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# Ethics for Public Servants

## **GAINS Conference**

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Suzette Arnold  
[suzette.arnold@uga.edu](mailto:suzette.arnold@uga.edu)

# Learning Objectives

- **Review the code of ethics for government service**
- **Discuss types of ethical reasoning**
- **Review the Six Pillars of Character**
- **Examine the principles of public service ethics**
- **Identify several ethical styles**
- **Discuss the code of ethics for government service**
- **Review steps for better decision-making**

# Twenty Dollar Bill...



<https://www.npr.org/2005/11/16/5015599/the-lure-of-the-counterfeit-too-strong>

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# Ethics are...

- Standards for right and wrong, good or bad
- Are concerned with what ought to be done to fulfill a moral duty
- A commitment to doing what is right and good
- How a moral person should conduct themselves
- How a person's beliefs and attitude governs their behavior
- Standards and values are integral part of any culture, hence culture is the bedrock of supporting every development



# **Code of Ethics for Government Service**

## **(CODE SECTION 45-10-1)**

**Any person in government service should:**

- Put loyalty to the highest moral principles and to country above loyalty to persons, party, or government department.**
- Uphold the Constitution, laws, and legal regulations of the United States and the State of Georgia and of all governments therein and never be a party to their evasion.**
- Give a full day's labor for a full day's pay and give to the performance of his duties his earnest effort and best thought.**
- Seek to find and employ more efficient and economical ways to accomplish tasks.**
- Never discriminate unfairly by the dispensing of special favors or privileges to anyone, whether for remuneration or not, and never accept, for himself or his family, favors or benefits under circumstances which reasonable persons might construe as influencing the performance of his governmental duties.**

# **Code of Ethics for Government Service (CODE SECTION 45-10-1)**

- Make no private promises of any kind binding upon the duties of office, since a government employee has no private word which can be binding on public duty.**
- Engage in no business with the government, either directly or indirectly, which is inconsistent with the conscientious performance of his governmental duties.**
- Never use any information coming to him confidentially in the performance of governmental duties as a means for making private profit.**
- Expose corruption wherever discovered.**
- Uphold these principles, ever conscious that public office is public trust.**

# Principles of Public Service Ethics

## Public Interest

- Public servants should treat their office as a public trust, only using the power and resources of public office to advance public interests

## Objective Judgment

- Public servants should use independent objective judgment in performing their duties, deciding all matters on the merits

## Accountability

- Public servants should assure that government is conducted openly, efficiently, equitably and honorably



# Principles of Public Service Ethics

## **Democratic Leadership**

**Public servants should honor and respect the principles and spirit of representative democracy and set a positive example of good citizenship**

## **Respectability**

**Public servants should safeguard public confidence in the integrity of government by being honest, fair, caring, and respectful**

# Ethical Reasoning



**Inner Benefit**

**Approval**

**Religion**



**Habit**

**Personal Advantage**



# Obstacles...

**There are obstacles to being ethical, which include:**

- **The ethics of self-interest.** When the motivation for ethical behavior is self-interest, decision-making is reduced to risk-reward calculations. If the risks from ethical behavior are high — or the risks from unethical behavior are low and the reward is high — moral principles succumb to expediency.
- **The real test of our ethics is whether we are willing to do the right thing even when it is not in our self-interest.**
-

# Obstacles cont'd.

**The pursuit of happiness. Enlightenment philosophers and the American Founding Fathers enshrined the pursuit of happiness as a basic right of free men. But is this pursuit a moral end in itself? It depends on how one defines happiness. Our values, what we prize and desire, determine what we think will make us happy.**

# Ethics Exercise

**1) Ethical people are always ethical regardless of what goes on.**

**True False**

**2) Appearing to do wrong & actually doing wrong are different matters.**

**True False**

**3) Ethical values are personal only.**

**True False**

**4) Ethics cannot be learned, taught, or even discussed in any meaningful way.**

**True False**

**5) Ethics discussions contribute little, if anything, to productivity, morale, or problem solving.**

**True False**

**6) An ethical workplace can be achieved easily or quickly.**

**True False**

# Six Pillars of Character

## Trustworthiness

- Trustworthiness is the most complicated of the six core ethical values and concerns a variety of qualities like honesty, integrity, reliability and loyalty.

