I watched the movie *Seven Pounds* starring Will Smith for my experiential activity. This movie delivers a very powerful message and leaves the audience contemplating what their mission in life is and how it would change if their life abruptly changed in an instant. The movie is written in such a way that each viewer can take away his or her own personal message from the movie. The main message of the film is centered on what is each individual’s purpose in life – what is their personal mission in this world. Throughout the movie, it becomes clear that Ben Thomas, Will Smith, was in a terrible auto accident that he caused and took seven lives, including his wife’s. Ben’s outlook on life changes with the accident. After the accident, he decides to drastically change the life circumstances of seven strangers, the last of which requires his own life. One of the questions the movie raises is why does it take something so drastic and devastating to alter Ben’s perspective on life. When he figures out his personal mission, he ignores the laws of man, fully personifying the top of Kohlberg’s stages, and carries out his mission until it untimely leads to his own demise. This film is geared toward the realm of individual ethics and individual choices. However, the message of the movie carries into the realm of business ethics, and there are three specific instances in the movie that relate directly to business ethics.

*Seven Pounds* does not polarize between good and evil, or any other extreme for that matter. The message is on the level of the individual human being and what each individual’s purpose is here on earth. In addition, instead of pitting right against wrong, good against evil, or black against white, the movie blends the boundaries of these distinctions in the ambiguousness of Ben Thomas’s stage in life. *Seven Pounds* does the same thing with business ethics. The movie plays on the rare situations that arise when the moral and ethical decisions that must be made are often done so in contrast with the rules and laws that govern society. In this way, the
movie delivers a neutral depiction of business ethics since it is centered on rare circumstances where the greater good is served by breaking established rules and laws. Ben Thomas searches with great effort to find seven strangers whose circumstances are far from ordinary. The film capitalizes on these rare situations. Three events that put business ethics in the spotlight are when a social worker illegally gives Ben the contact information for an abused wife so Ben can help her, when Ben acts as an imposter IRS agent and gives people extended tax breaks they are legally not entitled to, and at the end of the movie when Ben commits suicide and has everything arranged so his best friend (Dan, a heart surgeon) orchestrates a heart transplant to save a woman’s life. These three situations will be developed and explained further in this paper, but they are three specific incidents that break the existing rules and laws of society to serve a greater good. They are truly rare situations that drastically change and improve the lives of three strangers.

Three types of business ethics are portrayed in *Seven Pounds*. The first is goodwill. The movie develops goodwill on different levels. The first is the goodwill of Ben Thomas. Ben literally donates every major organ of his body to recipients in an effort to change their lives. The business ethic of goodwill is addressed when Ben donates a piece of his liver to a social worker who in turn refers an abused wife and her children to Ben for help. It is also portrayed when he gives Emily Posas, who has a rare blood type and is dying of a degenerative heart disease, a substantial tax break. In the movie Emily asks Ben “Why do I get the feeling you are doing me a really big favor” (addressing the tax extension). To which Ben responds “Because I get the feeling you really deserve one”. A second business ethic addressed in the film is justice and fairness. People who were not given a fair chance in the movie are given a second chance by Ben Thomas. This justice comes at a great cost when one thinks about the pain and agony (both
physically, mentally, and emotionally) that Ben goes through, as well as the fact that he had to kill 7 innocent people (by accident) to get to the point he was at in life. Ben dies at the end of the movie, and through this action, he brings upon himself the ultimate self-induced justice and closure to his life. A third ethic that is developed is compassion. Compassion plays a deep role in this movie, especially in Ben’s relationship with Emily Posas, who he falls in love with before sacrificing his life for hers. Ben’s deepest compassion is for Emily, but he shares it with the other six people he helps. Each of these three topics are singled out and identified by this paper, but they all work in unison throughout the different scenes of the movie.

