

Broad Matters Season 7 Episode 1 “Applying An Ethical Framework To Business” with Beth Hammond

Quinetta Roberson:

Welcome to Broad Matters.

Ken Szymusiak:

A podcast bringing you thought leadership, innovative perspectives, and real world impact from Michigan State University's Eli Broad College of Business. I'm Ken Szymusiak, managing director for the Burgess Institute for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and we're kicking off season seven with a talented new co-host.

Quinetta Roberson:

Thank you, Ken. I'm Quinetta Roberson. I'm the John A. Hannah Distinguished Professor of Organizational Behavior with a joint appointment in the Broad College's Department of Management and the College of Social Sciences' Department of Psychology. I've been a guest two times on this podcast and it is an exciting role for me to be on the other side of the interview table, now. So, thanks for having me as a co-host.

Ken Szymusiak:

Let's dive right in and meet today's guests. On this episode, we're talking with Beth Hammond, managing director for the college's Center for Ethical and Socially Responsible Leadership.

Quinetta Roberson:

The center was launched in March of 2022, and Beth has been leading the charge since the start of the '22, '23 academic year. In that time, she's developed the center into a place that ensures our students become ethical business leaders.

Beth Hammond:

The world is changing so fast, today. We here at Broad have an opportunity to change with it and create different leaders for tomorrow's environment and that we can be a pivotal part of helping our students be ready for what the world is going to look like tomorrow. I just feel really lucky that we get to be a part of their journey here at Michigan State and that we get to be a part of helping them grow and be ready to face what the world is going to need of them tomorrow.

Ken Szymusiak:

Welcome Beth.

Beth Hammond:

Thank you. I'm really excited to be here.

Ken Szymusiak:

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your role at the Broad College and what brought you here?

Beth Hammond:

I am a Michigan State alum. I was an English major because I really liked Shakespeare and then, thanks to my mom's intervention, I did get some internships that led me into human resources and so my

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career has been not a linear path. Worked in HR in healthcare for the first 10 years or so, so hiring and firing, and I actually had two significant back-to-back deaths in my family. And at that time I had started to really question what am I doing to make the world a better place and what's my impact? Really started questioning what I was doing. And throughout that exploration and thinking about what kind of impacts I wanted to make, I fell into an organization called Girls on the Run, which is an afterschool education and empowerment program for young girls and absolutely loved what it was doing to change how they thought about themselves and what kind of framework they used as young girls walk through the world today.

So, the next chapter of my career was starting a chapter of that in rural Illinois and did that for seven years and did all facets of nonprofit management from volunteer recruitment to fundraising to recruiting girls to be in the program. Throughout that experience, there was a local university nearby, and so the culminating 5K of this program, we would have hundreds of students come out and support the young girls in the community, and there was just such power and synergy in that space with the college students supporting the girls in the community. And so when a job opened up at the university as the director for civic engagement and volunteerism, I thought what an incredible way to give that back to other nonprofits in the community I was living in at the time. The whole focus of my time as that director was to help students understand that they had the power and the responsibility to give back and to make their community and their circle brighter and better for all of us and absolutely loved doing that work.

And then after Covid, really just wanted to be closer to my parents. That was a time that changed a lot of us in a lot of different ways. And so started paying attention to jobs that were opening up back here in Michigan. And when I found the position here in the Broad College, I thought, what an incredible fit for my different pockets of my career, but also what an incredible way to elevate what I was doing in civic engagement, but do that from the intersection of the students' skills and their careers. How are they going to make their workplace in the community that they end up in be better supported and be ethical leaders? I got really excited, crossed my fingers, applied, and as they say, here we are today.

Ken Szymusiak:

That's a really cool backstory. Such important work.

Quinetta Roberson:

Under Beth's leadership, the center is focused on preparing students to be ethical and social responsible leaders. Beth, could you give us some examples of things that you've done with that?

Beth Hammond:

Last spring we had a student group who came and was talking with Scot Wright, the DEI manager, Ken Horne, the undergraduate engagement director, and myself about their recruitment process. And they shared that after going through it, they realized there was a certain population of students that were not selected and that they were worried that there were some hidden bias through the recruitment process and they wanted to explore that and figure out how they could do better going forward. So we had a conversation with these student leaders throughout the spring semester and then the conversations that Scot and Ken and I were having behind the scenes were, “if there's one student group that is recognizing that this is happening, there are likely other student groups that may or may not have that same awareness.” So, how can we engage with students to help them elevate their leadership skills, their awareness, and to help all of our registered student organizations be better and stronger for all students here in Broad?

