❯ Module Activities

Activity 1: What Is Ethics?

Time: 10 minutes

Ask students what ideas pop into their minds when they hear the word "ethics?" Give students time to write on a sheet of paper ("What is ethics?").

Show a video clip of the TV show *The Office* (Season 5, Episode 2: "Business Ethics"). Show the clip from when Holly says, "Pencils down!" until Oscar says: "That isn't ethics. Ethics is a real discussion of the competing conceptions of the good. This is just the corporate anti-shoplifting rules." It is possible to substitute this clip with any clip where the characters exhibit a common misconception about ethics.

Ask students how the word *ethics* is perceived by the characters in the clip and how that is similar or different to what the students wrote or said earlier. Explain that this discussion was designed to get a sense of what images/ideas they associate with the word *ethics*, since there are different ideas about ethics, and that it is not just a series of rules telling them what not to do.

Discuss the definition of ethics from Chapter 6. Emphasize ethical decision making as discerning one's options between two conflicting values, or "right" versus "right."

Activity 2: Ethical Decision Making Four Corners

Time: 35 minutes

Open this activity by describing decision-making as something that people do not always engage in with conscious thought. This activity is designed to uncover our often subconscious rational for ethical decisions.

Following a statement, students will move to one corner of the room to indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. They must move to one area, not in between two areas. Ask students to try their best to move based on what *they* honestly feel they would most likely *do* in the situations and to try not to move based solely on social pressures to portray themselves in a certain way in front of the rest of the group. Finally, ask students to be pay attention to what emotions they feel during this activity (e.g., which questions/comments "push their buttons") and to be respectful, since the statements can be emotional for some people.

Read a statement. Once students have moved to the various corners of the room, ask students in each area to

1. Identify what the competing values in this decision are for them
2. Articulate what reasoning they used to choose between the competing values

If students have previously identified their values in an earlier activity, ask if their choice matches with their values. Ask the students to stick to "I" statements and to respond to you, the facilitator. Keep in mind that each one of the statements could lead to an in-depth discussion, so you may need to intervene to move the discussion along.

Suggested Statements

- I just signed an honor code pledge agreeing to abide by academic honesty policies, including any witnessing of cheating incidents. My best friend is in my accounting course and I observe that friend cheating during an in-class exam. I would report my friend. (*Note*: This statement is from the first page of Chapter 6.)

- Variations for follow-up discussion: What if the person you observed cheating was a stranger? What if it was someone you really did not like? Is there a difference in how you would respond? Why or why not?

  Note: This question gets at Kidder's (2005) "Truth versus Loyalty" dilemma paradigm, mentioned in Chapter 6.

- I am taking care of my friend's cat while my friend is on vacation. One day, about halfway into my friend's vacation, I walk into my friend's place to discover that his pet cat has died. I would wait until my friend got back from the trip to tell him.

- If my friend is joining a student organization and I know she is being hazed (it may be necessary to define hazing for some students), but the friend asks me not to tell. I would still tell someone who could have an impact on stopping the hazing.

- If I saw a homeless person begging on the street, I would give him money.

- If a good friend just bought an expensive outfit and asks me if I like it (and I think it's awful) I would share my true feelings with that friend.

- I would purchase tickets to a concert that I had no interest in so that I can sell them online for a profit.

- I would continue to eat chicken if I knew that the chicken I was eating came from a farm that had horrible, but sanitary, conditions for the animals.
  - Variations for follow-up discussion: What about pork? Beef? Fish? What is the difference, if any?

- I would speak up if I heard someone that I do not know make an offensive ethnic slur at a party.

- If I discover that a good friend is cheating on his or her partner and I am also very close to that partner, I would tell that partner about my discovery of the affair.

- I have been waiting for about eight minutes in a long line of traffic during rush hour, waiting to merge onto another street. A car pulls up next to me and the driver has their blinker on,

trying to get over into my lane. I would allow the driver to pull in front of me.

- Variation for follow-up discussion: What if you were late to work? What if the day before, you tried to do the same thing because you got caught in the wrong lane and did not realize the line of cars started so far back?

You can find many more statements from the game *Scruples* (Scruples by Milton Bradley: http://www.scruplesgame .com/main.html) or through an online search. Make sure to select questions that get at right versus right decisions as mentioned in the chapter, not just right versus wrong decisions.

Debrief Discussion   People often make decisions without much conscious thought. Can practice help a person learn to more automatically consider ethics in their decision-making?

Ask students about how culture and identity influence the decisions they make. What is one aspect of your culture, background, or identity that has influenced your beliefs about what is ethical? Do you feel that there are universal values that apply across cultures? Why or why not?

Additional discussion questions:

- What stood out to you about this activity?
- What statements/situations were more emotional for you? Why?
- What surprised you about this activity?
- Were there any patterns to where people were standing at different times?
- For those of you who stood relatively alone at some point, what did it feel like to be standing apart from others?
- What explanation (reasoning) did you hear that you really liked?

- Did this exercise force you to think about anything? What?
- How does this exercise relate to being a student?
- How does this exercise relate to being a person in the world in general?
- How does this exercise relate to leadership?
- What did you learn from this activity?

Activity 3: Connection to Theory

Time: 15 minutes

Reiterate that the four-corners activity was meant to help students uncover the reasons that they may currently use to make ethical decisions and to expose them to other reasons. Explain that we all are already using certain reasons (including our "gut reaction" or "intuition") for different actions and we may or may not be conscious of them. Continual reflection can help us learn to be consciously aware of our *reasons* when we make decisions, so we can be more intentional about them.

At this point, without calling out individual students, you can share some statements that you heard during the four corners activity (e.g., "it just feels right," "it wouldn't be fair," "it would be best for greatest number of people") to highlight different ideas that the students consider when of making decisions. Have students share the thoughts that occur to them as they are trying to make decisions, for example, "How would I want to be treated in that situation?" or "Would I be comfortable with this decision being on the front-page news?" If they are unable to remember what they ask themselves when trying to make decisions, ask them to think back to the four-corners activity and a reason they used for why they were standing where they were standing for one of the statements.

Review Kidder's Nine Checkpoints for dealing with ethical issues (cited in Chapter 6). Ask the students which of Kidder's

Resolution Principles (from Chapter 6) they find themselves using most often (e.g., ends-based, rules-based, care-based) and what might be some pros and cons of their personal approach. For example, a potential con of the ends-based approach is that if they only focus on the consequence of their actions they may not focus as much on the process it took to get there. You can also discuss concepts such as the Golden Rule, which is listed under "care-based thinking."

Encourage students to continue to reflect on how they can use all three of Kidder's Resolution Principles: ends-based, rules-based, and care-based.

Variation   If there is time or if the group needs to warm up to the discussion, you can divide the group into pairs and ask them to discuss what reasons they find themselves using in daily life and/or in the four-corners activity.

› Facilitator Notes

If you have already conducted a "values clarification" activity with this group of students, it is helpful to encourage students to consider this discussion to be an extension of that one as it considers decision-making when two values conflict (right versus right).

During the four-corners activity students may ask for more details about each statement, but it is important to tell them that they should use their own interpretation of each statement.

The four-corners activity may bring up strong emotions for some students because it can tap into deep beliefs and create cognitive dissonance (e.g., a student enjoys eating chicken but is not sure of the conditions of the farm where those chickens are

raised and they feel guilty, defensive). It is very important to create a safe environment where students have a sense of trust so that they can be honest, really examine what they believe, and be open to hearing diverse viewpoints.

❯ Reference

Kidder, R. M. (2005). *Moral courage: Taking action when your values are put to the test*. New York, NY: William Morrow.

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