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WNET’s Business Ethics Series Examines the Corporate Culture Behind One of America’s Deadliest Mining Disasters

PLAYING BY THE RULES: ETHICS AT WORK ***Episode Three: “The Run Coal Memos”***

Premieres Wednesday, June 7 at 8 p.m. on WLIW21
Premieres Thursday, June 8 at 8:30 p.m. on THIRTEEN
Streams Online on each station website following the broadcast

NEW YORK [May XX, 2017] – Twenty-nine men perished on April 5, 2010 in a massive explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia. It remains the deadliest mining disaster in America of the last 45 years. Government investigators blamed the tragedy on bad management and a culture fostered by the company’s controversial CEO, Don Blankenship, who they say placed production over safety. Blankenship would eventually be convicted of conspiring to evade mine safety regulations; just days ago he was released following a year in federal prison.

“**The Run Coal Memos**,” the third episode of the three-part WNET series ***Playing By the Rules: Ethics at Work***, gives viewers an inside look at the tragedy, speaking with key players – including some who were there the day of the disaster. The film also uncovers key company documents which government investigators say led employees to violate basic safety measures which could have prevented the catastrophe.

“**The Run Coal Memos**” premieres on Wednesday, June 7 at 8 p.m. on WLIW21, and Thursday, June 8 at 8:30 p.m. on THIRTEEN. The film can be viewed online on each station’s site beginning June 7 at 8 p.m., at wliw.org/ethics and thirteen.org/ethics. Additional options for viewing ***Playing By the Rules:***

Ethics at Work can be found at Thirteen.org/anywhere and WLIW.org/anywhere.

What led to the massive explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch Mine? In a report nearly 1,000 pages long, the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration found that if basic safety measures had been in place, the disaster would not have happened. "**The Run Coal Memos**" looks at the evidence uncovered by federal and state investigators surrounding allegations of safety violations and hazardous working conditions. Key to the government's case -- the infamous "run coal memos," internal company documents which investigators say demonstrated a disregard for safety and a corporate attitude which put profits over people.

The documentary features powerful interviews with those who were close to the events, including Stanley "Goose" Stewart, who worked at Upper Big Branch for 15 years and was heading into the mine to start his shift at the time of the explosion, and who long had concerns about the mine's safety; Harley Taylor, a safety officer at Upper Big Branch; Booth Goodwin, the former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of West Virginia, who oversaw the prosecution of Don Blankenship; and Tim Bailey, an attorney who represented the families of some of those killed.

Goodwin calls Massey Energy, the company which owned Upper Big Branch, "a rogue coal company" when it was run by Blankenship. Massey is no longer in business; after the tragedy, it was sold to a competitor. Under Blankenship, Massey became one of the largest coal producers in the U.S., but it was also cited for more safety violations than any mining company in America, with more than 50 people dying in Massey mines during his 10 years as CEO. The documentary also interviews Morgan Massey, the patriarch of the Massey family. Mr. Massey was no longer with the company at the time of the tragedy but remained close with Blankenship and says the popular image of the embattled CEO is a false one. Blankenship, he says, always put safety first because "it's good business." Blankenship himself did not respond to interview requests.

Playing By the Rules: Ethics at Work looks at how ethics play a major role in contemporary business practices and challenges viewers to think about what they would do if they found their values challenged at work. Comprised of three 30-minute films--"**The Whistleblower**," "**Ask Why**," and "**The Run Coal Memos**"-- the series focuses on real cases of corruption, fraud, or management failures in corporate America and implicitly asks viewers, "What would *you* do?" Each documentary draws on real-life examples, combining original reporting and interviews with experts and key players to provide an inside view of crises which have engulfed some of America's largest and most well-known corporations.

"As a PBS station, WNET is uniquely placed to look closely at key events and examine them in greater depth," says WNET President and CEO Neal

Shapiro. “Throughout this series, WNET has strived to bring these contemporary ethics stories to life and to challenge viewers to consider the broad impact of even ordinary business decisions. Business ethics are vital to a healthy economy and to communities in myriad real ways, which this series underscores.”

WNET is the parent company of New York’s public television stations THIRTEEN and WLIW21 and operator of NJTV. Bryan Myers is producer/writer. Sasha Schecter is associate producer. Evelyn Maturana is field producer. Sheelah Kolhatkar is host. Diane Masciale is vice president and general manager of WLIW21 and executive producer of local production. Stephen Segaller is executive-in-charge of production for WNET.

Major funding for ***Playing by the Rules: Ethics at Work*** was provided by Ronnie and Lawrence D. Ackman. Additional funding was provided by Betty and John Levin, Lise Strickler and Mark Gallogly, Patricia and Philip Laskawy, and Graves and Colleen Tompkins.

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About WNET

WNET is America’s flagship PBS station and parent company of [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#). WNET also operates [NJTV](#), the statewide public media network in New Jersey. Through its broadcast channels, three cable services (KidsThirteen, Create and World) and online streaming sites, WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to more than five million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [PBS NewsHour Weekend](#), [Charlie Rose](#) and a range of documentaries, children’s programs, and local news and cultural offerings. WNET’s groundbreaking series for children and young adults include [Get the Math](#), [Oh Noah!](#) and [Cyberchase](#) as well as [Mission US](#), the award-winning interactive history game. WNET highlights the tri-state’s unique culture and diverse communities through [NYC-ARTS](#), [Reel 13](#), [NJTV News with Mary Alice Williams](#) and [MetroFocus](#), the daily multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. In addition, WNET produces online-only programming including the award-winning series about gender identity, [First Person](#), and an intergenerational look at tech and pop culture, [The Chatterbox with Kevin and Grandma Lill](#). In 2015, THIRTEEN launched Passport, an online streaming service which allows members to see new and archival THIRTEEN and PBS programming anytime, anywhere: www.thirteen.org/passport.