

Learn whether the company has *ombudspersons*, who help employees file complaints, or hotlines for advice on ethics problems or for reporting misconduct. Ask whether the company or organization has a formal code for personal and organizational behavior (Figure 5.6). Finally, assume that no employer, no matter how ethical, will tolerate any public statement that makes the company look bad.

**NOTE**

*Sometimes the right choice is obvious, but often it is not. No one has any sure way of always knowing what to do. This chapter is only an introduction to the inevitable hard choices that, throughout your career, will be yours to make and to live with. For further guidance and case examples, go to The Online Ethics Center for Engineering and Science at <[www.onlineethics.org](http://www.onlineethics.org)>.*

### **Checklist: Ethical Communication**

*Use this checklist for any document you prepare or for which you are responsible. (Numbers in parentheses refer to the first page of discussion.)*

#### **Accuracy**

- Have I explored all sides of the issue and all possible alternatives? (117)
- Do I provide enough information and interpretation for recipients to understand the facts as I know them? (92)
- Do I avoid exaggeration, understatement, sugarcoating, or any distortion or omission that would leave readers at a disadvantage? (80)
- Do I state the case clearly instead of hiding behind jargon and euphemism? (233)

#### **Honesty**

- Do I make a clear distinction between “certainty” and “probability”? (156)
- Are my information sources valid, reliable, and relatively unbiased? (150)
- Do I actually believe what I’m saying, instead of being a mouthpiece for group-think or advancing some hidden agenda? (78)
- Would I still advocate this position if I were held publicly accountable for it? (78)
- Do I inform people of all the consequences or risks (as I am able to predict) of what I am advocating? (77)
- Do I give candid feedback or criticism, if it is warranted? (78)

#### **Fairness**

- Am I reasonably sure this document will harm no innocent persons or damage their reputations? (85)
- Am I respecting all legitimate rights to privacy and confidentiality? (80)
- Am I distributing copies of this document to every person who has the right to know about it? (81)
- Do I credit all contributors and sources of ideas and information? (87)

*Source:* Adapted from Brownell and Fitzgerald 18; Bryan 87; Johannesen 21–22; Larson 39; Unger 39–46; Yoos 50–55.