

ABRACOM

CODE OF ETHICS

FOR COMMUNICATIONS AGENCIES

Why a Code of Ethics?

Most known codes address what we know as “morals”. Morals is the *set of norms, rules, laws* that guide the lives of individuals and groups in society configuring what is called *ethos*, a society’s brand, the way people live and relate to each other based on certain values.

Ethics is the critical eye set on *ethos*, a reflection that asks about the fundamentals and the coherence of values. It is in the field of ethics that are the *principles* that support rules and laws.

Mindful of that we can perceive that morals has a particular character as *ethos* – custom, law, rules – varies from society to society, from one era to another. Conversely, ethics has a universal character – its principles have as ultimate reference human dignity, the *common good*.

Therefore, when we seek a code of *ethics*, we should contemplate in it a perspective for reflection. It is there that the principles that serve as a benchmark for our actions should be made explicit. However, as we cannot leave aside the practical aspect of every day, the code will also offer indications to perform these actions in the appropriate manner, and serve as a tool to review them.

The norms and rules that an organization sets out for the work that its directors and employees perform are made explicit in the *Code of Regulations*. These regulations will be more or less accepted depending on how much they are supported by ethical principles. That is the reason why a *Code of Ethics* is created to present the guiding principles for an organization’s actions that will valid not only within the organization but also in the global context of society.

As the social life to which it refers, a code is not something static, that is set once and for all. The critical eye set on practice and the code itself will enable that, in time, reviews and amendments are made towards the desired objectives.

“When the other enters the stage, ethics is born.”
Umberto Eco

Introduction

ABRACOM is an organization that gathers companies headquartered in Brazil and that are defined as **corporate communication agencies** that provide integrated services in the fields of diagnostics, planning and implementation of communication programs, training, and measurement and assessment of results. Member companies render services and produce products like: press relationships, investor relationships, government relationships, in-house audience relationships, community relationships, crisis management, institutional advertising, editing of publications, interactive communication, visual programming, business videos, market and public surveys, opinion audit research, and event organization.

By reason of the diversity and complexity of the services they offer, and of the plurality of the relationships they establish with multiple customers and audiences, we believe it is important to make explicit the principles that should guide the work and relations at the Association. Based on the assumption that the ethical conduct of agency professionals is important to enhance the quality of services, develop the organizations for which they render services and, therefore, to build the Brazilian society.

The contemporary world context has been marked by issues that involve relations among individuals, groups and nations. Failing to acknowledge differences, plurality generates inequalities, prejudice and discrimination, breeders of violence and cruelty.

In the Brazilian society and our work environment, we have face conflict situations, particularly in our social and economic relationships, especially those related to the job and service market. Parallel to the speech about the need for respect and solidarity, we have to live with disloyal competition and distrust in our relationships.

We take part in this scenario as analysts and as agents in the creation and advertising of ideas, thereby influencing decisions and making opinions. Thus we have to perform our activities with responsibility. Only by watching our own actions can we perform as citizen companies and contribute with our work to change our society towards the common good.

This Code defines and describes our professional posture towards everyone we relate to: competitors, customers, community, press and employees. It applies to every company that is an ABRACOM member, and from which we expect compliance with the principles herein set out.

Principles

Corporate communication agencies shall have their actions guided by the following principles:

- *Respect* as the basis for every relationship. This implies acknowledging the other and defending the *dignity* of every human being.
- *Justice* whose meaning is *equality in difference*, the support to all individuals and segments of society to exercise their rights of all natures.
- *Solidarity*, synonymous to endeavor in promoting actions that favor growth and achievement for all and everyone.
- *Dialogue*, as in sharing and confronting ideas, with the perspective to expand knowledge and enrich culture collectively.

These closely inter-related principles can be recognized by the following values in the attitude of our professionals:

- *Honesty* and *rectitude* in conducting our businesses.
- *Responsibility* in carrying out actions that effectively benefit the collective.
- The quest for *excellence*, expressed in the social quality of our products and services.
- The *commitment to seek the truth* and the strict enforcement of its presence in every internal and external work relationship.

- *Humbleness* and *courage* when facing challenges.
- *Integrity* in building and preserving our assets and image in society.
- *Clarity* and *accuracy* in divulging information, without harming confidentiality, endeavor in creating communication channels and structures that favor and promote the free circulation of information

Relationships

1. Competition

Every ABRACOM work is performed in compliance with the laws that govern competition. Our competitiveness is based on our management and negotiation skills.

