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CWRU Integrity Week Keynote Address

Mark Lekan

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Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here today at Case Western Reserve University to deliver the keynote address for Integrity Week. I would like to thank the members of the Academic Integrity Board—especially Jacob Sandstrom and Cassidy Abdeen—for this invitation and for their support in bringing me to campus. I also would like to recognize and thank the staff of the Inamori Center and Dr. Shannon French for sponsoring this event. Eaton has maintained a special relationship with the Inamori Center over the years, and I look forward to continuing that relationship.

In my job at Eaton, part of what I do is speak to groups of employees at all levels of the company about ethics, and more specifically, ethical conduct in the workplace. When I say “ethical conduct,” I refer to what we at Eaton call “doing business right,” which is doing business in a way that is consistent with the company’s values and code of ethics. I will discuss our code in more detail in a few minutes, but it includes everything from obeying the law to fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace to avoiding conflicts of interest. Doing business right for us means making ethical decisions in all situations, even and especially when the pressure is on. It means building and maintaining a culture of ethics across a huge global organization. It means being ethical leaders, whether you manage other people or not. What I find is that, in general, regardless of the level in the company, from production employees to senior executives, people want to talk about this topic.

Why? I think in general just about all people—and I’m speaking from the narrow context of my own work—want to do what’s right. There are certainly bad actors in business, in politics, and in sports. Reading the news makes that quite evident. I’m fortunate, though, to work for an organization that actively fosters a culture of ethics. Employees take a lot of pride in that culture. Many joined the company because of its reputation for doing business ethically. And because of that pride, people want to do what’s right. They want to maintain and be a part of it.

One thing I'll talk about today is how organizational culture can shape the ethics of individuals within that organization. I'm speaking of corporations, universities, teams—really any group of people working together toward common goals. I'll talk about the attributes of such a culture. Finally, I'll talk today about what we as individuals can and really should do to create cultures that value ethics—and I'm using a simple and general definition of the term here.

My hope today is that by sharing my own experiences and learning—both from my work in the field of ethics and compliance and during my career—you, and particularly those of you who are students, might take away an idea or thought that might promote your own learning on the topic of integrity or help you in some way as you begin your careers in whatever field you enter.

I never would have thought that my career would take me to where I am today. I see my good friend Matt Rossman here today. Matt is a professor at the law school and someone I have known since we were freshmen at Miami University many years ago. He can tell you stories of the ins and outs of my career, which took anything but a linear path. Like many people, I began my formal work life at age sixteen at McDonald's, making hamburgers and mopping floors. During college, I worked the cash register at a Convenient Food Mart, washed dishes in the university dining hall, and faced some of my first real ethical dilemmas as a resident assistant in a dormitory. As I look back on that experience, I wish that I'd had half the will and wisdom that I have today. After college, I worked in employee benefits, co-owned a small landscaping company, worked as an administrative assistant, and taught middle school English—all before I went to law school. I was a bit all over the place. Even in going to law school, I was not entirely sure where I was headed. I thought I might work for one of the important federal regulatory agencies or even the Department of Justice. After graduating, I clerked for a federal district court judge in Michigan, moved back to Cleveland to practice law at a large firm, worked in a family consulting business, and then—through dumb luck and happenstance—landed at Eaton. I've changed jobs and careers several times. As I look back, I was always searching for something better, always looking for that right fit, always looking for a place where I could make a difference and find meaning. That's probably not a unique desire. Now, and for the past eight years, I have found myself responsible for ethics at a large global company. Hindsight is of course what they say it is, and I have to say that looking

back, just about all my experiences help me in my job today. They've made me who I am and inform the way I think and make decisions.

Sometimes I wonder how it all happened. There were many times in my career when I felt completely off track, lost, and behind my peers and friends. There were some high points, too. I still think that someday I'll return to the classroom as a middle school English teacher, my first calling and first love. What I recognize now—and only with the power of hindsight—is that each step represented learning. What I would offer is that it's OK to explore and experiment. You may feel awkward, confused, or even lost as you seek your own path, but keep going. Keep learning. Keep experiencing. Everything you do, if you are open to self-reflection, is an opportunity for growth and learning. There is no one way, no single recipe. Perhaps some of you have found your path and are well on your way. Perhaps you haven't. That's OK, too. In thinking about integrity, about living and working ethically, I am convinced that we need to begin by being true to ourselves. If something is not working, don't be afraid to stop, think, and ask yourself whether you are in the right place. If something does not seem right, say something. Talk to someone. This practice of stopping to reflect, to consider decisions carefully, in my experience, is really at the core of acting with integrity in our education and work. I'll talk further about decision making in a moment as I share experiences from my role in Ethics and Compliance at Eaton.

Eaton is what we call a power management company. Our industrial products are found in airplanes, trucks, cars and construction equipment; our electrical products are found in commercial buildings, factories, hospitals, sports stadiums, data centers and homes. Eaton products keep planes in the air, trucks on the road, your data backed up, and the lights on, all with an eye toward efficiency and sustainability. We employ approximately ninety-nine thousand people all over the world, and we have a corporate office here in Cleveland.

Our company's vision is to improve the quality of life and the environment through the use of power management technologies and services. This vision statement is supported by aspirational goals, which include: to be the preferred supplier to customers and channel partners; to make work exciting, engaging and meaningful for our employees; to make our communities stronger; to ensure the safety, health and wellness of our employees; to be a model of inclusion and diversity in our industry; and to be active stewards of the environment. At the center of all of this and

all these people, is a shared commitment to doing business right, which is how we talk about being ethical or acting with integrity, as an organization and as employees.

