“The Devil’s Advocate” is a drama/suspense featuring the extremely successful defense attorney Kevin Lomax and his rise to power from rural Florida to New York City. He has a case record of 64-0, never losing a case. He has the best record of any attorney in Florida and
attracted the attention a very powerful New York City law firm that wants to lure him out to New York City to work for John Milton, the owner of the firm.

Kevin’s mother, who has a strong relationship with her church, is very weary of her son’s departure to New York with his wife Mary Ann. She feels that New York City has become “a dwelling place of demons”. But despite her opposition and her “bad feelings”, Kevin and Mary Ann move out to New York into a high-class lifestyle. They are treated to a luxury hotel with all expenses paid during their stay by the firm. Eventually, they decide to stay and make New York their home.

As Kevin begins his work with the firm, he is dedicated to meeting John Milton’s expectations. He continually works late and spends all of his time at work instead of with his wife. He becomes more and more preoccupied with his cases that he fails to see Mary Ann’s growing depression. Kevin also begins spending more time with John as they start to share their personal life going to boxing matches, dinners, and social gatherings.

Kevin’s first case is a minor health code case. After suspicious occurrences during the trial resulting in a victory, he is assigned to a very public triple homicide case. John Milton, whose faith in Kevin is becoming more and more suspicious, appointed Kevin to the case. The publicity of the case makes his relationship with Mary Ann more and more distant as she drifts further into psychosis. Her hallucinations increase as Kevin’s success increases. She ends up in a psychiatric hospital and eventually commits suicide.

In the final scene, it becomes apparent that John Milton is in fact Satan and Kevin is his son. It is a classic confrontation between good and evil. John has set the stage for Kevin fall victim to temptation and reproduce with his half sister to produce the Antichrist. John resists
temptation and eventually regresses to his original case where he is forced to make his first ethical decision.

The business world is portrayed in a very negative way with this movie. It shows that defense attorneys all engage in lies and deceit to get jury on their side. There are countless displays of deceit and deception on the part of Kevin. He continually takes unethical approaches to resolving his cases. My next three examples will give a detailed description on how the law firm and Kevin are deceitful and are portrayed in a very negative way.

1st Ethical Dilemma

During the first scene of the movie, Kevin is defending a schoolteacher who has been accused of sexually assaulting a female student. The student is on the stand testifying and it becomes extremely apparent to John that the teacher is guilty. John must take a break from the trial and collect himself. He is faced with two decisions as well as two loyalties. His first loyalty is to his conscience and emotional well-being and the second to his client who is writing the check. He can either retire from the defending attorney or try to manipulate the student into saying that she lied. John chose to scream and provoke the student with verbal abuse in an attempt to reduce credibility. He eventually gets the student to say she made up the story, which creates uproar in the courtroom. The victim’s parents are infuriated, as the schoolteacher is found not guilty of the charges.

I feel that the main unethical decision here is the manipulation of the student. Kevin’s power of manipulation greatly outweighs the student’s defenses. I feel that it’s unethical to market to younger children who don’t have the cognitive ability to decipher real from fiction,
therefore, I don’t think that it was ethical for Kevin to continue the trial the way that he did. This portrayed the courtroom into a place that is loaded with deceit and manipulation. It creates a very negative image towards defense attorneys and what they will do or say for money.

I would never have the moral flexibility to be a defense attorney, especially in this case. My best way to resolve this situation is to not put myself in the position in the first place. However, I would have liked to see Kevin retire as the teacher’s attorney. I think it is unethical to manipulate a child for money so I would never have gone through with the trial if I were in Kevin’s shoes.

2nd Ethical Dilemma

John Milton’s successful law firm has grown globally and their revenue has now attracted the attention of the justice department. It turns out that the firm has a lot more going on than just legal representation. They have their hands in heavy-arms dealing, drug cartels, money laundering and many more violations. Most employees of the firm are unaware of the extracurricular activities but the managing attorney, Eddie Barzoon, is aware of the situation. Eddie mentions that he knows that the justice department has been watching and yet he has done nothing. There was no cinematic resolution to the issue because Eddie Barzoon and the representative from the justice department are both killed.

I found this situation to be unethical because Eddie was aware of the illegal dealings of the firm and did nothing. He could have turned the evidence over to the justice department when he first discovered it but he did not. He continually put off and avoided any contact with the justice department. However, this situation was given a positive spin in the film. It
portrayed Eddie as negative for even contemplating the idea of turning the firm over to the justice department. The film glorified an employee’s ability to follow instruction without question.

I would have done things a little differently if I were in Eddie’s shoes. I would have spoken with the justice department right away. After our class session on whistle blowing, I would feel much more comfortable dealing with a situation like this. I didn’t want to see Eddie get murdered, I would have liked to seen him testify against Milton’s firm after hearing all of the illegal activities they were involved in. This situation was not a focal point of the film, but I still found it unethical.

3rd Ethical Dilemma

Kevin is faced with another ethical dilemma as he is defending Alex Cullen in a highly public, triple homicide case. As Kevin gets more and more information on the case, he starts to believe that his client is guilty. The only evidence Kevin has is that Cullen’s secretary will testify that Alex was with her during the murder. However, Kevin finds out that his assistant will be lying on the stand. Again, he has to question what he is doing. Kevin decides to put the lying secretary on the stand and Cullen is found not guilty.

This was the final trial in the movie and again Kevin wins the case. He uses tactics would be considered false advertising in the business world. He bases his case of the false eyewitness testimony similar to how a company could base their research on a physician who is not certified. Both situations are unethical. I would have liked to see Kevin lose the case.
because he became so wrapped up in himself that he has forgotten about his personal life and his relationships.

This is another situation that I would have rather avoided completely. I find that I make the best decisions when I’m not put into a situation like that. However, I would have not put the witness on the stand if I knew she was lying. He’s making unethical decisions for money, which I do not agree with. Kevin was too wrapped up with winning and keeping his undefeated streak. The record would be something that I’m less concerned about so I would not make unethical decisions to keep it.

Concluding Remarks

I learned that an attorney and a marketer have a lot in common. They are both trying to persuade someone into an action and there are ethical dilemmas for each profession. I would it very difficult to be a successful attorney and still meet my ethical standards. This is why I chose to study marketing instead of law.

I also learned how many different professions use deception and manipulation to their advantage. I found it interesting on how the movie portrayed the law to be so open to interpretation and subjective. This exercise also helped me apply the strategies and information I’ve learned in this course to situations that are outside of the workplace. Overall, I really found this exercise beneficial because of its ability to take the principles we’ve learned throughout the semester and apply them to situations outside of the workplace.

Bibliography