One of the business ethical dilemmas that arise in the movie is when Dan, Ben’s lifetime friend and a heart surgeon, agrees to complete the heart transplant that saves Emily’s life. While Dan does not assist in Ben’s suicide, he agrees to go along with it and prepares everything so the heart transplant goes smoothly. The issue is portrayed as one where Dan has to break his Hippocratic Oath for the greater good, to help his best friend reach salvation and save Emily Posas’ life. The issue is resolved by Dan breaking all the rules and oaths he has taken as a doctor, and potentially some legal laws, to help his best friend carry out this plan. He does the right thing; even though he broke the rules do it. This is exactly how the issue should be resolved. He has his responsibilities and obligations to his profession and to society. However, in this case, his responsibility to his friend and to the greater good was stronger and more important.

Another business ethical dilemma that arises in the movie is when Holly, a social worker, gives Ben the name of a woman, Connie Tepos, whose husband physically abuses her and her children. Ben had previously given part of his liver to Holly, so she knew his intentions were good. Ben asks Holly if there is anyone that she is aware of who is a really good person but
stuck in a bad situation. Holly tells him about Connie Tepos. Ben signs the deed on his beach house over to Connie so she can escape the brutal beatings of her husband. Once again, the movie depicts this sequence of actions as one that is necessary and the right thing to do even though Holly was disclosing privileged information that she would lose her job for disclosing. Holly broke the rules of her job to serve the greater good and improve the life of Connie Tepos and her children. The issue is resolved by confirming Holly did the right thing when Connie and her children moved out of the house one night after a brutal encounter with her husband. This is how this particular situation should be resolved. The greater good is served.

The last business ethical dilemma occurs when Ben Thomas acts as an imposter IRS agent by stealing his brother IRS badge and gives Emily Posas an extension on her taxes. This is a double pronged dilemma since he steals his brothers IRS identification, which is identity theft, and then proceeds to give unauthorized tax breaks. As with the other two, this issue is portrayed as a situation where the existing rules and laws are broke not to instill harm on others, but rather to promote good and serve a higher purpose. Without stealing his brother’s identification, Ben would not be able to contact the people he helps. Without the tax extension, Emily could lose her house. The issue is resolved by the outcome; Ben sacrifices his life for Emily’s, and the greater good is served. In the end, the film resolves these issues with vindication since they are the correct things to do in these extreme situations. In this particular movie, the ends justify the means.

Over all, there are many lessons to take away from this film, and it will leave almost anyone with a lump in their throat at the end of the movie. The most important and central message of the film is to dive deep down into one’s own life and discover for what purpose he or she is here. Does something as drastic and tragic have to happen as what happened to Ben
Thomas for an individual to reach a higher form of conciseness or enlightenment? To me the answer is no. I do not wish to take such drastic actions as Ben Thomas, but he had different experiences than I have had. I want to make a difference in the people’s lives around me, do good where I can, and identify the issues in today’s world that I am passionate about and dedicate myself to improving the world in those areas. The movie focuses on Ben’s redemption through the giving of his vital organs to different people and his emotional connection with Emily Posas. It is through his love and relationship with Emily that Ben finds his redemption. From this, one can conclude that the physical act of giving is only part of the story in fulfilling one’s personal mission on this earth. The other part is love and an emotional connection. From this I draw on the importance of not only what you do, but how you do it and with whom you share it.

*Seven Pounds* is an excellent film that delivers a strong message and allows the viewer to come to his or her own conclusion on how to interpret it. The message of fulfilling your personal mission in this life is integrated into several different situations, which allows each viewer to take away their individual interpretation of the film’s core message. Business ethics are tied into the film’s main message throughout the course of the film including the three specific situations explained above. The film does a good job building the ethical issues of goodwill, justice, and compassion throughout the duration of the movie. The ethics portrayed in the film, as well as the core message, are done not in the form of good versus evil, but rather they are portrayed in a neutral manner the depicts the different shades of gray in ethical decisions when they are made under extreme circumstances.