Eaton maintains a central office of ethics and compliance, which is where I work. Most of us on the team are lawyers, but there are other backgrounds as well, including human resources, finance, and audit. We are charged with protecting the company's reputation and shareholder value by ensuring that as an organization and employees, we live up to the phrase "doing business right," and we act with integrity according to our global code of ethics. Eaton established its office of ethics and compliance in the early 2000s in part to comply with the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation, which was enacted following huge corporate scandals like Enron and WorldCom. That legislation included a requirement that public companies maintain an anonymous reporting system through which employees or others could report claims regarding financial integrity. Eaton has operated what we call a "help line" ever since, and we are open to receiving not only concerns about financial matters but concerns about any matter that touches the code of ethics, which is comprised of twelve principles that include obeying the law, reporting results accurately and with integrity, respecting human rights, delivering quality, competing fairly, respecting the dignity of all employees, avoiding conflicts of interest, protecting the company's assets, never paying bribes, and protecting employee health and safety. We encourage and value transparency and speaking up, and we prohibit any form of retaliation.

In my role in ethics and compliance, I lead a team of people in the Americas region—north and south, who are charged with investigating concerns that come in through the help line, assessing and mitigating risk to the company, helping employees understand our values and the code of ethics, and ensuring accountability and learning when we uncover misconduct.

My job, like many jobs, brings out the full range of emotions in me and in those who contact us looking for help. It's easy to be indignant in the face of blatant misconduct, and compassionate when someone comes forward with a truly serious concern. If I were to list perhaps the most important quality for this work, it would be empathy. For most people, speaking up and calling out ethical misconduct through a formal channel like an ethics line is a daunting step. Despite our absolute prohibition of retaliation, people are nervous about speaking up. It's human nature. For this reason, my team and I spend a significant amount of time traveling to

our plants and office locations in the Americas, getting to know employees, and talking about Eaton's commitment to ethics. I've learned that more than asking questions, the most important part of taking in a help line complaint is simply to listen.

I feel fortunate in the sense that I have the independence and support within the organization to do my job with integrity. I really wouldn't do this if I couldn't do it honestly. The help line is real, and the process works. Of course, I am not here to say that we are perfect. But I can say that the organization has put the infrastructure in place to support a culture of ethics. I would offer this as another learning. As I mentioned earlier, be true to yourself. Find that place where you can find meaning, where you feel passion, where you can practice your profession—whatever that may be—openly and honestly.

I would wager that every company that has found itself enmeshed in a scandal has maintained a code of ethics very similar to or even more extensive than our own. I'm probably not telling you anything when I say that all the rules in the world will not stop misconduct, fraud, harassment, theft, or corruption without a true commitment to ethics on the part of leadership and employees. What I have found and believe is that culture trumps rules when it comes to ensuring ethical conduct within an organization. In some of the more recent corporate scandals, we have seen how issues of organizational culture resulted in scandal. In Volkswagen's "dieselgate" scandal, which involved Volkswagen arming eleven million of its diesel cars worldwide with a "defeat device" that allowed them to artificially lower emissions in order to pass emissions tests while polluting heavily in use on the road, much has been written about the culture of silence, the top-down leadership that did not tolerate dissent, and the relentless push to achieve corporate goals without regard to the means. VW has paid twenty-five billion dollars to settle claims in the US.

The scandal at Wells Fargo is another example of a broken culture combined with a relentless push to achieve goals that resulted in a tarnished reputation and costs to regular consumers. At Wells Fargo, the bank's intense push for growth and lax controls led to a tremendous scandal in which its employees fraudulently opened thousands of bank accounts on behalf of customers, accounts that those customers never requested. Wells Fargo has paid over four billion dollars in fines and in settlements. Think of the #MeToo movement and the toxic leaders and cultures that have been exposed.

These examples and other lapses point out the importance of an organizational culture of integrity. When I refer to a culture of integrity, I mean a culture in which there is a strong and credible tone from leadership with respect to ethics; a culture in which anyone feels free to speak up and call out ethical failures; a culture in which retaliation is not tolerated, ever; a culture in which concerns are taken seriously and investigated promptly and objectively; and a culture in which there is true accountability, regardless of the level of the person involved, and learning when claims of misconduct are substantiated.

Think about how important these principles are in a company, in a university, and in society at large. We live and work in challenging times. We face pressure in our work as students and in our jobs. Deadlines to complete papers. Course schedules that just don't line up to allow us to complete that double major on time. Pressure to publish. Pressure to hit the numbers or get the sale. Pressure to graduate X percent of students on time.

We also see corruption in the world continuing apparently unabated. If you've looked at the latest Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International, you will see that the world is awash in public corruption and that corruption corrodes democracy. Perhaps not surprisingly, the United States lost four points since last year in the index, dropping out of the top twenty countries for the first time since 2011. As Transparency International noted, "the low score comes at a time when the US is experiencing threats to its system of checks and balances as well as an erosion of ethical norms at the highest levels of power."

Sadly, we live in a time when—despite progress for social change through something as powerful as the #MeToo movement—we still see that harassment and discrimination against people because of gender, age, race, color, nationality, citizenship, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability continues.

I will close by asking: What role will you play in taking on these challenges? What role will you play in creating a culture of integrity where you work or learn or live? How will you promote speaking up so that everyone has a voice? How will you advocate for accountability? How will you foster learning? How will you create positive change? I believe that as individuals, future professionals, and future leaders, we have the power to make these changes and to create cultures of ethics in our schools, workplaces, and communities. Thank you very much.