## Respect

- Respect prohibits violence, humiliation, manipulation and exploitation. It reflects notions such as civility, courtesy, decency, dignity, autonomy, tolerance and acceptance.

## Responsibility

- Ethical people show responsibility by being accountable, pursuing excellence and exercising self-restraint. They exhibit the ability to respond to expectations.

# Six Pillars of Character

## Fairness

- Fairness implies adherence to a balanced standard of justice without relevance to one's own feelings or inclinations.

## Caring

- Caring is the heart of ethics, and ethical decision-making. It is scarcely possible to be truly ethical and yet unconcerned with the welfare of others. That is because ethics is ultimately about good relations with other people.

## Citizenship

- Citizenship includes civic virtues and duties that prescribe how we ought to behave as part of a community. Such a commitment to the public sphere can have many expressions, such as conserving resources, recycling, using public transportation and cleaning up litter. The good citizen gives more than takes.





# Ethical Style Activity

**A= Agree    D= Disagree**

- \_\_\_1. It really bothers me when someone ignores or breaks one of the government's rules. It's the same kind of feeling I get when I see someone run a red light, even if no one else is on the road.**
- \_\_\_2. I get so irritated when one of the bureaucrats at the Commission Office insists on following the rules when there just isn't any point to it. The important thing is service, not always following policy and procedure.**
- \_\_\_3. My feeling is that anyone who can't stand behind government policy 100% just shouldn't be here.**
- \_\_\_4. You always have to ask, "How will this benefit us in the long run?" I don't believe in short-term solutions.**
- \_\_\_5. I always ask, "Will I be able to look at myself in the mirror in the morning and say, I'm proud of you."**
- \_\_\_6. I just know when something's wrong. It's like I can smell it.**
- \_\_\_7. I always put myself in the other guy's shoes. It's not that I'll always give in if I know he's hurt, but I have to know how he feels.**
- \_\_\_8. Rockefeller, and Carnegie, - I mean you're not talking about nice guys who fought a clean fight. They did what they had to do to win.**
- \_\_\_9. Sometimes the rules and laws which man has developed just are not right and you know it in your heart. Then you have to refer to a higher power to determine what to do.**

# Ethical Style

- Rule of Law
- Utilitarian
- Loyalist
- Prudent
- Virtuous
- Intuitive
- Empathetic
- Selective
- Rule of God

# Ethical Decision Making

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

- **Stevens is a valued employee. She has worked for the County for 17 years and is the kind of worker that can be depended on to put in extra time and effort when it is needed. She has stood by your side several times in crisis situations. Recently, Hazel came to you and admitted that for some time, she has been “borrowing” money from the petty cash fund and writing false receipts to cover it. It was never much, usually \$10 or \$15, and she always repaid it. But her conscience has bothered her so much that she had to confess. Under the County’s personnel policies, her action is clearly a cause for dismissal.**
- **Last fall, your County’s financial difficulties came to light to both the board and the public. The finance director resigned amidst extensive media coverage. After a long recruitment and selection process, the County’s offer has been accepted and a new finance director is ready to report for duty. Robert R. Daniels has an M.B.A., an impressive resume, and while he has been living in another part of the country for quite some time, he was raised in a nearby county. You were mentioning the County’s good fortune to your cousin, who asked the name of the appointee. After comparing “notes”, your cousin recognizes this person to be someone he knew as Ricky Daniels. Ricky Daniels left his hometown about 10 years ago after two of his small businesses went into bankruptcy. While you were not part of the hiring process, no mention of this history was presented to the Board during the recent executive session approving Mr. Daniels’ generous starting salary.**

