“The Devil Wears Prada” is the story of the simple yet smart Andrea “Andy” Sachs, a Northwestern graduate, and her professional journey in the pursuit of her becoming a serious journalist. However, Andy interviewed for the job “a million girls would kill for” at fashion magazine Runway but not as a journalist but rather the second assistant to the merciless editor-in-chief, Miranda Priestly. Under the impression that after one year of being Miranda’s assistant she would receive Miranda’s support to pursue other opportunities – possibly even a journalistic position – Andy accepted the offer. However, any preconceived notions Andy may have had in hopes to learn about the magazine business as a second assistant were of little or no avail since her position primarily catered to Miranda’s personal needs 24/7.

Additionally, Andy was a fish out of water at Runway. She found herself in an industry where she thought beauty was overstated and superfluous, even though Runway was one of the most influential magazines in fashion, a multibillion-dollar industry. Andy made fun of her coworkers by calling them “clackers” for the sounds their stilettos made on the marble lobby; regarded clothes and accessories as “stuff”; was surrounded by women obsessed with their looks and coveted designer handbags that were at least twice as much as their monthly salaries. But because of Andy’s devotion to her career, she stuck it out with Miranda and her condescending colleagues, and left herself no time for family and friends and found herself questioning her own ethical tolerance of the abuse of power and privilege; workplace mobbing, followership and socialization; stealing; as well as contextual pressures, unhealthy motivations and loyalties.

The abuse of power and privilege was probably the most obvious business ethical issue in “The Devil Wears Prada.” Miranda was portrayed as a legend and though she may have appeared vain, she was simply devoted to Runway and did what was best for its sustainability. However, she wasn’t as devoted or compassionate to her employees: she refused to call Andy by
her name but instead referred to Andy as “Emily,” the name of the first assistant; she wouldn’t allow employees to ride the elevator with her; she asked for nearly impossible tasks such as obtaining the *Harry Potter* manuscript prior to being published; and possessed a management style that was vague in her objectives and without any guidance to the employees, i.e., “Get me that little table I like in that store on Madison” or “Where’s that piece of paper I had in my hand yesterday?” One might think that this management style was ineffective but the opposite was true in the movie. Because Miranda convinced everyone that she was right all the time, this allowed her to remain secure in her job. Toward the end of the movie there was the possibility that Miranda was going to be replaced by Jacqueline Follet, editor of *Runway’s* French edition, because Jacqueline was cheaper, but Miranda’s response was, “Truth is, there’s no one that can do what I do.” This statement may be true because Miranda did not take the time to mentor or guide anyone. Her characteristics of power and control often trumped those characteristics like concern for others or integrity.

The issue of abuse of power and privilege was never resolved in “The Devil Wears Prada.” In fact, it was never questioned by Irv Ravitz, board chairman of publisher Elias-Clark of *Runway*, who was a business man concerned about the bottom line. (Other positions above Miranda’s were not mentioned.) He, like everyone else, thought of Miranda as much as a guiding-force in the fashion industry as *Runway*. But if *Runway* had experienced a high percentage of voluntary turnover due to the pressures through the organization, from the top to the bottom, then it would be advisable to senior leadership and the board of Elias-Clark to explore enrolling *Runway’s* management team into leadership courses that addressed mentoring, social skills, as well as critical thinking skills.
Another business ethical issue was workplace mobbing and followership and how they evoked socialization. It has already been mentioned that Miranda lead by intimidation, degradation, humiliation and that her management style was considered by many as mean but the mobbing did not stop with just Miranda. Andy, of course, was mobbed by Emily, Andy’s confident art director Nigel, and other Runway employees. Mobbing is contagious and it trickled down throughout the organization. This psychological abuse may have been exaggerated in “The Devil Wears Prada” but it is commonly occurs in various organizations and industries. In the movie, Andy held her ground for as long as she could but the harassment got the best of her. Eventually she resorted to socialization to make the best of the situation. Socialization is when a person goes through the process of learning her own culture. In Andy’s case, after disappointing Miranda one of her demeaning requests and being told by her, “So I told myself, ‘Go ahead. Take a chance. Hire the smart fat girl,’” Andy quickly sought the help of Nigel and adapted to the Runway norms, values, behavior and social skills by getting a makeover, adjusting to her position, and changing her self-image. The reward was free designer handbags, exclusive accessories, but most importantly, respect from Miranda, Emily, Nigel and others.

Hopefully in the real world, however, someone who suffers from workplace mobbing can talk to her manager about the situation, assuming the manager is not a part of the mobbing. Also, incidents should be documented and then taken to human resources. Depending on the seriousness of the issues, actions such as termination of the accusers could be warranted. Having said that, in Andy’s case the harassment came from the top authority figure, so it may have been difficult for her to go to human resources but in general talking with human resources should be a viable option. However, one concern is that colleagues may think that you are a tattle tale or worse, it could continue if human resources did not think it was serious enough to address.
A third business ethical issue was stealing, which was illustrated when Miranda demanded that Andy get the unpublished *Harry Potter* manuscript otherwise Andy would be fired. Andy was able to obtain the manuscript from a business contact that had access to the manuscript but the assumption is that Andy was a third party and did not receive permission to receive the manuscript from the publisher. As Andy incrementally did more for her position and became more comfortable and empathetic to Miranda’s persona, perhaps even slightly under the impression that she and Miranda were becoming friends and that she still had something to prove, Andy went to great lengths to satisfy Miranda. In the “The Devil Wears Prada,” this last, almost impossible task of attaining unpublished material should have been the breaking point for Andy and it almost was when she called her boyfriend and said that she was quitting, but when her contact came through with the unpublished manuscript Andy felt relieved – that she actually did something right – and then she found herself back in the culture that had shaped her recent norms and morals.

By this point in the movie Andy wasn’t in a clear state of mind to resolve this issue. This incident had happened after Andy had finally earned Miranda’s respect; in fact, Miranda had even started calling Andy by her name instead of “Emily,” but the request for the unpublished manuscript was actually punishment for Andy not following rules and Miranda was trying to find a reason to fire Andy. In a perfect moral world, Andy should have quit but sometimes we find ourselves so engaged in a culture that it is hard to escape because of the fear of failure, especially for a driven, budding journalist such as Andy. Also, Miranda should have never asked Andy to steal from the publishers of *Harry Potter*; Miranda exemplified traits of both abusive power and mobbing.
The business ethical issues described above remind me of the importance of having integrity and compassion for others and to treat people with respect now and especially when I move into a management position. Regardless of how efficient I am or if I impose high expectations of myself, my response to others may be perceived negatively if I don’t display patience and empathy. If colleagues are being ineffective or producing undesirable results, instead of quickly dismissing or diminishing them, publically or privately as Miranda did, there are opportunities for me to coach them so that the team strengthens as a collective unit and we can be more efficient and productive. This is not just in the office; I experience this with group projects in the MBA program. Often I am paired into teams where there is a free loader and even though he or she may not be knowledgeable or competent in some areas of the project, I have to remind myself we are a diverse team and everyone has a competitive advantage within the group and it is a matter of evoking their talents and best applying them to the project; however, this may require some management of my part or by another colleague’s initiative. Not everyone is created equal but perseverance pays off.