Experiential Activity
Cinematic Movie: The Great Gatsby
Introduction

The Great Gatsby is a movie set during the early 1900s when America was going through a pretty dramatic change. The country had a lot going on including: a great divide between the newly rich and poor, prohibition, a raging stock market, industrial expansion, affordable automobiles, and a perception that life’s dream, the American dream, was in reach. Gatsby, the main character of this movie is a perfect vigilante whose perception is loved by many but known personally by few. Gatsby’s mission is to win back the love of his life Daisy. The story, as told through the eyes of Nick Carraway, Daisy’s cousin, is one from an interesting perspective as he is not like most others in 20’s. Nick Carraway is innocent, but later corrupted by social norms of the society he lives in. For the most part, he is a good man when compared to others in the movie like Tom Buchannan, Daisy Buchannan, and Jay Gatsby. The movie ebbs and flows into three distinct sections. In these sections, Nick affectionately known as Nicky is first moving to the city and getting used to the raging metropolis of New York. Next, he is thrust onto the party scene as provided by the city’s wealthiest, Mr. Buchannan and Mr. Gatsby. Nick starts to lose his innocence as he gets drunk repeatedly and opens up to the anything goes party lifestyle afforded to those surrounding him. Lastly, Nick is sought out to help Gatsby fulfill his mission to reunite with Daisy. Gatsby had prior relations with Daisy whom ended up marrying Tom Buchannan. Nick is faced to struggle through this love triangle in order to do what is right. Sometimes he doesn’t know what that right thing is. Throughout this interesting movie, many business ethical dilemmas arise. Over the course of this paper I will make it a point to highlight those and the ways in which they affected the story and today’s real world.
Business World Perception

The perception of the business world in the movie is very similar to thoughts about business today. The perception is presented as one of complete mistrust between those in power and those seeking it. Similar to the financial crisis prior to 2007, the business world in Gatsby is thriving. Markets are performing, millionaires are being made, and the financial good times are rolling. Those making money are portrayed as notoriously bad folks. When the party stops and the money leaves in 2008, all of a sudden these bankers, financiers, and people of power are perceived as greedy crooks. The same can be said for the perception of businessmen in Gatsby. They are in power, have money and don’t care about society’s perception. They are wreck loose villains who have an inner perception much different that reality. In my opinion, the business world in the Great Gatsby was portrayed in a negative light. Gatsby, Buchannan, and other businessmen have little respect for the law. They act with little disregard for others feelings.

The business world is portrayed in the following way: glutinous, ignorant of others, and with motives of greed and self-betterment. Businesses and businessmen both are portrayed as glutinous in Gatsby because they are concerned with making more and more money. Money is everything. It buys women, clothes, houses, boats, cars, and other items deemed to be possessions. An example of this gluttony is from a scene when Gatsby shows Daisy his house. The tour is an advertisement for excess from the size of his home, to the pool and lake views, his king sized closet, church-like grand organ, marvels and treasure from around the world, butlers and maids, etc. Business and its minions are portrayed as ignorant as they don’t care about anyone but themselves and money. An example of businessmen being ignorant of others is the major player’s misuse of others. Gatsby and Buchannan specifically use others as pawns. They are ignorant of Daisy’s, Buchannan’s mistress, and Nick as they continually treat them with an
eye on their worth. Gatsby and Buchannan play into the saying what are you worth to me today or what have you done for me lately. Continuously they utilize other’s needs, wants, and desires to manipulate a scenario to arrive at their own selfish desired outcome. For this reason, they are ignorant to the fact that they are misusing friends, loved ones, resources, business successes, etc. Lastly, business is portrayed as being greedy and out for self-promotion. Gatsby and Buchannan, whom I have deemed agents of business, again are acting only for their own self-promotion. Nothing is ever enough. This concept can be applied to houses, clothing, women, liquor, you name it. Their images and self-promotions driven by greed are more important than loved ones, the law, and moral guidelines. In conclusion, the movie conveys a consistent message about businesses and their agents. They are not to be trusted and pursue power above all else. The rules don’t apply simply because businesses and their agents have money and power.

