Does this following question ring any bells? Just do ‘it’ anyway, the client won’t know! Is this statement OK? or does it depend on what ‘it’ is? Well yes of course it does you may be thinking. There will be examples that come to mind no doubt. But just who determines what is acceptable and right and what isn’t in business, in life, in relationships? Just a moment, we are delving a bit deep now, so let’s stick to business and business ethics. Ethics are your moral principles, what you consider good and what isn’t. This shapes your behaviour and how you conduct yourself in business and in all other areas of your life! Ethics are part of your fundamental truth system, the foundation of your business and in many cases the foundation of success. If you run your own business then it should be you who sets out your Policies and Procedures, these should cover all business aspects such as financial considerations, customer care, animal welfare, health and safety, cleanliness etc. and will most likely, encompass your ethics. To finalise them, you may seek opinions of others through consultation with staff, clients, friends, colleagues, peers and family, bringing together a range or ethics or you may choose not to! Obviously there needs to be regards to current legislation and laws within the industry you work within, but ultimately many policies and procedures will be determined by you. If you are a staff member, volunteer or family member helping in business or within charities then you should be following and adhering to these Policies & Procedures too.

So, let’s consider the following, is it OK to charge a client if they are late for their appointment with you or don’t turn up? To close ten minutes early? Not to sterilise your equipment between each groom? Dispose of a light bulb in the domestic waste bin. Not to tell a client their dog was poorly during boarding with you? or That it escaped for half an hour while everybody helped you catch it? These examples may nudge you to explore different moral aspects of your business and related topics may not even make it into your policies and procedures, but they should, regardless of any emotional pull. Does it mean that the client needs to be informed? Let’s assume you have a policy on ‘appointment non-arrivals’, your procedure states that you need to provide a copy of this to each client and they need to sign their understanding and compliance and you have done this. Then it would be perfectly OK to charge them as stated in your P & P if they did not turn up for their appointment. But what if they didn’t turn up because (honestly) a close family member had just died after an extended period of illness, and they completely forgot their appointment – would you still decide to charge them or not? This relates to your personal ethics but can also be heavily influenced by your business financial position. How would you feel ‘deep down’ if you did charge them, would it bother you or not? Longer term your business will probably gain a healthier reputation if you don’t charge them as you will be demonstrating ‘ethical value’. This has the potential to increase custom and longer-term profit, balanced against reduced shorter-term profit.

Disposing of a light bulb incorrectly can impact the environment, having watched people throw rubbish out from their car windows I know that for some the environment has no meaning to them whatsoever, but has it to you and to your business? How green are you really and do you actively pursue ways that your business can reduce its carbon footprint? Maybe you should start to if you don’t now? Appropriate sterilisation as part of reducing cross contamination is just one element of your health and safety responsibility and welfare within the animal industry, but I know there are several of you that don’t sterilise your equipment between each groom, so is this a financial consideration because of the time or a lack of education or just a lack of care? I may have provoked angry feelings with my comments, but I consider my working ethics to be strong and I encourage all my students and any others within this industry to adopt the same.

For those of you that know me you will be aware of my high-standards of welfare. Have I lost clients because I stick to my values? Yes, I have. Does this bother me? No, but it does sadden me to think that people will sacrifice the welfare of their animal against cost or lack of compassion, perhaps they are not educated within animal behaviour or very understanding of needs or possess little ethics. This is not an arrogant viewpoint, and I am fully aware of clients effected by financial pressures and having to make compromises due to cost. I consider part of my job role is to educate and provide understanding, for those prepared to listen. This is not me saying that people must adopt my way of thinking or that they are wrong, nor is it a lack of awareness of other viewpoints but it is me sticking to my ethics, my values, and not being influenced by others or giving in to the desire of additional profit. I could make more profit if I lowered some of my values, am I likely to, certainly not. ‘They say’ that the root of all evil is money, but isn’t that why we are in business? Yes, most definitely, but making money is not the issue within ethical trading, but how you make money is, and what you do with it.

Raise widen your views, raise your standards, assess your trading style, your suppliers your client understanding and go forth with updated Policies and Procedures that reflect your ethics and stick to them. Ethical trading should rule before profit and you may be surprised just how your profit improves.