

IGFOA Annual Conference

Worksheet for Imperfect Equanimity and the Art of Being an Ethical Human – *at Work!* September 16, 2018

Part I: An intentional state of mind:

This workshop is an open discussion, with some structure, regarding ethics in the workplace. The intent is to be as practical as possible.

There are two themes that run through this summary:

1. Ethics based social norms may keep us from speaking up. Social norms may unwittingly curtail organizational performance, give room to ethics violations and prevent the exchange of good information.
2. For practical reasons, we don't push back against leaders who are doing things that are unethical. Not pushing back against leaders has become easier because we've changed our definition of ethics to accommodate their actions.

Most ethics seminars and articles focus on case studies and specific ethical requirements in the workplace. How one is expected to behave is spelled out in laws, workplace policies and professional codes of conduct. While this approach to ethics management is the norm, I see the following shortcomings:

1. Leaders continue to violate ethical standards.
2. Employees at all levels continue to report disengagement and dissatisfaction.
3. Difficulty with simple interactions and conversations remains a source of significant conflict and trouble.
4. Locally and across the globe, governments, NGOs and businesses continue to fail under the weight of bad actions by their leaders. Bad actions are rooted in competency and ethics.
5. There does not seem to be an agreed-to human ethic.

Our interest in discussing how we act toward one another is a weighty issue. Here are some ideas to move the conversation forward. As you read this list, consider the Gestalt coaching stance that “Awareness cures.”

1. Social constructs at work have created barriers to supervisors saying what’s on their mind. The result of social constructs such as “Be kind”, “Be positive” and “Be humble” have caused us to 1) not address problems, 2) address problems with obscure language and 3) edit and distort our thinking and speaking.
2. Leadership is the primary source of ethical violations and evil.
3. Not being straight with people is a taught norm. We’ve been taught how to dance around issues. The idea of confronting leaders with courageous conversations is a bad idea – a job ending move.
4. We’ve been taught/told never to embarrass another person. This has removed an essential tool for accountability (Argyris – HBR). The social command to “Be positive” trumps “Be accurate.”
5. People don’t speak up at meetings because they fear ridicule or being offensive. This opens the door for bad decisions and growth of bias.
6. Our ego keeps us from being transparent; we are often not open to being wrong. We act defensively when others discover our errors or question a decision.
7. We think that because a leader appears generous and kind they must be doing good work. We don’t know when we are being duped by them. Acting like we don’t know what others are up to is a safe stance. We ignore signs and avoid accountability. To be accountable may require action and the action may not be in our interest.

What is Administrative Evil? Consistent with the definition of administrative evil, people tend to ignore the possibility that others might be doing wrong, we may ignore slippery slopes, we are unwilling to hold each other accountable (peer to peer), we let leaders get away with not solving problems, we see real or potential violations against individuals and groups but ignore them, and we are committed to doing our own job even when we sense that evil lurks around the corner. Significantly, 1) we are usually unwilling to push against higher-ups and 2) if we get what we want, we ignore others. Seen in this context, improving an organizations ethical stance is unlikely.

Conclusion: Deep-seated workplace ethics is always subject to the ethical stance of its leaders. People will consciously or unconsciously follow the character of the leaders. As

humans, we see the friction between how leaders are and the ideals we believe in. As we see the political nature of a leader play-out, we may ignore the pull of own standards and unwittingly become a player in administrative evil. This is how cultures decline and corruption and evil grow.

This is just one possible cause and effect for ethical swings in our own behavior. Experiencing Stanford Prison experiment like results is similar.

Although imperfect, the idea of being equanimous toward one's self and others raises the idea of what frame of mind leads to the best possible moral decisions and judgements about duties, self and others. I state this as I search with you for an understanding of what

“Life without war is impossible either in nature or in grace. The basis of physical, mental, moral, and spiritual life is antagonism. This is the open fact of life.”

Oswald Chambers 1874 – 1917, England

ethics is and what triggers the best possible ethical work-life. This also raises the possibility that the presence of equanimity, a principle of attitude and behavior, is an essential starting point for being ethical/moral. Being ethical doesn't just happen. To be ethical, we need to start by triggering an ethical presence and attitude. There are two conscientious steps that precede the state of being ethical. Both relate to the idea of being present minded. The two present-minded/pre-ethics steps are _____ and _____.

