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INTRODUCTION

Disney’s Monsters University is a prequel to Disney’s Monsters Inc. It focuses on Mike and Sully’s college years and their adventures in trying to be readmitted into Monsters University, the most prestigious university in the monster world. Contrary to the audience’s original belief, Mike and Sully initially disliked each other. Mike did not appreciate how easily Sully won over every monsters’ respect and awe due to his family’s name, and Sully disliked how a volleyball-sized monster was outperforming him in class. Tension between the two climaxed during finals when each tried to scare the other. Their egos disrupted the exam, destroyed a symbolic university artifact, and led to their eventual expulsion from the Monsters University Scare Program! In order to gain acceptance back into the program, Mike made a deal with the dean of the school. Each year, the school hosts the Scare Games that physically and mentally test each monster to determine the scariest group of monsters at the university. If his team should win, each monster would be reinstated back into the Scare Program. However, if they should lose, Mike will be forced to leave the entire university with no hopes of ever becoming a scarer… And unfortunately, Mike and Sully’s team is composed entirely of monster rejects that previously failed the Scare Program. In addition to testing each monster, the games end up presenting several ethical dilemmas along the way, forcing Mike and Sully to make difficult decisions that could not only affect themselves but their entire team.

BUSINESS / UNIVERSITY WORLD PORTRAYAL

The entire monster world operates in a similar manner to the human world. There are suburbs, cities, and means of transportation from one to the other. Children run around playing with one another, while parents socialize and gossip. Children also attend schools, beginning
with preschool and finishing with college. The entire world, including its scariest places, appears vibrant and bright with color, casting the world in a positive light.

The movie begins with a preschool field trip to Monsters, Inc., where Mike witnesses first hand the power of scaring and how it can be used to generate energy to power the entire monster civilization. The scariest monsters are friendly to one another and have a nonchalant view to what their job requires of them, scaring human children. It is not considered wrong. The sole purpose of the act is to fuel the monster economy and ensure it can continue to operate at its highly developed level. During the field trip, Mike snuck through a door, a device used by monsters to enter children’s rooms, to observe a monster he admired scaring a child. He was so impressed that he too wanted to become a “scarer” and set an impossible goal for a monster of his stature to enroll and be accepted in the Scare Program at Monsters University, the most respected school in the monster world.

Monsters University is very similar to a human university as well. People form friendships with similar groups of people. You have the cheerleaders, the nerds, the students who do not care about anything, and the jocks. In addition, there are several fraternities that exist for the different groups of people. Students are seen during the day attending class in which they have no interest, and partying at night. Overall, everything appears very similar to the human world. However, due to the high level of similarity, monsters can also face ethical situations that can encompass many individuals.

**BUSINESS ETHICAL DILEMMA #1 – Eliminate All Opportunities to Succeed**

During final exams, monsters were instructed to scare a dummy child. If their scares were insufficient, the monsters would be forced to leave the Scare Program, which accepts only the scariest monsters, making it extremely difficult to graduate with a degree in that program from
that school. During the exam, Mike and Sully were practicing their scare faces, trying to best each other. Their egos disrupted the class and led to the eventual destruction of an important school artifact. The dean of the school reacted by expelling Mike and Sully from the Scare Program. She refused to accept any form of apology and sincere effort the two said or did, denying Mike and Sully of a second chance, which is what I would have provided if I were the dean.

This may seem fair given the circumstances, but can be considered unethical if applied to the business world. For example, when I approached my former boss with an idea to increase efficiency in the month end reporting process without sacrificing integrity, she vehemently denied me the opportunity to explore and develop this idea. The current process made it extremely difficult to provide management with the information it needed in a timely manner, forcing management on multiple occasions to make executive decisions without the necessary reports. My idea would utilize the more complicated processes in excel, something my boss was unfamiliar with and unwilling to learn. In addition, my former boss developed the current month end process, and she did not want to navigate away from a project she developed to help increase efficiency in the past. I approached my boss twice about the subject, and each time she refused without listening to my arguments. My boss’ refusal to allow me to develop an alternative method was negatively impacting the Cost Department’s ability to meet its deadlines. I ended up working on the process improvement outside of work hours, extending the timeline needed to develop the new system. In the end, the new month end process was adopted by all project teams located throughout the local area, increasing the ability and frequency of presenting the board with timely month end reports.
BUSINESS ETHICAL DILEMMA #2 – Discredit Individuals & Third Parties

During the Scare Games, a party was organized by one of the teams participating in the competition for all remaining teams to attend. Oozma Kappa (OK), Mike and Sully’s team, was asked to approach the stage to be honored for making it to the third round of the games. Something no monster considered possible due to the low caliber of monsters that Oozma Kappa had to work with. While the host of the party was congratulating them, bright colored paint, stuffed animals, and glitter was thrown upon them and the team’s picture was taken. The picture was posted in the city’s newspaper with the headline reading “Cute-Ma Kappa”, discrediting the team’s ability to compete and succeed in the games.

