

**Santa:** I'm Santa Ono, the president and vice-chancellor of UBC. On this season of the *Blue and Goldcast*, I'm speaking with the people who are leading some of the most innovative and creative work coming out of our campuses.

**Santa:** In today's episode, I'll be joined by the directors of the Peter P. Dhillon Centre and Peter Dhillon himself to talk about why business ethics matters at all levels. Through the Centre's research initiatives, collaboration with the business community, and their work training, the next generation of business leaders at UBC will speak about how they are working to establish the Centre as a global voice on social responsibility, sustainability, and ethics in business.

I'm joined by Professor Kate White, the academic director at the Dhillon Centre. Her research looks at how to encourage ethical, pro-social, and sustainable behaviors in consumers. Kate is a professor of marketing and behavioral science and the senior associate dean of equity, diversity, and inclusion at UBC's School of Business. Christie Stephenson is the executive director at the Centre. Her work has raised the profile of a number of key issues like sustainable finance. Having served on the boards of cooperatives, nonprofits, and private companies, she has over two decades of diverse governance experience.

I'm also joined by Peter Dhillon. Peter is the CEO of the Richberry Group, one of the largest Canadian producers of cranberries for Ocean Spray. He also serves as the chairman of Ocean Spray. Outside of his leadership in the agribusiness industry, Peter is known for a philanthropic and charitable service. In 2015, in partnership with the Sauder School of Business, he founded the Peter P. Dhillon Centre for Business Ethics. Peter, Christie, and Kate, welcome to *Blue and Goldcast*. Thank you for coming on the show.

**Peter Dhillon:** Thank you.

**Christie Stephenson:** Thanks for having us.

**Kate White:** Thanks.

**Santa:** Peter, you have been outspoken about the importance of ethics, especially in business. Could you take us back in time and share what originally motivated you to start the Dhillon Centre?

**Peter:** Yes. Thanks, Santa. Thanks for the question. It actually came to me this purpose/cause that I wanted to lead around business ethics. It was just ethics in general and focused in on business. I was in Florida with a colleague of mine, who's retired, former CEO of a pretty large-sized CPG brand. In 2008, as we know, we had the financial crisis where companies were threatened, whether they were going to get credit available to them or not.

It hit me after the fact that companies like mine that were doing the right thing, that we're meeting our obligations to our employees, to our shareholders, to our lenders, we could have been collateral damage as a result of the 2008 crisis. As I was walking on the beach with my friend, we just talked about how this could happen. It really was driven by a very few people who were doing the wrong things.

They weren't thinking about values. They weren't thinking about shareholders. They weren't thinking about employees. They're, in fact, just thinking about themselves. The collateral damage from that was pretty big already that governments had to give hundreds of billions of dollars of loans to keep some of these big corporations from going under. To me, it was about myself, my industry, my fellow farmers, who could have been really tremendously hurting. It was about, how can we be better?

When I started the Centre with UBC, I would've thought that governments or corporate America or corporate Canada would have stood up, but yet it was a cranberry farmer from a cranberry bog that said this has to change. You know what? Sometimes change needs to start from the most unusual spots. That's where the idea was born and fed from there. Working in partnership with UBC, we were able to create something that I think will be special, is special, and I look forward to the future and what it can do.

**Santa:** I do as well and we're really very, very fortunate that you've engaged with us. Now, looking at where we are now in terms of dealing with the impact of coinciding health and climate crises, it's been a very tough 18 months. How can ethical leadership look to the past to help prevent or mitigate these crises?

**Christie:** I think what's evident in so many crises, whether we're talking about COVID, the climate crisis, some people would speak of their looming crisis of economic inequality, reconciliation. I don't think we're that far off of talking about that in terms of a situation that if we don't get right, it's deeply problematic. I don't know exactly what defines where something is a tipping point that defines a crisis, but we have a lot of very large and systemically important issues that we're facing.

I think that there's no question, business leaders, if they want their organizations and our economy as a whole collectively to be resilient. We really need leadership that's going to acknowledge stakeholders, that's going to care about things like the environment, about vulnerable people, not just incentives that are furthering the bottom line but that are really involving a level of fairness and equity in business.

**Kate:** I think the one thing that just came to mind for me when you said what can we learn from past crises, it's one of those things where I think there's things happening right now where there's a lot of warning signs happening, things happening with climate right now, right? One of those things were there were some warning signals and maybe things could have been done sooner with respect to past crises. Moving forward, thinking about, okay, when we see these warning signs, [chuckles] there's potential to do something. Maybe put mitigation types of things in play. That's just the one thing that came to mind for me when you talked about that notion of what can we learn from past crises.