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And so that was the beginning of what turned into our Leadership In Action conference and then ensuing workshops throughout the rest of this fall semester. We hosted a full day event the Saturday before classes started and talked about ethics. We talked about hidden bias, we talked about what it is to be a leader, and then we've had three workshops, one a month for all members of registered student organizations, helping our students have the language to talk about their skills as a leader. It's going to help them when they interview, it's going to help them when they get out into the world to be able to recognize their skills in a different kind of a way than if they just were like, yeah, I had this role, but I'm not sure how to talk about the skills that I brought to that role.

Ken Szymusiak:

It's such an interesting topic because it permeates all levels of decision making. I think most students can immediately recognize, well, I'm not the one running a paper company or chopping down rainforests or something, which they may find to be highly unethical, right?

Beth Hammond:

Yeah.

Ken Szymusiak:

But what do they think about running personal copies in a copy machine at the office? That stuff comes up sometimes, but those are all ethical decision making points. How do you expose students to that?

Beth Hammond:

When I go in, especially with freshmen and sophomore classes, I say, how many of you have been in ethical situations? And two or three hands go up. And then I say, how many of you have been involved in a group project? And obviously all of their hands go up. And then I say, how many of you have been in a group project where somebody didn't pull their weight? All of the hands stay up.

Ken Szymusiak:

Everybody.

Beth Hammond:

Right?

Ken Szymusiak:

All of us.

Beth Hammond:

And I say, that's an ethical situation. It's not a clear cut here's the right way to move forward, here's the wrong way to move forward. It's what do you do? And when they start recognizing that they're already walking through these ethical spaces, that it isn't just leaders at the top end of any organization that are having to make these complicated and complex decisions, but it's us as human, we're doing this every day all day, I can see them get excited and engage with the concept of ethics in a different way.

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Quinetta Roberson:

It sounds like that ethical decision making is like a muscle that needs to be strengthened and worked on before we go out in the real world and actually are faced with chopping down rainforest kind of decision. Then you're like, I can handle it. Maybe have a bit more confidence to do so because of all these experiences here at Broad, being able to deal with the more daily things that don't necessarily seem as insidious.

Beth Hammond:

That is exactly what Tyler Schultz, one of the whistleblowers for Theranos, said last week. We brought him to campus to talk about his experience as a 23-year-old having to choose to disrupt what was happening in front of him. And he said that to our students that you have to be willing to practice this and if you can practice it in the little moments, it's easier to do it in the big moments. And to have to make that decision as a 23-year-old at the very start of your career is just proof that it can happen to anyone at any point. And we have to be willing to have practiced that muscle enough to make the right choice.

Ken Szymusiak:

This is a great segue to some of the amazing events you've already kicked off since you've been here, Beth. Can you talk a little bit more about maybe some of the other things that you're working on in the near future?

Beth Hammond:

We have two main focus. Obviously, we want to engage with our students and be a part of their growth and understanding and evolution around ethics and social responsibility. But we recognize it's not just the center's lift. We are here surrounded by incredibly intelligent faculty and staff, and we all have a part to do this together. And so we also want to support the faculty. So we offer research and teaching grants to create new courses that have an ethical or social responsibility angle or lens to them. We offer the research grant so that our faculty can be part of the conversation about new ways to think about ethics and its intersection with every facet of business or social responsibility. And we also have partnered with the departments to offer speaker series events so that if there's someone in their industry based on the discipline that they want to bring to campus, we will help cover the cost to bring those experts to campus to talk about the intersection of ethics and a particular industry or discipline.

We partnered with the School of Hospitality Business, part of the Ray Schmidgall Speaker Series event, and it was really well attended by students and faculty and staff and brought in an executive that students were really engaged with what he had to share. And again, it's leaning into the partnership that we're not doing this independently on our own island. We're doing this collaboratively across the Broad College.

