The Shawshank Redemption

**Storyline**

In *The Shawshank Redemption*, our main character is Andy Dufresne who has just been wrongfully accused of killing his wife and a golf pro she was having an affair with. He was found guilty and sentenced to serve two life sentences back to back at Shawshank Prison. The first night there Andy realizes what he is in for when the captain of the prison guards, beats a new inmate to death for crying his innocence in the middle of the night. Andy soon meets Red, who is known as “the man who knows how to get things” at Shawshank Prison. Red smuggles in miscellaneous items for prisoners to help them deal with everyday life. Items like posters, a bottle of champagne, chessboards, etc. Red becomes skeptical when Andy asks him for a rock hammer which is used to shape rocks, however he eventually decides to do business with him.

Outside of the prison, Andy was a banker who had a high education in accounting. After it comes to the attention of the captain that Andy is has specific skills, he and the warden decide to move him to the library where is knowledge can be better utilized than in the laundry room. Not only do all the guards at Shawshank use Andy for taxes and other financial issues, but so do guards at other nearby prisons. The warden of Shawshank Prison eventually establishes a system where he uses the prisoners for free labor on construction projects where they can underbid any local contractor. Enough money can be skimmed off the top to make the warden a very rich man. He uses Andy to turn a profit and set up accounts to launder money into. Eventually a new inmate comes to Shawshank that can prove Andy is an innocent man. In order to protect his laundering scheme, the warden refuses to give Andy a fair trial and instead punishes him in the most confined area in the prison known as “the hole.” The new inmate is asked to meet the warden outside of the prison to discuss if he would be willing to testify that what he said was
true, when he says yes, he is assassinated on the spot. Andy then refuses to run any of the warden’s schemes, but by doing so the warden says he will serve the hardest time there is and spend more time in “the hole” than in his normal cell. It seems as though Andy is giving up and other inmates are worried he is pondering suicide. On one morning during role call, Andy does not come out and the guard goes into his cell only to discover he is missing. Andy tunneled out of the prison after twenty some years of chipping away little by little at the prison wall. Before the guards discovered he was gone, Andy dressed up and under another alias, went and cleaned out all the accounts which he and the warden were wiring money too. Although this is still technically an illegal act, it is very difficult for the viewer to see this as “unethical” because it is obvious after what he has been through that he does deserve it.

**Portrayal of the Business World**

The business world in this movie at times is portrayed as negative. With all the money laundering schemes the warden of Shawshank Prison sets up and how the guards treat the prisoners unfairly, it is not exactly positive. The warden is first viewed as a devout Christian, who lives his life by “Discipline” and “the Bible.” At the same time he contradicts himself because he skims money off the top of the tax payer’s money. The one scene that particularly shows how cold of a person the warden truly is occurs when Andy has served over a month in the hole, and he refuses to continue doing the laundering schemes for the warden. The warden begins to threaten him with cruel punishment and how everything Andy worked for (prison library) will be destroyed if he stops. This gives you a sense of a man who feels he is an ethically fair person but really has no idea how much power he exerts and how unfair he is. His ego got in the way of him and he had to show Andy he had more power by putting him in the hole for an extreme amount of time and trying to break him down entirely. On the other hand, I would like
to argue that in a sense this movie sheds a fairly positive light on the world of business ethics. I would say the actual business in the movie is fairly unethical, but at the same time the movie revolves around the idea of justice and redemption, which to me is shown fairly positive. After the warden realizes Andy escaped and exploited him for his laundering scams, the warden glances at a piece of art his wife made that says “His judgment cometh and that right soon…” This may go beyond deeper meanings than just business, but in my opinion it says that everyone will get what they deserve eventually. At the end of the movie when Andy has escaped and has collected all the money from the accounts, although what he is doing is illegal, it is still shown in a positive light because he got what he deserved. While talking to Red in prison after his 20th year he says, “Whatever sins I did I have paid for them and then some.”

**Ethical Issues**

Several ethical issues come up in this movie, and for the most part they involve harassment and financial scamming. The first one I will discuss is cruel punishment (harassment) from the captain guard onto other prisoners. Another issue would be the money laundering the warden participates in by almost running a “slave” labor by not paying the prisoners who were working on his projects so he could underbid any nearby contractor, and eventually keep all the revenue that came from those projects by wiring it to several accounts. Finally the third issue actually involves the main character Andy Dufresne, who as a viewer you feel happy for him but at the same time we need to acknowledge that what he is doing is still unethical, despite his circumstances. He participated in a fraudulent scheme and false identification.

The first issue explored is harassment by the prison guards onto the inmates. As mentioned earlier, the captain of the guards beats a man to death on the first night Andy is staying at Shawshank Prison. When the inmates are tarring the rooftop, Andy comes off as trying
to offend the captain during conversation, the captain then grabs Andy by the shirt and says, “Step aside boys this guys having himself an accident” Implying that he was going to throw him off the roof top to show that he was an authoritarian. Now for starters, prison guards and inmates are not exactly business associates. For example prisoners cannot just say “I quit” and then leave the camp grounds, it is mandatory that they are there. However they do have rights and it is unethical for prison guard to assault one of them let alone kill some. Later on in the movie, after Andy escaped and notified the media about the corruption at Shawshank Prison, the captain of the guards is arrested and charged with murder.

The second issue uncovered is how the warden receives his funds into Shawshank Prison. He utilizes Andy’s knowledge with numbers and after the warden underbids local contractors on construction jobs, he has money sent to an account created by Andy that is a false identity. The warden is using the free labor of the prisoners for his own personal profit, Andy says, “By the time the warden retires, I will have made him a millionaire.” Andy knows that what he is doing is illegal, but a part of him wanted to get on the good side of the warden. The warden keeps Andy happy by allowing him to expand on the library, letting him keep contraband items that would normally be confiscated, and other small benefits along the way.

Finally, After Andy escapes he goes to every bank and town and withdrawals the money the warden had saved up after he assumes the identity of the created account. Now first of all, he is an escaped convict so already being outside of the prisons jurisdiction is illegal. Second, using a false identity to clean out a bank account is highly illegal, and if caught he would head right back to jail. However if you know what the viewer knows, and that he was convicted guilty when he did not commit the crime, it feels a lot more justified. The warden was also the one that instructed him to have all of the money he profited laundered into a separate account. At one
point when Andy asks for a new trial to plead his innocence after the new inmate will give a
testimony, Andy tells the warden that he will not mention anything about the laundered accounts
because he would be held just as responsible as the warden. The warden responds by punishing
him with more time in “the hole.” The point being is that the money was not Andy’s to spend,
even though it felt justified and even as viewers it did not seem unethical. At one point he says to
his friend Red, “The funny thing is on the outside I was an honest man, straight as an arrow, I
had to come to prison to become a crook.”

This movie showed how some people may think they are leading by example (the
warden) and are upstanding citizens but they tend to forget all of the illegal activities that they
participate in. The truth is this movie is also about so much more than just ethical business
issues, and it is definitely worth checking out.