**Peter:** Santa, I'm a firm believer. Never let a good crisis go to waste. What are those learning lessons that came out of the 2008 and what are learning lessons out of any crises? I got to tell you, and I really thank Kate and Christie and the university for allowing me to speak to their students, I'm so inspired by the young people because I think they're moving the pendulum back to the middle.

I look at my generation that perhaps wasn't as in touch and in tune with what was really happening on, whether it's environmental sustainability, treating people fairly. There's so much that we never thought about that this new generation is really focused in on and their priorities are certainly different. I really love that because I think they're going to make the world a better place. Talking to the students at UBC, I can see that and it really excites me, but I think it all really starts with a strong foundation.

**Santa:** Well, I agree 100%. I think that your Centre really provides that kind of platform or venue to have those important conversations to teach them, as you say, to harness their energy. What would you say, Peter, to someone who has looked at what's happened over, say, the past 15 or 20 years, who thinks in a cynical kind of way that business and ethics are actually contradictory? I know that's what you're trying to actually counteract with the mission of the Centre, but what would you say to someone who says that?

**Peter:** That's exactly what people's impressions are today, that those two just are on opposite ends. I think the Centre is a real opportunity to actually build the bridge between ethics and business because they don't have to be a part. They actually can be put together. I think having the Centre and leading the conversation and being a leader in this really important topic actually can build a bridge. It doesn't have to be two separate. It should be together. That's why I think the university with the Centre can really play a critical role as we look forward into the future.

**Santa:** Well, thank you, Peter. Now, this question is for Kate. As a social psychologist, your research looks into how business can influence consumers to make behavioral changes for the public good. Most recently, your work has looked at how a business addresses the issue of climate change through encouraging more sustainable consumer behavior. Is there a recent example where consumers themselves may have pushed the dial on a public issue to encourage business leadership to change, or is there any research that shows that business itself sees a benefit when they think about the overall public good?

**Kate:** I think the first answer to that is a broad answer, which is something that Peter alluded to as well, which is that more and more we're seeing people asking and demanding from organizations and brands to have options and offerings and ways to-- they're looking for values-aligned options, right? How can I use my dollars that I'm spending in ways that align with my beliefs and values and how can I contribute to things like social impact and sustainability?

There was a recent industry survey and they found that 70% of consumers really said that this was important to them, finding these brands that align with values that do some kind of social good. This was even more for millennials and Gen Z as Peter was referring to. One kind of example that came to mind for me was even something like the climate marches. In Vancouver, for example, a lot of employees said to their employers, "You know what? We would actually like to take the time today to go and take part in the climate march."

Some of the employers, for example, Lush and MEC, actually gave their employees the day off to go and take part in the march. To go and advocate and not just sitting around talking about it, but going out and-- It was a march, but it was going out and

doing something. It was a behavior, right? I think there are definitely cases where consumers are moving the needle on things.

Another one that's not as-- I don't know if it's a high-impact example, but it's an example that consumers' voices can lead to change is the issue of plastic straws. I don't think this is the most impactful climate problem, but it's interesting because it got a lot of consumer attention. It did force certain organizations and brands or it encouraged certain organizations and brands to move the needle. Starbucks, for example, and McDonald's were very much influenced by consumer demand and what people were asking for in the space.

The other question you asked was, are there examples where doing business for good has paid off for businesses? There's some interesting analyses where these organizations that are really doing well on environment, social, and all these things do actually do well financially and there's certainly case studies, right? Patagonia definitely is doubling down on and environmental values and it's worked really well for them.

Another example is actually Nike, right? When they had their Colin Kaepernick campaign, at first, they got some negative attention on social media, but they tracked it over time and it turned out that sales actually went up after they used the Colin Kaepernick campaign. There's definitely examples of brands taking this and organizations taking these types of values-related issues and having financial payoffs as a result.

**Santa:** Talking about social responsibility, how do you incorporate this when you work with students? We know that they're more socially responsible and conscious, but is there an example that you could share, any of you, from the classroom? I imagine a big part of social responsibility is also thinking about who has a seat at the table and, more importantly, who gets heard. I'm thinking about equity, diversity, and inclusion. Can you tell a little bit about how we bring this to life? Because as Peter said, we're trying to teach them because it's inherently in them, but how do we teach them so that when they become business leaders, their values are embedded in their business decisions?

