



# Ethics on the Job

Cases and Strategies



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# **Ethics on the Job: Cases and Strategies**



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## **The RESOLVEDD Strategy of Ethical Decision Making**

- R eview of the details and background of the case
  - E stimate of the problem or conflict the case presents
  - S olutions reduced and grouped into a few main solutions
  - O utcomes of each main solution
  - L ikely impact of each main solution on people's lives
  - V alues upheld and violated by each main solution
  - E valuation of the values, outcomes, and likely impact of main solutions
  - D ecision stated, detailed, supported
  - D efense of the decision against objections to its main weaknesses
- (See Checklist in Chapter 3.6.)

# **Ethics on the Job: Cases and Strategies**



## DEDICATION



We dedicate this text to our mothers and fathers, who taught us that doing right is its own reward. And to LoLita, Sharon, Mariah, Ryan, Caven, and Darian, who taught us that when we are unsure of what is right, we must try harder to find out.

# GUIDE TO TOPICS IN CASES



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## Working Conditions

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## P R E F A C E



This is a text on practical ethics. Its purpose is to help the student master a clear, applicable strategy for making decisions in the presence of ethical conflict. It is not a text on theoretical ethics and does not provide a comprehensive treatment of the many concepts and issues in the field of ethics. However, neither does this book assume that the reader has general mastery of the subject of ethics. Many basic concepts needed to use the strategy are defined and exemplified in the text. The book is written for the general reader.

It is not the purpose of this book to persuade anyone of the importance of living an ethical life. Rather, the book assumes that the reader is already convinced of its importance, and is seeking ways to live accordingly. We have been impressed time and again by the comments of our students, friends, colleagues, associates, and acquaintances to the effect that they are unsure what is right and wrong in certain complex situations they encounter in their daily lives. Some have drawn the conclusion that there are no answers to such questions, or at least no best answers.

It is our conviction that many ambivalent situations do admit of better and worse determinations of what is right and wrong. Indeed, the confusion and frustration arising in many such situations seem to result more from someone's inability to ask questions that lead to enlightening answers than from any inherent moral or ethical insolvability. The problem is, many people are unsure how to start analyzing an ethical conflict, what questions to ask, and how to proceed.

Our teaching of applied ethics during the past decade has led to our

development of the RESOLVEDD strategy of ethical decision making. It provides a clearly applicable and easily remembered approach to the complexities of ethical conflicts encountered in everyday life. It does not simplify such conflicts, but helps to guide one through a process of arriving at a well-reasoned decision.

The first half of the book presents an applicable overview of ethics, some basic, useful ethical values, the RESOLVEDD strategy of analysis, and provides three sample analyses using the strategy. The second half presents forty-two personal ethical conflicts that might be encountered by employees in various occupations. The purpose of these cases is to challenge the student to apply the RESOLVEDD strategy to develop the best decision possible in each case. The effort to do so offers the student opportunities to examine the case from varying perspectives, sharpen his or her grasp of important ethical principles, and to assert, analyze, and defend value judgments based on them.

The personal ethical conflicts presented in the book are rarely clear-cut. There are usually a number of compelling options for resolving each conflict. Moreover, these conflicts do not simply present the question of whether or not to act ethically. There are usually significant ethical advantages and disadvantages to several of the main options relevant to each conflict. To decide in such contexts, the reader must make and defend value judgments regarding which ethical principles are relevant and most important for the case.

The personal ethical conflicts presented here are typical of the work-a-day lives of lower-level managers and their employees. We have largely avoided the kinds of ethical issues confronted by top-level managers and directors of organizations. Current textbooks in ethics present many such cases. But they less frequently present students with the kinds of ethical problems confronted by workers at lower organizational levels.

These issues confronting lower-level employees are important for at least four reasons. First, most people begin their careers at the bottom of organizational ladders. If they have studied only the broad ethical issues confronted by those at the top, they may be ill equipped to address the issues of day-to-day work they confront early in their careers. Second, the approach a manager takes to ethical issues confronted later in life results in part from habits of thought developed earlier. Many of the same ethical principles and values are relevant to ethical issues on all levels of an organization. Students can develop a clear understanding of these principles and their applications and excep-

tions by studying issues relevant to employees at lower organizational levels. Third, top-level executives should be well informed about the viewpoints of their subordinates. One of the best ways for them to understand these views is to confront and analyze the kinds of personal ethical conflicts addressed by lower-level employees often contain challenging and enlightening issues that are well worth analysis in their own right.

The personal ethical conflicts presented here are our own creations. Most are adapted from newspaper reports, journal articles, and personal experiences of friends and acquaintances. The characters are fictional, as are the companies, institutions, and the particular personal relationships described. However, the background information presented in each case is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate. The cases present fictional characters facing problems that may arise in real working environments.

