**Difference Between Law and Ethics**

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**Law vs. Ethics**The difference between law and ethics is very useful to know as both have a significant effect on our day to day life. Law and ethics are two important terms associated with the science of management. Law is a set of universal rules that are framed, accepted when usually enforced. Ethics, on the other hand, define how individuals prefer to interact with one another. The word ethics is derived from the Latin ‘ethos’ meaning character. The word ‘ethos’ combines with another Latin word, ‘mores’ meaning ‘[customs](http://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-customs-and-vs-traditions/)’ to give the actual meaning.

**What is Law?**

Law, in simple terms, is **a collection of rules and regulations** that comes with penalties and punishments if it is not followed. It is important to note that the definition of law contains terms such as **consistent, universal, published, accepted and enforced**. A law has to be consistent because there cannot be two contradicting requirements in law since people cannot obey both. It has to be universal because the requirements must be applicable to everyone, not to just one group of people. The requirements have to be in a written form and hence a law is published. The requirements have to be obeyed too and hence a **law is accepted** in sense. Since the requirements are compelled to be obeyed by the members of a society, the law becomes enforced.

Disobeying law is **liable for punishment**. That is how you enforce law. For example, stealing is prohibited. So, if someone steals something from someone else, that thief is punishable by law. Depending on what he stole this punishment can vary.

**What are Ethics?**

Ethics, on the other hand, are **a collection of social guidelines that** are based on moral [principles and values](http://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-values-and-vs-principles/). You can see, ethics only show what should be done. Therefore, unlike law, ethics cannot be compelled and hence they **cannot be enforced**. They **need not be universal** too. This is mainly because ethics are created by a society. What is accepted in one society as good behavior may not be considered with such value in another. That does not mean they consider it wrong. For example, Hindus and Buddhists worship their elders as a way of showing respect. This is done in those societies, but in other societies may not be done. Therefore, ethics are not universal. Also, ethics **need not be published**. Ethics totally depends on the individual and the choice of the individual in terms of his interaction with the other members of the society.

Ethics have altogether a different set of characteristics. Ethics consist of learning what is right and what is wrong and doing the right thing. It is interesting to note that ethical decisions have various consequences, outcomes, alternatives and personal implications. Unlike a law, when someone does not adhere to principles of ethics, then he is **not liable for punishment**.

For example, shaking hands is a valued ethical behavior especially in business world. So, if someone does not shake hand with another business associate, he is not going to be punished with a fine or jail sentence. Such punishments cannot be applied to such violations of ethical behavior. Simply, the other party will be hurt and that can have a harm upon social interactions between the two thereafter.

**What is the difference between Law and Ethics?**

• Law is a collection of rules and regulations whereas ethics are a collection of social guidelines based on moral principles and values.

• Law is a set of universal rules, but ethics need not be universal.

• Disobeying law is liable for penalties and punishments, but not adhering to the principles of ethics is not liable for punishment.

• Law is published; it has to be in written form, whereas ethics need not be published.

• The law of the land should be obeyed, and hence, it is enforced, whereas the ethics cannot be enforced.

It is thus understood that both law and ethics are applicable to all walks of life and to all professions as well.