**Kate:** I think there's two pieces there. The courses that I teach, I teach consumer behavior courses. One of the things I always try to do is we talk a lot about ethics and advertising and how marketers engage in things like CSR. We talk about those types of topics more broadly. We also talk a lot about shifting consumer behaviors towards more positive, pro-social, and sustainable outcomes. For example, in the last time I taught my consumer behavior class, we actually did projects with local companies and local brands.

That's how some of these issues get brought to light in the class, giving students these real projects that they can apply the concepts that they've learned to and make these pro-social differences for these organizations. I think the question about EDI is an interesting one because there's some classes where we have specific program EDI content. A lot of the organizational behavior courses have specific modules and speakers specifically around EDI.

I think what's interesting too and not all instructors always think about this is you can also think about, how are you using EDI in your technique, your pedagogy? How are you making people feel included in the classroom? How are you setting the stage for inclusive conversations? How are you forming your groups? Is it inclusive? What's going on? I think there's also that level as well, thinking about how your classroom is running and does it feel inclusive and equitable for everybody in the class? I think Christie might have-- Do you have some teaching examples too?

**Christie:** Yes, one of the things I think that's really exciting about the Centre is students is one of our core pillars. Yet when we talk about students and we're providing support to students, we're really talking about the gamut. We've talked now about younger students, undergraduates, but really we're involved in delivering to undergraduates, to graduate students. We're involved in executive education at UBC Sauder. We're also involved in training programs for a number of professionals with external bodies, so for accountants, governance professionals, lawyers, et cetera.

We really run the gamut on topics that would tie in with ethics or responsibility, environmental, social, and governance. On EDI specifically, I give you one example of an undergraduate course that we have supported now for a number of years at Sauder, four years. I think it's our fourth year. We had the students this year design an investment strategy for the Canada Pension Plan around reconciliation and recognition of the rights of Indigenous people and they did a fantastic job. I love what Santa said about a seat at the table because one of the things that the students pointed out is this is great to get us thinking about it.

If Canada Pension Plan is actually going to develop a strategy, it shouldn't be a whole classroom of non-Indigenous people giving them all these ideas of what they should be doing. They really need to bring in significant representation into the workforce, draw on investment professionals who are, in fact, Indigenous or other community leaders to be weighing in. It isn't just about building in EDI. It really is about power-sharing.

**Santa:** In view of that fact that the student is central to this and to the future, what is the Centre doing and what can we as a university do to help recruit students to the university, but also to be involved in the work of the Centre?

**Kate:** I think one of the things that draw students to UBC and to Sauder, I think a lot of them are looking for the social good. They want to get involved in values-based initiatives. They want to get involved in values-based research. We have a lot of amazing students already like student groups popping up all over the place getting involved in different issues and initiatives. I think this is a really active place and a lot of the students seek out the Centre, right?

**Christie:** We have graduate students that are receiving grant funding to really help encourage them to pursue research around business for social good. They attend conferences that we run. They show up to various events. Business and ethics case competitions, professional ethics case competitions, they participate in. There's all kinds of ways that students are getting drawn in.

We've, from the start, played a role in supporting curriculum development at Sauder business school, but the piece around UBC is really compelling because I think

corporations are the dominant institutions of our time. They are the most important institutions that are driving our reality as a society in this day and age. They can't just be left to business in a sense. It's becoming a reality that businesses are increasingly places that are multidisciplinary.

Exactly like Peter said, we're talking in boardrooms about EDI. We're talking about technical climate topics. We have the Bank of Canada weighing in on climate change. Topics that were not business topics are business topics now. Really, a university is a place that can bring together students that are business students, but being able to draw on the incredible resources of students who are not business students, I think, is really exciting.

**Peter:** I think, really, the opportunity is beyond the university. I think it's universal. I think the Centre could be a global voice on business ethics, but let's be honest. We run into ethical dilemmas every day. Doesn't come just from business, it comes from everywhere every day. What an opportunity that UBC has with perhaps being a global voice on business ethics. As you said, what a tremendous opportunity to extend it beyond Sauder, but to extend it to the rest of the university. I hope from there, we can take the conversation globally and become the voice universally.

**Santa:** Well, we'll definitely do that, Peter. I'd love to have your last word. Looking to the future and just speak from the heart, what do you hope to see happen with the Centre in the next five years or so? Kate, you can talk about research. You can talk about teaching. You can talk about the impact on the greater landscape of business and on society. I'd love to hear from all three of you. Kate, what do you see in the next five years?