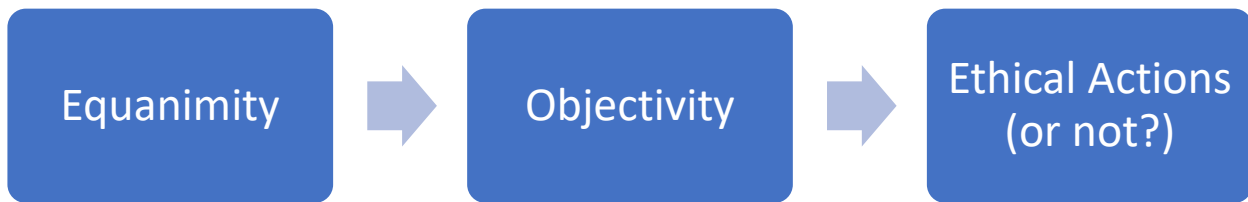
Just as we might not want to test our swimming skills by jumping from a cruise ship into the middle of the ocean, we may not want to boast about being ethical without first examining our emotional state, intentions and motivations. Life is complicated. We complicate life even more because we haven't thoroughly examined our thinking and behavior under pressure.

There are two other points to consider when sizing up why we fail to be ethical at will:

- There are times when we just don't give a damn.
- We reject the notion that something we are doing could be defined as unethical; we categorize a questionable action as “This is just what I want – end of discussion.”

Consider ethics as a state-of-mind process: Being ethical is a mental process and not an automatic state of mind where the ego usually rules. More likely, to be ethical requires that we habitualized certain ways of thinking and being. By intentionally seeking and acting from the right state of mind, we will increase the likelihood that our better self-will consistently emerge.

What's your ethics process or model?



People who choose to wing it regarding their ethics are more likely to miss it.

In small groups, please discuss what this concept means to you. Write your ideas down. Appoint a spokesperson:

Five essentials necessary for a moral state of mind:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Part 2: A useful definition of ethics.

Discussion: Like many concepts in the world of philosophy/humanities, definition is difficult but essential. Without a definition of ethics, what's likely to occur?

Accordingly, to move this off the dime, I settle on this simple non-sectarian definition. You should feel free to add or subtract – the key is to have a definition you will hold yourself – and perhaps others – to account for.

A. Ethics is about two universal principles – from Immanuel Kant:

- ✓ Would my actions stand up universally?
- ✓ I must see and treat myself and others equally

Agree/disagree – add or subtract:

B. Ethics is about laws. Laws tend to be:

- ✓ Place and group specific; targeted, legally binding
- ✓ Necessitates an adjudication

Agree/disagree – add or subtract:

C. Ethics is about professional codes, Codes of Conduct – Policies

- ✓ Group & career specific
- ✓ Work Rules – one set for all
- ✓ Social norms - expectations & values

Agree/disagree – add or subtract:

D. Ethics is having a deeper sense for how I am:

- ✓ What does it *feel like* to be me?
- ✓ Nietzsche and Eternal Recurrence:
 - Destined to live my life over and over - again and again
 - Think about this when interacting with others

Agree/disagree – add or subtract:

Part 3: A three -step plan for creating ethical competency:

1. When facing normal or potentially explosive ethical issues, how might I prepare myself before I start talking and deciding:
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-
-

2. **Without emphasizing social norms**, what are my rules for how I will treat co-workers and the public? How will I treat people in meetings, emails, etc.? How might I create a sense for personal and group accountability?
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Peter’s Plan for ethical conversations:

General rules:

- Essentially, downplay all social norms in the workplace.
- Emphasize getting and giving correct information.
- Standard for challenging each other
- Drop all clichés
- Intent: treat everyone the same

Three steps for ethical conversations:

Inquiry:

Rapport:

Advocacy:

3. How do my actions stand up universally?

Final thoughts and comments:

Peter's summary

The actions of leaders matter greatly

My own ethics stance can be supported by:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4,
- 5.

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