PART ONE: THE HISTORICAL RUNDOWN

The term "whistleblowing" began being used by journalists in the 1960s, to describe people who reveal wrongdoing. In the early 1970s, Ralph Nader coined the term as a positive alternative to negative connotations such as "informer" or "snitch." The Whistleblower Protection Act was passed in 1989 in the United States, and protects federal government employees from retaliatory action for voluntarily disclosing information about dishonest or illegal activities occurring at a government organization. In Canada, the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act has protected whistleblowers in the federal public sector since April 2007. The goal of the Act is to require employers in the public sector to establish a code of conduct that provides civil protections for whistleblowers, including disciplinary actions against a public servant who takes a reprisal against a whistleblower, and reinstatement or damages in lieu of reinstatement for whistleblowers who have been subject to reprisal. The Act states simply, "no person shall take any reprisal against a public servant."

Today, the term 'ethics reporting' is more generally used. An ethics reporting program serves a vital function in business and government. It assists with revealing unethical behaviour and offers legal protection for doing so. A person can expose any kind of information or activity that is considered not appropriate within an organization. This can include violation of company policy/rules, ethics, law, regulations, safety concerns, threat to public interest/national security, fraud including time theft, or corruption.

Most concerns filed are internal, reporting misconduct of a fellow employee or superior within their company through anonymous reporting mechanisms, like hotlines.

MORALLY SOUND: BEST PRACTICES IN ETHICS REPORTING HOTLINES.

A FOUR-PART SERIES ON ETHICS REPORTING (AKA WHISTLEBLOWING) HOTLINES-AN IMPORTANT RESOURCE TO KEEP YOUR WORKPLACE SAFE, AND YOUR COMPANY INTEGRITY IN PLACE.

Violators are held accountable and it can influence the behaviour of other organizations and even whole industries. This ripple effect can bring about significant, positive reform.

Current ethics reporting programs have three core components: why, what, and where/how. Without a why, there is no reason for employees to speak up at all. This is why companies need a strong ethics policy or code of conduct. If you want to encourage employees to speak up, you must tell them what to speak up against. Most policies use blanket terms like fraud, harassment, and illegal activity. Best practice is to be specific with in your policies. Policies also contain information on where and how employees should lodge their concerns. This can range from informing their immediate supervisor to a third-party ethics reporting hotline.

Employee confidentiality and protection clauses are also very important in policies. Suitable standards that are most widely adopted explicitly state that the reporting person will not experience reprisal for relaying the information. They also clearly define what this looks like.

Research and information gathered from Security Magazine.