The RESOLVEDD strategy integrates a model of decision making with certain ways of thinking essential to the study of ethics. The strategy directs the student or manager to make a decision after having analyzed and evaluated both main sources of ethical justification: consequences and principles. It helps the student survey the possible solutions to a given conflict, identify the significant consequences of each main solution, and state the ethical principles upheld and violated by each one before proceeding to evaluate them and make a decision.

The RESOLVEDD strategy is based more on a certain practical and common-sense approach to ethics than on a philosophical theory. Our approach does not result from an attempt to apply any of the great theories of ethics such as utilitarianism, natural law, or Kantian or Aristotelian ethics. These theories are the result of philosophers' attempts to clarify and systematize certain basic intuitions believed to be fundamental to the moral point of view. That point of view can, however, be described in other ways, independent of these theories. The approach we take is certainly not inconsistent with these theories, but neither is it based on an exclusive commitment to any one of them.

This book can be used as a general supplement to most of the more comprehensive ethics texts that are currently popular in college courses in ethics. Because it is neutral regarding the main theories of ethics, it is compatible with most such texts. Its day-to-day orientation adds a practical dimension to the more theoretical level of discussion in many of those texts.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



This book is born of the growing awareness among teachers of applied ethics that ethical decision making involves ways of thinking that differ in significant respects from those appropriate to the philosophical study of ethics. Our understanding of these differences has developed gradually over the years in the many classes we have taught in ethics, business ethics, and medical ethics. This book brings to fruition many ideas and lessons growing out of a long process of reflection, dialogue, and experimentation, spurred on by the commitment to improve the value of our teaching for our students.

Raymond Pfeiffer first became aware of the need for a decision-making strategy when teaching bioethics to Delta College nursing students in 1979. He found that ethical theories traditionally studied in courses in philosophical ethics have limited value for making decisions in everyday contexts. Professor Richard A. Wright, a consultant sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, suggested the importance of offering a practical strategy for students to apply when confronting ethical issues on the job. Pfeiffer's attempts to use Wright's own Situation Assessment Procedure led him to develop an early version of the decision-making strategy presented here. He initially used the word **DIAGNOSE** as an acronym to help students master the steps of the strategy. Although the strategy worked well, Pfeiffer was not fully satisfied with the acronym. A colleague, Max Thomas, suggested in 1987 that the word **SOLVE** might be adapted as a better acronym. This word had other shortcomings, which were later addressed in developing the acronym **RESOLVEDD** as it is presented here.

Ralph Forsberg's teaching of applied ethics at Harper College in Palatine, Illinois, and at Loyola University of Chicago had led him to become aware that many cases presented by texts in business ethics had limitations. Typically, the cases required the student to assume the role of a top executive. He undertook, beginning in the early 1980s, to develop cases that would be more typical of the kinds of employment his students would have during college and in the first few years beyond. He received important encouragement in this endeavor from professors Patricia A. Werhane and David T. Ozar at Loyola.

When we (the authors) became colleagues at Delta College in 1989, we discovered the complementary nature of our interests. If there is any one moral theorist to which we owe a special debt, it is Bernard Gert. We have found a version of his notion of the moral rules to be helpful in applying the RESOLVEDD strategy. We have not, however, adopted all his moral rules or the precise formulations of those rules that emerge from his careful and insightful analysis.

Our students in medical ethics and business ethics classes over the past decade have helped us sharpen and season our approach. Mary Sue Anderson, Michelle Cobb, Cassandra Collier, Steven W. May, Raquel L. Mondol, Cynthia L. Ott, and James A. Wood have graciously allowed us to adapt their ideas and writings for this work.

The free and open environment at Delta College has contributed immeasurably to the development of this book. Delta administrators such as Deans Owen Homeister, Brenda Beckman, and Betty Jones have continually encouraged innovation and, at times, offered much needed support. Our colleague in philosophy, Professor Linda Plackowski, was of special help, daring to struggle with some of our early ideas. Many of our colleagues in the divisions of Nursing, Business, Technology, and Allied Health have reviewed our ideas and encouraged us to try them out on their students. In particular, professors Jessie Dolson, Louise Goodburne, Bruce Leppien, Ion Keefer, and John Flattery have provided time, energy, thoughts, and opportunities to work with their students, and deserve our special gratitude.

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Like other textbook authors, we owe a debt to the many thinkers from whom we have shamelessly borrowed and adapted many ideas and approaches. Our work has grown from participation in an extended community of teachers, scholars, and philosophers whose integrity and wisdom have inspired and motivated us.

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