The Ethical Decisions of Jerry Maguire

“Hey, I don’t have all the answers. In life, to be honest, I failed as much as I have succeeded. But I love my wife. I love my life. And I wish you my kind of success” Dicky Fox-Jerry’s Mentor

Jerry Maguire is a sports movie that takes place in the late 90’s. The movie is follows a sports agent named Jerry Maguire (played by Tom Cruise) who at the beginning of the movie is at the top of his game working for a large, well known company named SMI. Jerry soon finds out after “finding himself” that his picture perfect life isn’t what it seems. He soon begins a downward spiral after experiencing much deceit and backstabbing by his co-workers and those he called his friends. Through the movie Jerry is faced with many business and personal ethical decisions in his efforts to rise to the top once again while being the man he wants and needs to be.
Our first perception of Jerry is as a successful sports agent who maintains 72 clients and receives over 400 phone calls a day. Jerry’s life is that of a very successful businessman but you can see that everything is not how it appears with his fiancée and career. The picture that is painted of Jerry is that of an unethical agent who cares little about the lives and family of his clients but only about their careers. The first sign of this is when one of his players is hospitalized after a bad concussion. Jerry, while visiting his client and his family in the hospital showed his uncaring side when confronted by the client’s son. The son, in caring for his father’s health, requested that Jerry advise his client to discontinue playing for health reasons. In a manner befitting an agent that doesn’t care, Jerry told him that no one could stop his dad from playing. Later in light of this discussion Jerry asks himself “Who have I become just another shark in a suit?” showing that his perception of himself is beginning to change. Which develops into Jerry writing a mission statement for himself of where he would like to go as a person and an agent, he ends up forwarding this to all his fellow agents. His personal mission statement, being met by a round of applause from his peers, left Jerry to believe he has done the right thing. Although they gave him this acknowledgement, his co-workers know this is the end of his careers at SMI. They even stating to each other “How long do you give him?...About a week!” Soon after this Jerry’s life falls apart in every aspect; losing his job, his clients, and his fiancée leaving him holding on to the edge and trying to work his way back up. Throughout many mishaps Jerry keeps his last client, Rod Tidwell, a struggling football player for the Arizona Cardinals and by them learning through each other they are able to achieve success getting them back to the top while learning valuable lessons along the way.

**Portrayal of the business world**
In this movie the business world was portrayed in a very negative light. Through the beginning this is shown with everything and everyone being so shallow and only looking out for themselves. Loyalty is a major factor in this portion because the main characters have little to no loyalty towards each other and are only pursuing personal achievements such as success and money. The best example of this is when Jerry as been fired by his best friend Bob Sugar over lunch in a crowded place. Upon returning to the office Jerry immediately attempts to contact all his clients and ensure their loyalty but Bob as already beat him to the punch, bringing them all to his side. When leaving Jerry asks who will leave with him to which no one will join except a lonely secretary Dorothy who Jerry later shares a romantic connection. This just shows that even those he believed to be his friend’s prior were not willing to put their neck on the line for him. Towards the end of the Movie the portrayal of the business world looks brighter through the success both Jerry and Rob find as a result of their hard work and putting their whole heart towards what they really wanted while being true to themselves and each other.

**Ethical Dilemmas**

Jerry is faced with several Ethical dilemmas throughout the movie. The first being how he initially approaches his career as an agent. Prior to writing his mission statement and losing his job Jerry was very unethical in how he worked for his clients. He always placed an emphasis on their careers over their personal well being like how he dealt with his hospitalized client in the opening scene. Jerry resolved this issue by questioning who he had become as a person which leads to him writing his personal mission statement which “Started at 1 page and went to 25” of who an agent should be and how they can better represent their clients. Although this would eventually cost him his job it puts him on the right path to becoming more successful as a person and an agent. I believe Jerry made the right choice in deciding which course he needed to take
since he was not happy with whom he had become. I also hope that I would be able to make the same decision if my personal life and career where progressing in the same direction as his.