**Kate:** I'm actually incoming as the senior associate dean for equity, diversity, and inclusion for-- I'm doing this dual role and it works really nicely because the Centre along with our board, we decided that one of our strategic areas of focus was going to be EDI, right? It's something that we want to really move forward. As I've stepped into this role, it's just a super exciting time because there's so much to do, but it's super exciting because there's so much to do, right?

There's just all this room for-- it's like, "Ooh," like you just see all these-- I don't want to say low-hanging fruit, but they're juicy and attractive-looking fruit that it's like, "Oh, I can do all these things." I have a lot of aspirations in the EDI space. Then I think in the research space, one of the things we've been trying to do is create cross-fertilization of ideas. Not just business research, doing business research, but how can we bring in other disciplines?

Also, how can we also bring in cross-cutting ideas from industry and other types of organizations, nonprofit organizations, and creating intersectional research where you might come up with innovative solutions because you're taking in all this information from different directions? I guess those are my two wishlist items, so going deeper into the EDI space and then more of the cross-disciplinary research in this area.

**Santa:** Thanks, Kate. Christie?

**Christie:** Yes, those are great. I would maybe add a continuation of the collaboration we've done. Starting out a brand new center, we really relied on collaborating with others and that's been with industry bodies, professional associations externally. That's been with other faculties, the law faculty, you name it, all kinds of other faculties at UBC. Other universities were involved in all kinds of global networks that are really, really exciting. It's really a way to scale and to have more impact.

The other thing I feel like I can't help but say because it really is so gratifying is students who have been there and have been involved in the Centre, seeing them go out into the workforce. They get out into the workforce and they're early in their career, but I'm just watching and waiting as they ascend. They get their hands on the levers of power because you see these students and you think, "Wow, watch out, world," right? These guys are coming and we're going to be in good hands, right? Seeing some of these folks that we've been able to work with as young undergraduates really become leaders in the business community. It's just so exciting to see.

**Santa:** Thank you. How about you, Peter? I'm still thinking about how the idea was born for the Centre from a crisis and your desire to really support the future of ethical leadership. What's your vision? What can we do in the next five years or so to just support and amplify your vision?

**Peter:** As I look out 5 years, 10 years from now, something you said earlier, if we could help reduce the cynicism between business and ethics, people don't see them even in the same time zone. If we can build that bridge over the next 5 to 10 years and actually demonstrate that this is something that both business and ethics can actually be in the same room together and work very well together, I think that is important to stomp that impression that people have that they don't belong. I think that's something that I'd like to see the Centre really help towards accomplishing.

The other is I really believe that when I did this, there wasn't a very strong voice. Not many organizations were talking about business ethics. We knew that we had the crisis. What did we learn from it? I don't know if somebody sat down and wrote a list of lessons learned, right? If it took a cranberry farmer to create a center of business ethics and other big corporations or government does then step in and do something, I think that's something I'd like to see Sauder then become as the global conversation center on these types of matters, and also help create other centers around the world to lead the discussion in their geography.

It all streams out to businesses, not just in Canada, not just in British Columbia, but internationally. Last but not least, I really want business to realize that doing the right thing makes them a big winner. That in itself, it may not pay dividends in the short term. In the long term, it will really pay dividends. It will excite people, young people to come and work for companies that are doing the right thing. With all of the talent coming at you, you're going to be a winner.

**Santa:** Well, thanks a lot and look forward to thinking about how we can expand the impact of the Centre. We're really grateful as an institution to have all of you involved. Peter, thank you for creating the Centre. Peter, Christie, and Kate, thank you so much for being on *Blue and Goldcast* today.

**Peter:** Thank you.

**Kate:** Thanks for having us.

**Christie:** Thanks.

**Santa:** Peter Dhillon, Christie Stephenson, and Dr. Kate White, thanks so much for being on *Blue and Goldcast* today. Dr. Kate White is the academic director of the Peter P. Dhillon Centre of Business Ethics and a professor at UBC's Sauder School of Business, Christie Stephenson is the Centre's executive director, and Peter Dhillon is CEO of the Richberry Group. That does it for this episode. You can find links to our guests' work as well as previous additions to the show at [blueandgoldcast.com](http://blueandgoldcast.com). You can also find us on your favorite podcast app like Apple Podcasts, SoundCloud, or Spotify. You can tweet me @ubcprez. That's prez with a Z. I'm Santa Ono. Thanks for listening.