The book, Trust Us, We’re Experts!: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles with Your Future, provides many examples where businesses and universities used the term junk science or other methods to discredit the work of scientists. For instance, Dr. Arpad Pusztai, considered the world-leading expert on lectins, experimented with potatoes by genetically modifying their composition while he was employed at the Rowett Research Institute located in Aberdeen, Scotland. He inserted the snowdrop lectin into vegetables, hoping to produce a potato safe for human consumption but immune to insect pests. The results were vastly different than expected. The vital organs of the mice consuming the genetically modified potatoes changed significantly in size, posing serious negative health problems. In order to continue the research, additional funding was required. The Rowett Research Institute allowed Pusztai to appear on a TV interview with World in Action, describing his work. Pusztai specifically stated that the snowdrop lectin was used in the experiments. However, a press release by the director of his own institute noted that the Concanavalin A lectin was used instead, which is known to harm the immune system, severely damaging Pusztai’s credibility. In addition, the research institute
forbade Pusztai from speaking with others about his research, limiting his ability to repair any damage. Furthermore, the director of the institute publicly criticized Pusztai, denouncing his competence by referring to him as senile. These tactics severely tarnished Pusztai’s credibility, taking years for him to rebuild his image (Rampton and Stauber 153-159).

Another incident of discrediting others involved researcher Betty Dong at the University of California. Dong published the results of a limited study, stating Synthroid, a thyroid medication, was medically superior to similar drugs. Boots, the company manufacturing Synthroid, provided Dong with $250,000 to perform a large-scale study in order to increase its reliability. However, the study generated a different outcome from Dong’s original research. The new study concluded that Synthroid was no more effective as drugs offered by Boots’ competitors. As a result, Boots prohibited Dong from publishing the results of her research (Rampton and Stauber 215-216). “The study sat on the shelf for five years while Boots waged a campaign to discredit Dong and the study, bombarding the chancellor and other university officials with allegations of unethical conduct and quibbles over the study’s method, even though the company itself had previously approved the method” (Rampton and Stauber 216). After seven years of battling Boots, Dong was able to release her research findings, resulting in a class-action lawsuit and Boots paying disgruntled customers $98 million (Rampton and Stauber 216).

Many businesses use their power to discredit others in hopes of achieving a desired result. This approach may be considered ethical if it prevents companies or individuals from hurting others. However, in most cases, a business has used its power in an unethical manner to promote sales and increase profits.
BUSINESS ETHICAL DILEMMA #3 – Coerce Others to do as Commanded

While training for and competing in the Scare Games, Mike was constantly seen telling his fellow team members to do as he commanded. He believed that no other monster on his team had half of the intelligence he had when it came to scaring children. This attitude almost eliminated Oozma Kappa from the games until Sully became annoyed with Mike’s leadership style and appropriately took the initiative to think outside of the box, saving Oozma Kappa from elimination.

Forcing others to do what you want based on intimidation or intelligence has resulted in many unethical business practices. One famous example is the Enron debacle. Arthur Anderson, Enron’s auditing company, was constantly pressured into allowing Enron to use aggressive accounting methods that did not adequately capture Enron’s true financial situation. Enron repeatedly employed Ernst & Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers to complete certain accounting tasks, giving the impression that Enron may choose one of these firms to become its new auditor. This was a huge threat to Arthur Anderson due to the extravagant auditing fees it collected from Enron, which eventually was considered a conflict of interest when the public and government discovered the fraud. Enron ultimately filed for bankruptcy to cover a portion of its huge losses and several executives were indicted and sentenced to prison. In addition, Arthur Anderson’s refusal to require Enron to adopt a new accounting method led to its own insolvency, and forced Congress to implement new accounting procedures to prevent such scenarios from developing in the future.

In both the WorldCom and Waste Management scandals, upper management directed its employees to incorrectly categorize items by capitalizing expenses. Upper management used its authority to pressure employees into performing actions they knew were unethical and illegal.
Management threatened employees with termination or the prevention of future promotions to help influence the employees’ decisions in conducting the unethical behavior. In the end, WorldCom filed for bankruptcy, and executives from both companies were indicted and sentenced to prison.

Power through one’s position in a company has been a key contributor in financial statement fraud throughout the years. Authority does not give a person the right to take advantage of individuals and use fear to influence their decisions. But rather, authority is given to a person in order to lead employees in an ethical manner and promote business development.

**OTHER BUSINESS ETHICAL ISSUES**

Throughout the movie, several other ethical issues were noticed, creating potential negative consequences for those affected. There were two instances in the Scare Games where monsters cheated. The first resulted in the disqualification of a team, allowing Oozma Kappa to remain in the games. Oozma Kappa originally finished last in the event, eliminating them from competition. However, due to the other team’s unethical conduct, Oozma Kappa was allowed to compete in the next round while the team who cheated was eliminated instead. The second incident involved Oozma Kappa. During the final round and without his team’s knowledge, Sully intentionally broke the scare counter on the dummy child’s bed in order for Mike to achieve the score necessary to win the games. Mike later discovered what happened, and Sully emitted his wrongdoing to the dean, resulting in Sully’s expulsion from the school. This incident caused future events to occur and led to a greater appreciation and understanding between Mike and Sully, helping the two monsters grow and become a successful duo later on in their lives. In the end, movie viewers witnessed the repercussions associated with poor decisions, but also
observed how individuals can use what they learned from these past experiences to succeed in the future, outlining a valuable lesson for our society.

**SUMMARY**

Growing up, I never made a connection between the villains outlined in Disney movies and their relation to ethical issues in the real world. I now have a greater understanding and appreciation for the level of effort and detail that goes into creating and linking these family-oriented movies to our culture. Instead of blindly accepting what I see, I now analyze the material and try to form connections between the information presented and society as a whole.