



# THE OATH PROJECT

## Talking Points: Introducing the Oath to new affiliates and new students

The idea of a Hippocratic Oath for business leaders can be very appealing and inspiring. But people often have concerns and objections to the idea of an oath. Most often, the objections and concerns are based on an incomplete understanding of the history and goals of the Oath Project. In particular, some people may not realize:

- The idea of an Oath is a very old one; no one with The Oath Project is claiming to have invented it.
- The Oath Project is a partnership of many individuals and organizations, and does not represent one particular point of view.
- We believe taking the Oath can be meaningful and important, but only as an early first step toward considering the responsibilities of what it means to be a professional
- Taking the Oath, by itself, is likely to be insufficient to make real change, and so we encourage the exploration of “Habits” to make the Oath deeper.

What follows are more thorough talking points, to help you explain The Oath Project to friends and colleagues:

### **The Big Goal – Business as a Profession**

- Classic professions (law, medicine) have certain things in common: an exam that proves knowledge AFTER grad school, continuing education requirements, a peer-administered code of conduct;
- By these standards, business is not currently a profession.
- The people involved with the Oath Project believe it is worth considering how to encourage all business leaders, someday, to hold themselves to the higher standard of personal conduct that is considered *professionalism*.
- This doesn't necessarily mean that business will need to look exactly like law or medicine – modern technology may allow us to do things differently. But we want to move toward the professional orientation.
- The Oath is just a useful first step in that conversation. We don't think it solves everything, but it is vital as a way forward

## History

- Schools offering technical business knowledge (accounting, etc) have existed for hundreds of years;
- MBA programs were created one hundred years ago with the goal of professionalizing business leaders. It hasn't quite happened that way.
- Schools have been experimenting with Oaths for years. INSEAD tried for a few years. Thunderbird has had an Oath since 2004.
- In 2008 an academic article by two MBA professors proposed a specific draft Oath.
- Many people were inspired to take immediate action – organizing colleagues to sign an Oath. This included the World Economic Forum, students at Harvard Business School and the University of Ottawa, the Mongolian Chamber of Commerce, etc.
- In 2009, several of these groups joined together to launch a new nonprofit, The Oath Project, to help coordinate their various efforts;
- The Oath Project serves as a platform or “hub” to support and enhances the work of the many individuals and organizations who have committed themselves to advancing the concept of the Oath. Our founding [Partners](#) include the [World Economic Forum's Young Global Leaders](#), the [MBA Oath](#), the [Aspen Institute](#), the [Principles for Responsible Management Education](#), the [UN Global Compact](#), the [Association of Professionals in Business Management](#), [Net Impact](#), and the [Canadian MBA Oath](#).

## Living The Oath – The Habits

A key goal of The Oath Project is to find ways to continually deepen the experience. Signing the Oath should be much more meaningful than an online petition. Grounded in academic research on behavioral transformation, we are experimenting with a few ideas:

- The power of groups – a signing ceremony makes the commitment more real
- Personal reflection – What if each signer was required to write themselves a private note, and The Oath Project emailed it back to them every year—their commitment to the Oath would extend over time.
- A “lifeline” – If signers simply write the name of a person who they would consider calling in the event of an ethical crisis, research shows they are more likely to actually call that person.

## The 2010 Business School Campaign

To show the world that this is not a passing fad, we want to have a multiple of the 2,000 signers from 2009. Our plan requires:

- Students from 100+ schools sign the Oath
- Only 30-40 schools are identified as Leadership Schools
- Each Leadership school must have 2-3 student champions

## The Only Rule – Add, Do Not Subtract to the Oath

- Although the early adopters of the Oath each had slightly different versions of the oath, we soon realized that the power of our movement depends on having a “common core” – so that Oath signers working together around the world can rely on a common set of principles.
- We went through a long, open, multi-stakeholder process to identify the current Oath, which we view as the “common core” for all affiliates of the Oath Project.
- If you like, **you may certainly add** content relevant to your school – a preamble, additional clauses, or an addendum. But to be an Oath Project affiliate, you **may not subtract** from the common core.

### **Resources for Affiliates**

- Access to bi-weekly Best Practices conference calls
- One-on-one support from other student leaders
- A toolkit of useful written materials – sample emails, posters, a guide to a signing ceremony (and these talking points!)
- A customized Landing Page at [www.mbaoath.org](http://www.mbaoath.org) that lists the signers from your school.
- Chance to compete for cash prizes to the School Affiliates with the highest adoption rate, and most innovative efforts.
- Recognition of your school on websites and any upcoming advertising, print materials, etc.

**We are mostly a group of volunteers, and we'll make some mistakes – and hopefully keep getting better. Will you join with us?**

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