Ken Szymusiak:

Well, I don't have a question, but I have a statement. I want to thank you since you've been here. And Jen Dunn, who's your faculty director, as well has been highly engaged with us in entrepreneurship because we see a big overlap. We now have an asynchronous course that we're offering as E&I experience in our minor that is on ethics in entrepreneurship that I know Jen and you put together, which has been really well received by our students, which has been awesome. And then I do want to also comment on your sponsorship for the Burgess New Venture Challenge, which is our premiere business plan competition we run every spring and now we have a thousand dollars scholarship that you

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guys have supported towards students who are looking at social responsibility as an angle for their business creation. Last year's winner was Elliot Smith, MBA student, which was pretty cool. He's doing the Underwater Drone program to check out water mains before they become a problem.

Beth Hammond:

We were really excited to partner with you, and Jen and I had a great time coming and talking with your students and hearing their pitches and Elliot rose to the top for everybody. So we thought that was a really powerful way to do good for a lot of us. Thrilled to be able to say congrats to him.

Quinetta Roberson:

Beth, kind of zoom out. We've been talking about ethics, which can often be very contextual. It changes across people, it changes across cultures, and so I was wondering if you do anything looking at ethical leadership across cultures or geographic spaces?

Beth Hammond:

Absolutely. Just last week we did our very first cross-cultural conversation and we partnered with a class here in the Broad College and we partnered with a class at XLRI, which is a business university in India. And we had faculty from both spaces and then we had HR professionals, one from Tata Steel, which is one of the largest steel manufacturers in the world, and we had an MSU alum who has been the chief people officer at some pretty significant organizations, including Google, and they were talking about the ethics of inclusion in the workplace. Where is the overlap? Where are the difference between the two cultures? And had a chance for our students to ask questions, had a chance for faculty to talk about the frameworks for how they set it up in their classroom. Again, talking about the difference in the overlap.

I think it was a powerful space for the nearly hundred students across the two classrooms to come together and learn. When you think about the goals for the Broad College and for MSU, having a global mindset and a global understanding is really critical. To be an ethical leader, you have to have an understanding of other cultures. And so we're trying to figure out the best way that we can help our students gain more knowledge and more understanding through the center as well.

Ken Szymusiak:

Well dovetailing off the international angle, you have a new study abroad program you're launching also.

Beth Hammond:

Yes.

Ken Szymusiak:

Do you want to tell us about that?

Beth Hammond:

I do.

Ken Szymusiak:

In Cambodia, which is really cool.

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Beth Hammond:

The focus of this education abroad experience is going to be social responsibility and entrepreneurship. So we're meeting with business leaders in Cambodia who are using their skills to disrupt and address social problems that are happening there. For example, there is a circus that pulls kids out of the foster care system because apparently in Cambodia, if you're in the foster care system, you don't get an education. So they pull these kids out, help them go to school, but then also give them skills so that when they age out, they can have a skillset to rely on, whether it's in hospitality business or production management for the circus or a performer.

And then there's an artist incubator that helps give artists all of the tools that they need, whether they're wood workers or painters or stone carvers. They hire them, provide them all the materials they need, and then purchase all the product that they make and then use the profits to hire more artists so they can give people a chance to use their skills. And another thing that I learned is Vietnam and Cambodia have the same longitude and latitude and Vietnam produces a massive amount of coffee and Cambodia produces none. And so we're going to meet with a venture capitalist who is hiring farmers and teaching them how to grow coffee, then purchasing the beans from them and then selling that, trying to help elevate that part of Cambodia.

And we're also going to meet with a young Cambodian entrepreneur association, and so we'll meet with their leadership and some of their top rising stars. I think it's going to be a really interesting opportunity for our students to meet and learn from lots of people who are using their business skills to do good in really different ways while getting to see incredible spaces like Angkor Wat as well.

Ken Szymusiak:

Beth, what's one thing that every Spartan can do to be more ethical or socially responsible?

Beth Hammond:

I think a big piece of it is just understanding that we are walking through ethical situations every single day. According to Google, we as humans make 35,000 decisions every day. And when you think about that and you think about how fast we have to make decisions, whether it's what am I going to wear today or what do I have for breakfast, or how do I interact with this person who appears to be unhoused, how do I handle a situation in a classroom that feels like it could be unethical, those decisions are happening at such a fast pace, and if we're not paying attention to it, it can be really easy to miss.

And when I'm talking to students, I talk about ethics as being the intersection of three things: What knowledge do you have, what are your values, and what action are you going to take? And it's the combination of those three things that is ethics. But if you're not paying attention to that, then it can just feel like another decision in a long list of decisions you have to make. And so I think having that understanding that we're all doing this every day and you can pay attention to it and be ready for it when it's a really big ethical situation you walk into.

