

Ethikos Volume 35, Number 4. October 01, 2021 Pioneers in business ethics: Emmanuel Lulin

Emmanuel Lulin (emmanuelulin@gmail.com), LL.M., is Chief Ethics Officer for L'Oréal, based in Paris. Lulin was interviewed by Joan Dubinsky, JD.

A note on this series: In the last 40 years or so, an entirely new academic and occupational niche for practicing ethics in business has emerged. Many of the original academic business ethicists came to the field through philosophy, then brought their thinking and research into business schools. Many of the original practitioners came to the field through the law and remain close to the practice of law.

In an effort to preserve and share this knowledge and practical experience, the Center for Professional Responsibility in Business and Society at the University of Illinois Gies College of Business has filmed and transcribed the oral histories of these pioneers and early adopters. To date, almost 50 academics and practitioners have been interviewed, each with 25 years or more of experience in the field of business ethics. This series aims to provide a better understanding of how the business ethics field and profession have evolved over the decades, through the interviewees' own experiences. For more details on the series, contact Gretchen Winter (gwinter@illinois.edu), JD, the Center's Executive Director. This interview was condensed for clarity and brevity.

JD: What is your personal backstory?

EL: I come from a regular French middle-class family with a robust background. I was born and raised in Paris but educated partly in the US. I started my legal career with American law firm Debevoise & Plimpton. When we discussed whether to start in New York or in Paris, I thought it was better to make my first mistakes in Paris, in my home country. After ten years, I joined L'Oréal. Two things influenced my career choices: First, my parents were self-made people. They lived through the Shoah (the Holocaust). My mother was a brilliant pupil but was banished out of school by Vichy. Both started very early in their life to work. They remarkably showed my brothers and me how to behave appropriately, what forgiveness means, and the beauty of humanism. When I was ten, they sent me on vacation with a German family that didn't speak French. Second, for about ten years, I worked with Serge and Beate Klarsfeld, who hunted Nazis in Europe and helped bring those criminals to justice after the Second World War. I started to work with them when I was 16 or 17. I made extensive trips on the other side of the Iron Curtain, sometimes missing school, to search for remains of the decimated Jewish communities. It led to the discovery of the Auschwitz Album, the only pictures taken by the Nazis themselves in the camp, now in Yad Vashem. The Klarsfelds made me understand very early in my life that you can be alone, but nevertheless, with a strong will, you can move things and eventually prevail.

JD: Working to address the evil of the Holocaust shaped your work in business ethics. What is your philosophy?

EL: I think that individuals can move things. And often, in conversation with colleagues or with students, I tell them that to become a reasonably good ethics officer, they should learn old authors, philosophy, rhetoric, history, sociology, etc., and this would be, at least, as necessary as studying law.

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