

Ethical Employment

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WOULD YOU EVER FEEL OK ABOUT WORKING FOR A MORALLY DUBIOUS COMPANY?

THE DEBRIEF: WHAT'S MORE IMPORTANT, MONEY OR MORALS?

As you probably well know by now, we are all over BBC Three's new drama series, *Clique*. It's all about the dark side of doing what it takes to get to the top. Things take a sinister turn on screen and we wanted to look into how a desire to work your way up the professional ladder could leave you stuck in a financial, emotional and sometimes mental rut.

Are you satisfied with how much you're earning? It's not unusual for the UK's city dwellers to be working more than one job to make ends meet, but where do you draw the line as far as your work duties go, on an ethical level? Making money is a goal so many of us aspire to: measured by ambition, competitiveness in the workplace, and the drive to achieve the lifestyle you want, so what's the harm in being flexible with your morals if you want to earn more than 'just enough to make your rent'?

Despite the difficulties of getting by in expensive cities while trying to climb the career ladder, millennials are said to be way more concerned with the ethics of their working lives than previous generations. [A study by the University of Missouri-Colombia](#) found that young workers were more

likely to leave the business they were in if it had a bad track record of corporate responsibility which didn't sit right with their moral values. Researchers interviewed employees in the textile and clothing industry and found that workers were most frustrated when companies claimed they were being ethical publicly, but in reality, their practice was far from it.

But just how common is this masking of morals? Corporate responsibility, particularly in big business, is something that can easily be swept under the carpet to maintain profits and an all-important reputation. But when it hits the headlines, it can be really damaging for the company and its employees alike ([see the recent sexual assault allegations at Uber](#)). But bad ethical practice in the workplace can be a real moral dilemma for millennials working their first jobs and trying to get ahead in their career. It's hard to know where to draw the line when you have a lack of experience to compare it with. This theme is explored in the first episode of BBC Three's new drama *Clique*, which is available on iPlayer now. Set in Edinburgh University, the pilot introduced us to the eerie goings-on of a prestigious internship scheme that's far from ethical, and although fictional, it seems like an increasing number of young women are doing whatever it takes to get them ahead in the working world.

After all, with fewer jobs, rising rent and stagnant wages, it's pretty easy to end up doing things that we never imagine doing when we're focused on making money. How far you're willing to take it depends on the individual. For one person, it could be something as simple as mystery shopping. It's a popular choice for young people trying to make some extra cash in their spare time, and although totally legal, it often requires you telling some white lies - something some people would rather avoid as a way of making some extra income.

For others, it could be taking the drastic step to leave your degree, and take up a job that'd guarantee you a better lifestyle (and a regular income) in an expensive city like London. I spoke to Jenny*, a 20-year-old lettings agent who moved to London last year to complete a French and Politics degree at university. She left further education after three months and started a job as a trainee lettings agent.

She said: 'We spend on average, a third of our lives at work, and prior to this in education.'

I've always been a firm believer if something isn't making you happy, then what is the point? I chose to leave my French and Politics degree because I wasn't happy. I wasn't motivated to get up in the morning and attend my lectures and seminars, or come home and revise, which I knew was unlike me, because when I'm doing something I love and am passionate about, I do it properly and put my 100% into it. I was desperate to leave, and did explore options prior to this, like changing my course. But I felt even the university wasn't right so I knew it was time to make a bigger change. But what? What on earth was a three-month university drop out going to do, in London?'

When she started working, she initially had doubts, including whether she'd be earning the [commission-based] income her employer had suggested she'd be taking home at her interview. 'If not,' she continued, 'how would I support myself financially living in London? The same feeling of emptiness and unhappiness I'd experienced at uni didn't necessarily go away once I was working. I experienced the same feeling again just over a year later, which is why I knew it was time to move on [with my job] again.'

So, the financial pressures of city life are definitely influencing the career choices of young women. Alex*, 22 is working in asset management in the City, despite it not ever being what she thought she'd get into. After studying economics at university, she took up a job dealing with private investors as it's 'something that'll allow her to save enough money to do what she wants to do later in life'. She told me: 'I've been in this job for about a year now, and it's growing on me - but I never imagined myself working in a high-pressure finance job like this. It can get pretty boring, but it's not all bad. I'm on an amazing salary for someone my age. I'm just going to keep my head down until I've got a nice amount of money saved up so I can do something good with it.'

Even before graduation, girls are finding ways to fund their education to give them better financial prospects once they leave, putting their long-term goals for success before what is arguably a tricky moral situation. With raising tuition fees, alternative options – such as working in a strip club – can pay better than working in a bar, and although you might not be able to imagine doing it at first, there are girls that swear by it as a way to make some extra cash. Alexandra Wright wrote about the reasons why she worked in a strip club to pay for university for The Debrief in 2015. She said: 'The money I've made from stripping has always allowed me to fund the lifestyle I want. It's not always easy, and it's not always perfect, but stripping has given me far more than it's ever taken away.'

And in the UK, it's also university students who make up the largest proportion of 'sugar babies' - the girls who sign up to 'sugar daddy' websites to go on dates with self-proclaimed successful men. The 'daddies', who usually work in hedge fund management or private equity, pair up with a girl and give them a regular allowance (which can be thousands of

pounds a month) in exchange for whatever is agreed upon their initial arrangement. I spoke to Sammie*, who messaged a few guys on the Seeking Arrangement site before deciding not to go through with meeting them. She said: 'At first it seemed like a good idea. I was sick of being broke and living in London, and someone at work had done it and said it was great. She was taken out for dinner in a top Mayfair restaurant and the guy even paid for her to get a cab home afterwards. But I guess what I was most worried about was if I enjoyed it. I didn't want it to become a thing I did regularly, so I chose not to go before the situation could spiral out of control and become really complicated.'

So, it seems the days of working a cushy nine-to-five are behind us, and a generation of women is working longer hours and in increasingly 'innovative' ways to chase after their own success. The moral issues surrounding some of these techniques are often kept quiet, but with the cost of living sky rocketing at an alarming rate, can you really blame them?

Clique is on BBC iPlayer now.

Created by Jess Brittain (*Skins*), *Clique* is about two best friends - Holly and Georgia - who are drawn into an elite clique of alpha girls led by lecturer Jude McDermid in their first few weeks at university. Brittain says: "*Clique* is about the different ways ambition plays out in young women at university. It's a heightened version of a certain type of Uni experience, pulled from my time at Uni, then ramped up a few notches into a psychological thriller. *Clique* goes to some pretty dark places but returns, always, to the key female friendships of our central characters."

Intrigued? So are we. [Click here](#) to find out more