Quinetta Roberson:

Beth, as you continue to expand the center's reach and programming, what's your vision for ethics and social responsibility at the Broad College? What do you think success looks like?

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Beth Hammond:

That's a good question and it changes. Last year, I just wanted to have programming off the ground and happening and available to students and was thrilled that we engaged with over a thousand students, 1,004 to be exact. But just to know that we reached 20% of our Broad College students the first year was a wild success for me. Long-term down the road, I think it would be incredible if we had an ethics or social responsibility minor that was available to campus. If you think we have 5,000 plus students in the Broad College, if we can engage with a significant population of them, as they graduate and move on and move out into the world, we could exponentially change what business looks like if our students are a different kind of leader or have the language and the skills around ethics and social responsibility. And that is a huge responsibility, but also a massive privilege to know that we collectively could have that kind of impact. I get really excited about the chance to figure out how to do that and do it right.

Ken Szymusiak:

What's something that's exciting you right now, Beth, that's on your horizon or happening at Broad that got you excited this year?

Beth Hammond:

There are two things that come to mind. The first one is we're doing an Ethics of Water Symposium. Water and water access is the number one predictor for health and good outcomes for humans, especially for women and girls. And I had never thought about it from that perspective. Most people are not talking about their water use, but that is an up and coming way that businesses are going to have to reframe their impacts on the climate. I'm really excited about the symposium that's open to the full campus community, but anyone who's interested in the intersection of ethics, water and business. Faculty from across campus are going to come and talk about their water research, got panels with water scientists, water policy makers, academics who study water coming together. So I think it's going to be a really powerful way to have a better understanding of how water impacts all of us already today and moving forward. So I think this is going to be a really powerful way to learn about that before it becomes a normal part of everyday conversation.

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah. And you're already starting to see some of those headlines kind of pop up now, and it's like some town in Illinois now has rights to a billion gallons of Lake Michigan water. I was like, how did they get that?

Beth Hammond:

Right.

Ken Szymusiak:

Who struck that deal? It was weird how I'm like, why did I respond that way? It's not my water either, but it's kind of like one of those turfy things. You're like, oh boy, how often is this going to happen moving forward? You're starting to see that kind of crop up. And shouldn't they have rights too? I mean, they need water.

Beth Hammond:

Right, absolutely.

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Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah, right?

Beth Hammond:

There's towns in Arizona that can't do any new construction because they don't have enough water for the construction process, but AI also is a huge water user because they have to cool down the machinery. Which leads me to the other program I'm really excited about. We are doing two lunch-and-learns, one for students about the ethical use of ChatGPT as a student, and then one for faculty about the ethical use of ChatGPT and AI as an educator.

Ken Szymusiak:

I love that. It's awesome.

Beth Hammond:

When you think about it, at its core, ChatGPT is a tool. How do we use it in a way that enhances our ability to learn and to do our work that doesn't detract from it?

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah.

Quinetta Roberson:

We're having those same conversations in the research space because doctoral students are asking about writing their intros or their discussion sections. And then editors, do you write editorial letters using generative AI? So there's all these spaces and there's a question of whose work is it and are we advancing science, et cetera? So I will be at that.

Ken Szymusiak:

Yeah, it's going to be really interesting.

Beth Hammond:

All three of those events are happening in November, and information can be found on our website through the Broad College. Just search “the Center for Ethical and Socially Responsible Leadership”. And we promote those on our LinkedIn page. Again, search for the Center for Ethical and Socially Responsible Leadership. And you can find out about all of our programs, those and more that we're offering this fall and beyond.

Quinetta Roberson:

Well, Beth, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast. It's been great talking to you today. How can we keep up with your work going forward?

Beth Hammond:

Follow us on LinkedIn, or if you go to our website, we have a monthly newsletter that talks about the upcoming programs for the following month. Get on there quick and sign up.

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Ken Szymusiak:

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Quinetta Roberson:

And remember to like, rate and subscribe to Broad Matters on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, and Spotify. That does it for this episode. I'm Quinetta Roberson.

Ken Szymusiak:

And I'm Ken Szymusiak. Join us next time to hear faculty and staff weighing in on relevant issues and discussing how their work makes an impact, illuminating how and why Broad matters.