

# *The Scarlet Source*

*"Just" What You Need for Organizational Success*

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## Ethical Decision Making

### What are Ethics?

One of the major responsibilities of leaders within an organization is to act ethically, make ethical decisions, and promote ethics within the organization. However, in order to accomplish this, one must first start by understanding the definition of ethics. At the most basic level, ethics can be defined as deciding what is right in a particular situation and determines what ought to be.

### What are Ethical Decisions?

Ethical decisions are decisions that are consistent with one's personal or organizational value system. As a leader, it is important to be aware of the messages you are sending when you make decisions. Not all values and principles are clearly stated so think about what message you want to convey. It's also important for your organization to develop a Code of Ethics to define what behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable and to promote a high standard of practice. A Code of Ethics also serves as a framework for professionalism within the organization.

#### FIVE BASIC ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

- 1) **Respect Autonomy**—Individuals have the right to make their own decisions as long as they do not interfere with the well-being of others
- 2) **Do No Harm**—Policies and practices should not have a potential for physical or emotional harm
- 3) **Benefit Others**—Decisions should have a positive effect on others
- 4) **Be Just**—The need to treat people fairly
- 5) **Be Faithful**—Includes issues of loyalty, trust, and respect

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

- 1) **Can I live with this decision?**
- 2) **What's at stake (acting vs. not acting)?**
- 3) **Is my action doing more good than harm?**
- 4) **Am I proud of this decision?**
- 5) **Would I be comfortable if this decision was in the headlines of the newspaper?**

Below are some additional guidelines to help you and your organization make ethical decisions:

- Behave in ways that are consistent with the purpose of your organization. A clear purpose is the foundation for ethical behavior.
- Maintain high standards of professionalism at all times.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Act in ways that you are personally proud of.
- Remember that ethical decision-making takes time!! Do not act prematurely before all ethical implications of a decision are reviewed. Behave with patience and avoid the trap of having to have things happen immediately. Patience helps us behave in ways that will be best in the long run.
- Behave with persistence and **ACT ETHICALLY ALL OF THE TIME**—not just when it is convenient to do so.