According to our research, while 63 percent of respondents regularly witness both minor and major ethical infractions, employees confront only half of the unethical behavior they witness at work.

Our study of 926 people found that the top three minor ethical violations include taking credit for someone else's work, taking extra long breaks, and calling in sick when actually well. A third of respondents reported seeing one of these minor infractions in the last week.

Taking unfair revenge, embezzling significant value, and coercing sexual favors are the most common major infractions observed. When these more gross violations are suspected, only one in four employees confront their unethical colleague.

Why do most stay mum when witnessing unethical behavior? The top “excuses” employees gave for not blowing the whistle include:

1. It might damage their career
2. It would have made the offender harder to work with
3. They didn’t think they would be taken seriously
4. They weren’t sure how to bring up their concerns

The study showed that those who speak up about small infractions are six times more likely to speak up about major ones—suggesting that it’s more likely organizations can create ethical cultures when employees feel enabled to blow the whistle.

About VitalSmarts—An innovator in corporate training and leadership development, VitalSmarts combines three decades of original research with 50 years of the best social science to help leaders and organizations change human behavior and achieve new levels of performance. VitalSmarts has identified four high-leverage skill sets that, when used in combination, create healthy corporate cultures. These skills are taught in the Company’s award-winning training programs and New York Times bestselling books of the same titles: Crucial Conversations, Crucial Accountability, Influencer, and Change Anything. VitalSmarts has consulted with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies and trained more than one million people worldwide. www.vitalsmarts.com

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