Business Ethical Dilemmas – Bad Business Deals

Nick Carraway was pressured into a business ethical dilemma that still carries on today. He was presented and had the opportunity to get inside information from both Gatsby and Buchannan. Very discreetly, they both offered him insight into the bond market. Insider information can be defined as the following: strategic information on the inside meaning the information is not known to the public. This information not known to the public is beneficial because it may influence the company’s earnings and security trades. The situation presented to Nick can be described in further detail below. On behalf of Tom Buchannan, the presentation of insider information was attempted at a social gathering at Toms’ residence. Nick showed up to reunite with his cousin Daisy and Tom, upon finding out that Nick was a bond salesman, quite discreetly took him aside. He put an arm over Nick’s shoulder and asked if he needed any
assistance. Tom Buchannan’s many business connections were marketed to Nick at his discretion. The issue was resolved quite matter of factly as Nick just changed the subject. In the case of Gatsby, Nick was offered a similar opening into the life of connections. Gatsby offered Nick refuge and favors in his vast social networking promising him the world if only he could gain access to Daisy. He displayed this prowess by taking Nick to a local club an introducing him to any number of influential folks who could give him anything from jobs, insider information, and business connections.

Nick surprisingly did not give in to the offers of both men. He wanted to do the right thing and trade bonds as he saw fit. He brushed off the offers with a joke and a change of conversation and went along his business none the wiser. The issue was resolved because he did not pursue business opportunities with either man. A better solution for Nick may have been to report the two men to local authorities for engaging in illegal business conduct. Given the fact that police and agencies during that time period were in on the deal, makes a suggested solution much more difficult. This was compounded by the fact that Nick had become acquaintances with these men. The best possible solution was the course of action that Nick had taken which was to totally disregard offers for jobs or insider information. He could have taken this one step further by recognizing what kind of company he had been keeping. The pledge to garner friendship and favors from Buchannan and Gatsby in return for business success should have been a warning sign to Nick. In this instance, he should have distanced himself from those not only acting ethically and morally wrong, but also breaking the law. The best solution would have been for Nick to ignore the proposals, discontinue relations with these men, and warn others such as Daisy about this fraudulent conduct.
Business Ethical Dilemmas – Ignoring the Law

The issue of ignoring the law was presented quite clearly and frequently throughout the movie. It was even pointed out that the law and ramifications of general society rules were to be ignored at all costs. Ignoring these principles made the characters look like vigilantes. Carraway, Buchannan, Daisy, Gatsby and other characters routinely broke the law and had no fear for repercussions. These examples of law breaking include consumption of alcohol during prohibition, prostitution, and illegal use of motorized vehicles to name a few. Business professionals, elected officials, representatives of companies, and other characters were seen several times during the movie buying liquor, drinking, ignoring general traffic principles, and paying for prostitutes. In the case of a business ethical dilemma derived from illegal activity, Gatsby was a prime example. He owned and operated drug stores. These stores were a cover for the real business he was running in the back room of these stores. He made money selling bootleg liquor. Gatsby even took Nick Carraway to one of these operations. They walked through the door of a normal looking convenient store and knocked on a sign revealing a secret passage into an underground society. Underneath the store was a bar and social club which promoted all kinds of illegal activity ranging from consumption of alcohol, prostituted women, and illegal business engagements. Nick had no clue what he was getting into upon entering the establishment. He ponied up with Gatsby and initially refused a drink, but after being pushed and going with the rest of the crowd he eventually gave in and started drinking. If it hadn’t been for the group mentality and Nick’s desire to fit in, I don’t believe he would have engaged in illegal and unethical behaviors. As discussed in class, Carraway showed signs of somebody acting in Kohlberg’s stage 3 for engaging in group behavior and avoided stage 4 by acting against the law. Carraway proved he was a pawn for Gatsby and Buchannan by taking part in their behaviors. He
was ripe for further manipulation which proved to be the case as the movie progressed. In the movie, the dilemma was never resolved and only further encouraged. In my opinion, the issue should have been solved by Nick Carraway walking out of the establishment. He couldn’t report the misconduct to the authorities because they and other elected officials were taking part in the illegal consumption. When you’re in a no-win situation, it is best to remove yourself from it. Carraway could have made an excuse, returned to the office, or just been honest with Gatsby and left the scene. From Gatsby’s perspective the solution to the ethical dilemma is much more challenging. He is the one owning and operating a bootleg alcohol operation out of the back of a drug store. The only way to solve this ethical business dilemma is to shut down the business, lobby to change the law, or come clean to all that this is the operation he is running and not do so in secrecy.