# Ethical Decision Making

- **Your position in your organization takes you away from your family on many occasions. You take public service seriously and attend as many workshops and conferences as possible so that you may best serve the people you represent. Your organization's travel rules allow for a maximum single meal expense of \$12. You travel to a conference where a reasonable dinner costs \$20. That same morning, you had no out-of-pocket expense for breakfast because you stayed in a hotel where breakfast is provided. A colleague suggests that to "stay whole," you should claim an \$8 breakfast. What would you do?**
- **You were asked to serve on a task force to decide on a controversial endowment for a hospital. Your community has experienced significant population growth lately, with many young families relocating to the area. There is an obvious need for a neonatal unit in the county hospital. Already this year, there have been several infant deaths while premature babies were being transported to hospitals in other counties. An article recently appeared in a regional newspaper describing this situation. Someone willing and able to donate the \$8 million needed to construct the wing has contacted the authority's board. This person will donate the money under only one condition: the new wing must be named in his honor. The donor is a reputed (but unconvicted) member of an organized crime family.**

# Ethical Decision Making

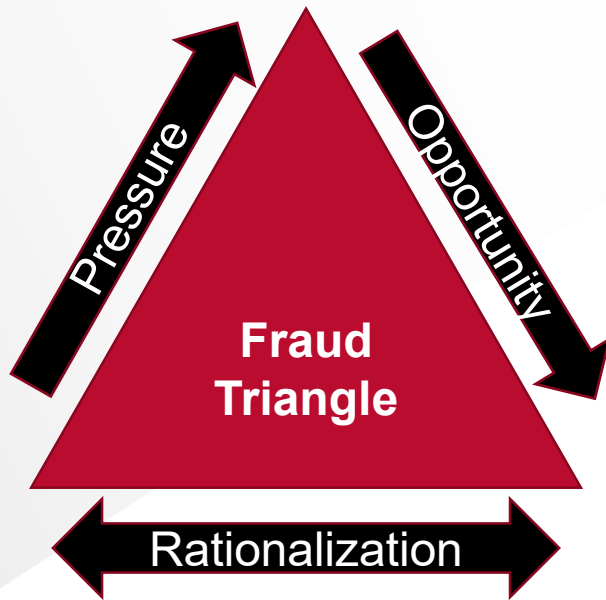
- **After a lengthy recruitment process, the public works director is excited to have found an employee as skilled, enthusiastic, and dedicated as Carlos. Carlos began work just three months ago. He has 3 days of sick leave banked and no vacation leave. Carlos' widowed father, who lives outside of the United States, suddenly becomes very ill and has only a month to live. Carlos is an only child and would like to be with his father during his last days. Carlos asks whether he can take leave for up to 4 weeks. Policy does not allow for leave requests (paid or unpaid) for employees with less than one year of service.**
- **As the school accountant, you have easy access to the school's accounting software. The system is efficient, user-friendly, and you've become quite familiar with it over time. It's part of your daily routine—tracking budgets, expenses, and financial transactions for the school. You're comfortable with the software's layout, and you've always found it easy to use. One day, while managing your work tasks, you realize how simple it would be to use the system to manage your personal finances: the software is already there, and the tasks you'd be managing are straightforward. Plus, you are certain it will not interfere with your work tasks.**

# Ethical Decision-Making

- **Your county recently sought requests for proposals for a new financial software package. You have attended a workshop where the pros and cons of each of the three qualifying proposers have been outlined. You have made the decision to support staff's recommendation for Vendor X. Two weeks before the commission vote, the president of Vendor X calls because he has one extra ticket to a Braves game and knows you are a real fan. He will not be attending and, if you take anyone with you, you will need to pay for that person's ticket.**
- **A homeless person recently died in your county. This person was widely known as suffering with alcoholism. Local police were familiar with this individual. A few also knew that this person had Hepatitis C. One cold morning a police officer was called over by a passerby to help the homeless person whose heart had stopped. The officer hesitated because she knew of the person's medical history and decided that, as a mother of 3 children, she could not administer CPR and risk getting sick herself. (She did not have her breathing apparatus.) The officer then called the EMS service. By the time EMS arrived, the homeless person had died. The local media have picked-up on this story and ask you to comment on the situation.**

# Importance of Creating an Ethical Environment

- Less likely to have high incidences of fraud and/or corruption
- A strong ethical environment hedges against all three sides of the fraud triangle



- Less likely to take an unethical path to meet a goal
- Respect and support build loyalty
- Competitive pay and benefits



