

# The Ethical Decision-Making Model

Adapted from Rushworth Kidder's Book How Good People Make Tough Choices

## 1. Recognize:

Do you recognize a moral or ethical dilemma where two or more values are in conflict (i.e. Truth vs. Loyalty)?

## 2. Players:

Who is morally responsible/morally obligated? Who contributed to the problem(s)? What were the motivations? Self-Interests? Which of the players will suffer with the choice

## 3. Gather:

Gathering the facts. Remember, opinions are not facts. Opinions of popular or famous people are still "opinions." Apply critical thinking skills generously. Earnestly "Seek to discover the truth." What assumptions are being made? What information/facts are being omitted?

- ◆ Know that a "right" choice is ethical, effective, and efficient ([ADP 6-22, p. 1-4, para 1-24](#))
- ◆ List the possible right choices
- ◆ Determine the right choices that solve the problem, are within resource constraints, and are ethical

## 4. Right vs. Wrong:

Ethics: What I ought to do (Kidder), according to laws, rules, oaths, creeds, codes, cultural expectations  
The list below contains guidelines to help determine if a decision is right or wrong: If the decision fails a test it, may be a wrong decision; it takes personal courage to choose an unpopular right decision.

**Is the choice illegal or does it violate community norms?** Is it against values of community, family, church, school, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, coaches, mentors, etc.?

**Does the choice pass the Gut Check?** Does it make you feel uneasy when you think about doing it.

**Is it OK for "your choice" to go viral on Social Media or appear on NY Times Front Page?**

**Is it OK for your highest ethical role models to know of your choice:** parents, coach, mentor, sponsor, etc.?

## 5. Right vs. Right: Priority of Values

Rank your values. Apply your values to possible choices. Is there a choice that honors "do good & avoid evil"? The most common values, in conflict, pair like this:

- ◆ **Truth vs. Loyalty:** If I tell the truth, I will "betray" my friend, who may suffer immensely.
- ◆ **Self vs. Community:** If I sue the hospital, I'll get rich (self), but the sick people will lose their hospital (community).
- ◆ **Short-term vs. Long-term:** If I cheat on tests (short-term), I remain undereducated and disadvantage others
- ◆ **Justice vs. Mercy:** If the system convicts a homeless woman, with no money, for stealing food, her three children go into the foster system.

## 6. Resolve: Which choice is best? Consider these common resolution principles:

- ◆ **Ends-Based:** Greatest good for greatest number.
- ◆ **Rule-Based:** Kantian/Categorical Imperative Universal Principle: same rule for everyone, always.
- ◆ **Golden Rule:** Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

## 7. Alternatives:

Is there a choice that would honor both the core values in conflict and still solve the problem?

## 8. Act:

Leadership requires the competence, character and commitment to act according to the right choice (ethical, effective, efficient). This is often the hardest part of making a decision: *to act*. Remember, to "not act" is a choice. All choices have consequences.

## 9. Reflect:

It is most beneficial to reflect on choices and their impact. Think about second, third and fourth order effects of a choice. Practice reflection on hypothetical ethical scenarios to develop making better choices which lead to better habits. There are hundreds of ethical and moral dilemmas that we face daily. Reflecting on the choices we make in "hypothetical" situations can still build "brain" pathways to better choices. Making consistent better choices can result in good choice habits and make honorable living easier. Keeping a journal can assist you in tracking your improvement in ethical decision-making.