In order to fight predatory and disloyal competition, communication agencies are required to:

- a. Refrain from prospecting customers that are already catered by other communication agencies with similar services.
- b. Refrain from using spiteful means to recruit professionals who work with competitors thereby harming them or acquiring confidential information.
- c. Refrain from copying competitor's projects.
- d. Actively support the practice of transparent bidding processes, free from artifices that illicitly favor any competitor.
- e. Refrain from offering illicit advantages to benefit the result of a bid.
- f. Refrain from setting degrading prices and/or dumping.
- g. Cooperate with competing companies when the need so requires it, and seek agreement for concepts and criteria.
- h. In conflict situations, assume a stance open to negotiation and understanding.

2. Customers

The competent performance of communication agencies is revealed in complying with the following precepts:

- a. Providing customers with all information about the work to be provided, clearly stating the specific duties of the communication agency and professionals with whom they relate, defining quality and service scope, and the professional commitments and responsibilities so that customer can decide whether to accept or decline the service.
- b. Declining to accept agreements that harm the communication agency dignity and are against the principles herein set out.
- c. Holding in confidence any information that is entrusted to the agency as a result of the service provided, and not disclosing any information that may harm the customer, with the exception of criminal offenses.
- d. Not using any strategic information obtained from customers in the agency's own benefit, or as a mean of bargaining personal or business advantages or benefits.
- e. Not condoning with untruthful *briefing*.
- f. In case of conflict of interests, acting with transparency and explaining to customer about the conflict in question.
- g. Not supporting any kind of discrimination whether it is age, gender, color, race, religious belief, ancestors, etc. when servicing customer.
- h. Respecting the organizational and professional structure that customer has made available to the agency.
- i. Refrain from representing customer if not authorized to do so.

3. Press

In order to establish relationships that are supported by the values we uphold, agencies are required to comply with the news organization's conduct codes, and the following is not allowed:

- a. Engage in illicit practices that may corrupt or compromise the integrity of communication channels or the exercise of the journalist profession, including pressure and financial compensation to journalists.
- b. Spread false, misleading information, or information that cannot be supported by known and demonstrable facts.
- c. Address journalists in a fashion that compromises the agency image.

4. Employees and Collaborators

Agencies shall create an environment that allows employees to work individually or in group with professional responsibility, by enhancing their knowledge and attitudes through the ongoing improvement of their competence and well-being.

Relationships in the work environment shall be based on the respectful and responsible conduct of all professionals, regardless of their job positions, in order to seek the common goal. The work environment shall be free of offenses, slander, any kind of exploitation, repression, intimidation, sexual harassment, verbal or non-verbal violence, or favors that may be construed as personal obligation or commitment, particularly if derived from the relation between those who lead and those who are led.

Caring for employee's health and physical and psychic integrity, and promoting quality of life are fundamental values. Complying with Occupational Medicine and Labor laws and regulations is necessary to ensure safe and healthy work conditions.

It is also advisable that agency professionals do not work at the same time with a communication agency and a news organization.

5. Suppliers

A supplier shall be engaged based on the principles herein defined, thereby establishing a preference for working with citizen companies that have good reputation and support social accountability practices.

It is advisable that communication agencies adopt policies to engage service providers that stimulate creativity and value diversity.

Supplier relationships shall excel by transparency, compliance with agreements and concern for technical development and financial balance.

Conclusion

This Code presents the work guidelines for communication agencies that are ABRACOM members. They reveal the ideal of a competent performance, and the Association's seriousness, fine-tuning and integration with the objective of building a democratic and pluralistic society, and a dignified and happy life for all.

The Code can serve also as a reference for writing a *Self-Regulating Code* or *Regulations* that contain the normative indications for communication agencies to carry out their work, taking into account the peculiarity of their organization and the specifics of the demands with which they deal every day.

Any suspicion of non-compliance with the Code will be judged by ABRACOM's Council of Ethics by means of a representation submitted by any member, pursuant to the procedure to be created by the Council. It is for the Council to promote discussions, and from time to time review the Code in the light of the work they have performed and the interaction between member agencies and the population in general.

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