The Second ethical dilemma that occurred was that of the client stealing done by his friend and co-worker Bob Sugar after Jerry’s termination at SMI. In this situation Bob had the decision to honor his friendship with Jerry yet chose to instead treat him in an un-loyal way and betray him. After firing him, Bob proceeded to persuade 99% of Jerry’s clients to join him which was obviously premeditated. The issue was resolved through Bob’s un-ethical actions to Jerry by taking his clients away from him through a lie which made Jerry appear to of experienced a “meltdown” resulting in Bob convincing them to join him. This set the stage for Jerry to focus on his one remaining client, Rob Tidwell, a wide receiver for the Arizona Cardinals which by acting ethically would bring them both successes. In my opinion I believe that Bob acted extremely un-ethical both in his personal and professional relationship with Jerry. Bob should not have backstabbed Jerry in this manner. If I were put in this situation I would not have fired a friend in a public setting so he wouldn’t make a scene and definitely would not have undercut him by dishonestly acquiring his clients.

The third ethical dilemma was that of Jerry’s love life. We learn through a movie played at his bachelor party (which features a number of his ex girlfriends) that Jerry was a womanizer and will say just about anything to get what he wants including statements like “He can’t be alone” and “he lies, lies, lies”. This continues on to when he breaks up with his fiancée by finally telling her that he doesn’t lover her even though he was preparing to marry her. Jerry also shows this attribute with his employee/romantic interest Dorothy when she tells him she is going to accept a job in San Diego. In return, Jerry not knowing if he truly loves her or not, (this he admits to his client Rod) asks her to marry him and they proceed to get married. The ethical
dilemma here is should Jerry really be proposing to Dorothy if he was unsure as to his true feelings for her. These situations was resolved later in the movie after Dorothy and Jerry’s break up, resulting as an eye opener for Jerry to finally realizes that he needs her and really does love her unlike anyone he has in the past. I believe this situation should have been avoided by always being honest with the one you are with and thinking about both parties individually instead of as one. This is what should have been done with Dorothy, in that it should have been cleared up by talking (like suggested by Rod) instead of randomly proposing. This way both parties would know how the other felt and they could work it out from there. In this situation I would have thought about what was best for the other parties involved and figured out how I truly felt before making a rash decision.

I did notice one marketing ethics issue in the movie that pertained to Jerry’s action. This situation was how Jerry chose to market his two remaining clients, Rob Tidwell, who had proven to be a loyal client and friend to Jerry and Frank Cushman. Frank, after initially refusing to sign a physical contract with Jerry and instead gave him a verbal agreement, ends up backstabbing Jerry by signing a contract with Bob Sugar. Jerry chose to all but ignore marketing Rod to potential teams and instead focused his attention on Frank who in the end would betray him. This strain on Jerry’s work ethic would be concluded when it came out that Frank had secretly signed with Bob, leaving Jerry high and dry. Jerry would later learn to focus completely on Rod, becoming 100% loyal to him; resulting with not only a strong bond as his agent but also a lasting friendship. Had I been placed in this situation I would have made an effort to equally divide my attention among the two to ensure greater success or focus primarily on Rod since he has proven his loyalty.

What I took from this Exercise
This exercise has taught me that the business world can be a very deceptive and dangerous place, especially for those who haven’t acted ethically or true to one’s self. Unlike Jerry who didn’t learn this lesson until the end, I hope to always act in the best interest of my clients while also keeping my own ethics and what I aspire to achieve. It has also showed me that you need to be ethical in every aspect of your life; friendships, relationships, personal beliefs, and your career. If you are unable to achieve this, you will most likely be unhappy with yourself in the end. I especially like the quote made by Dicky Fox in the movie (The paper’s opening sentence) that to me sums up as; yes we make a lot of mistakes in life but in the end you have to love what you have made of your life.

Bibliography