serious problem. Killing a doctor who does abortions because we believe in protecting life is still murder, no matter what we believe. We don't condone such actions simply because they are based on beliefs, however sacred. *A personal belief, solely and simply by itself, cannot justify harmful actions to others. More is needed to justify such actions.*

In the workplace, which is our focus here, it seems that most colleagues understand and respect this. Many of the cases in this book are about people acting on their beliefs and it is fascinating to analyze this in some detail. If we or others end up doing hurtful things in the workplace, whether they can be avoided or not, then maybe we need to examine, be aware of and perhaps modify our beliefs. They impact our collegial relationships in many ways.