# Seven Steps to Better Decision-Making

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- 1. Stop and Think**
- 2. Clarify Goals**
- 3. Determine Facts**
- 4. Develop Options**
- 5. Consider Consequences**
- 6. Choose**
- 7. Monitor and Modify**



# Protecting the Public Trust

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- **AVOID wrongdoing... violating laws, rules or policies.**
- **AVOID conflicts of interest...failing to exercise independent professional judgment on the merits and for the public interest when a decision is affected by:**
  - **Personal economic interests**
  - **Personal friendships and associations**
  - **Inappropriate or irrelevant attitudes**
  - **Personal political ambitions**
- **AVOID violating common standards of propriety.**
- **AVOID appearance of wrongdoing...any act that creates in the mind of a significant number of reasonable impartial observers a perception that the public trust has been violated**
- **Calculated evasions of the spirit of laws and rules**
- **Exercising official authority in circumstances where it reasonably appears that independence and impartiality could be affected by personal, financial, social or political interests.**
- **Expressions of prejudice or attitudes inappropriate to the exercise of public authority.**
- **DISCLOSE POTENTIAL CONFLICT**
- **CONSIDER SELF-DISQUALIFICATION**

# The Motivation of Morality

Check the six items below that you find most important in motivating you to remain aware of ethical issues for you and your organization.

- ☐ 1. Fear for your job.
- ☐ 2. Explicit, clear and applicable policies.
- ☐ 3. Knowing that the organization expects it of you.
- ☐ 4. Knowing that your family expects it of you.
- ☐ 5. The sense that your role in the organization is important.
- ☐ 6. Living up to the responsibilities that you know are yours.
- ☐ 7. The knowledge that you'll be rewarded.
- ☐ 8. Your concern for the organization's reputation.
- ☐ 9. Knowing your organization is already fair, and wanting to keep it that way.
- ☐ 10. Strong pressure to "toe the line."
- ☐ 11. Knowing you'll get caught.
- ☐ 12. High personal standards of ethics.
- ☐ 13. High corporate standards of ethics.
- ☐ 14. You really respect your manager and wouldn't want to get him or her in trouble.
- ☐ 15. The dictates of your religion.
- ☐ 16. You always hear your mother's/ father's voice in the back of your mind.
- ☐ 17. You'd hate to be on television for such a reason.
- ☐ 18. You welcome the opportunity to show what a good person you are.
- ☐ 19. You're being paid to uphold organizational standards.
- ☐ 20. Ethics helps motivate everybody; unethical behavior turns people into cynics.

# Evaluate your answers in light of the following principles. There are no absolute answers

- **Morality is a living phenomenon, no matter how ancient its codes and principles. Our primary moral precept is the autonomy of each individual and every generation to rethink and decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong.**
- **Morality is what one does, not what one says or how loudly and publicly one regrets doing wrong afterward -- a recent fashion. Apologizing on the national news after being convicted of a crime is not necessarily a mark of morality.**
- **Morality is a shared sense of values. It is possible that only one person in the organization is right and everyone else is wrong, but how do we recognize when that lone voice is indeed correct? Only because that lone voice finds a much larger audience outside the company, and agreement on the moral principles with which the company itself will be condemned.**
- **Morality isn't accidental. It is not what one does that counts but what one does knowingly. Promoting the right person by mistake isn't being moral. Giving money to a charity by mistake isn't charity.**
- **Morality requires compassion. Cold-blooded obedience of the rules isn't enough.**
- **Morality is a way of life, a state of character. It's not a matter of forcing oneself to comply. The self-satisfaction of being a "good person" is motive enough.**
- **Morality is not a substitute for life. We are a "crypto-moral" society that delights in clever criminals and charming con men, and not only in the movies. We are a law-abiding society, but we are also attracted to people who break the rules. No one who knows our society should ever expect a morally perfect business world. But such characters and their stories provide the spice of business life, not its substance.**

**Suzette.arnold@uga.edu**

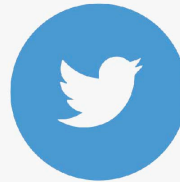


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