**Business Ethical Dilemma**

Many unethical decisions are made traveling between New York City and the residences of Gatsby, Buchannan, and Carraway. In the work class industrial park, the cast of characters commit infidelities, take advantage of a less educated working class, and even run over Buchannan’s mistress with a vehicle. It is in these scenes that a business ethical dilemma arises. This dilemma is the clash between the haves and have nots. Businessmen are utilizing the ‘city of dust and black soot’ for production. This industrial city is portrayed as dark and desperate in comparison to the bright light of glamorous New York City. Living and working condition standards were not the same between the two cities or classes of people. This issue can be compared to the difference between 3rd world countries working conditions and advanced nations. There is very little an individual and more specifically the characters in this movie can do to change this. In Gatsby however, the industrial city was ripe for exploitation. An example of
this is the black smog continuously billowing in the air from factory production. Businesses took their production to this city to take advantage of the cheap labor. To solve this dilemma Gatsby and Buchannan could have used their considerable resources to change perception and promote proper working standards. I would have resolved this manner with at a minimum not partaking in the city’s marketed vices such as liquor consumption. When you cannot change something that you disagree with it is best to avoid the situation altogether and constantly look for avenues of change.

Other Business Ethics

Jay Gatsby was known for throwing parties. He tried to keep the rich richer and those supporting people in power happy as well. It takes a good supporting staff to make others great. A piece of this happiness included utilizing people and presenting them with positions of conflict. Jay kept many people including public employees and businessmen alike on the payroll. By keeping these folks in his hip pocket, it begs the question how can these agents act in the best interest of their representatives when they are being paid to represent Gatsby? Businessmen of the time, especially during Prohibition, utilized other's greed to buy their own interests. A specific example of this is in the customers who attended the bars with Gatsby. When everyone is breaking the law and are in your corner, specifically Gatsby’s, it presents an ethical dilemma. The following ethical dilemmas arise from such a conflict: favoritism, improper payment to encourage unethical behaviors, representation of the wrong agent, and unlawful favors.

Lessons Learned

It is always easier to learn from others than to make your own mistakes. From this exercise, I learned many things from the unethical business decisions made by many of the characters in the movie The Great Gatsby. Some of these key lessons include avoiding situations
where a group will influence or pressure a decision and avoid making the first mistake. Several examples from the movie involved social norms shaping the behavior of individuals and little decisions made started behaviors that created more missteps along the way.

I learned that it is okay to be a maverick or go against the grain. In Gatsby, individuals engaged in unethical behavior simply because they knew others were engaging in similar actions. Prohibition and the mindset that everyone is breaking the law is a simple example of this. Gatsby ran a bootleg alcohol sales shop in the back of a drug store. Buchannan and Gatsby consumed alcohol, provided it to others, and encouraged this behavior to others at social engagements and at the parties they threw. Nick Carraway, a first perceived straight laced character, was persuaded to start drinking at one of Gatsby’s establishments. At the coaxing of Gatsby public officials and others, it was deemed to be acceptable to break the law. Everyone was doing it so why not. The social norms were a self-fulfilling prophecy. People drank because they perceived everyone else did and everyone else did it because they thought that was the thing to do and so the cycle continued. The lesson learned I learned from this is don’t let the group change the perception of an idea to something acceptable. Don’t just follow the crowd.

Lastly a good lesson to be taken away from this movie is the criticality of little decisions. The phrase the devil is in the details resonates in this scenario. Little decisions lead to bigger decisions and once you compromise your morals or beliefs it is easier to do it a second time. It’s also easier to make bigger compromises. Nick Carraway provides a good example of this when he starts out by making a single compromise by accepting a drink. Next he moves on to raucous partying and engages with folks unafraid of legal consequences and with a penchant for engaging in borderline ethical behavior. Soon he is aiding with affairs and mingling with men blinded by greed and power utilizing both to pursue endless means. The lesson I learned here is to not
compromise on the little issues because it is a slippery slope that leads to compromising again and again. A focus on the details will lead to success.
Bibliography: