



THE BUSINESS ETHICS FIELD GUIDE

Challenge 10: Sacrificing Personal Values

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This series features 13 articles from Brad Agle, Aaron Miller and Bill O'Rourke, co-authors of The Business Ethics Field Guide. Each article focuses on a common work dilemma, while providing real life examples and insightful solutions. For more information, please refer to the cover story in the November/December 2018 issue.

In a diverse society and an interconnected world, it is nearly impossible to avoid products or activities that conflict with your values. When outside of your like-minded community, you will be confronted with the challenge of trying to live those values where circumstances make it difficult to do so.



People have important personal values. Many of these are rooted in one's personal or cultural beliefs. It is entirely appropriate to honor those values and live your life being true to them. So, how will you respond when others invite you to act in a way that violates your personal values? Will you give into the pressure, real or imagined, and disregard them or will you be true to your values? The decision gets complicated when living true to our own beliefs might impose a burden on others. This dilemma is intended to have you think about your personal values. Is your belief a preference or a firm conviction? Also, what are some potential consequences of being true to one's values?

Potential Conflicts

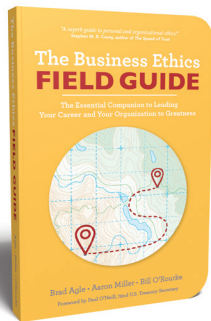
Some of these personal values could originate in religious tradition. For example, work is avoided on Fridays for Muslims, on Saturday for Jews and on Sunday for most Christians. What if your employer schedules you to work on a Sunday and you have a conviction to attend church on that day? If you refuse to work, someone is going to have to fill-in for you and you might get a reputation for being a recalcitrant employee or not being a team player. However, perhaps you can switch your scheduled work day with someone who has been scheduled to work on a day that they attend their religious services. That sounds like a fair sharing of the burden to accommodate the situation, show your willingness to support the team and avoid a negative reputation.

Some religions require certain clothing to demonstrate modesty. Others encourage the wearing of religious artifacts, such as a necklace with a cross. What if your company forbids the wearing of certain religious artifacts for safety reasons? Certain rings, necklaces and bracelets create a risk in certain manufacturing environments where the jewelry can be pulled into the moving equipment and cause injury. In some cases, the jewelry can be secured under protective clothing. In other instances, the

13 ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Upcoming articles in this series will take a closer look at each dilemma.

- 1 STANDING UP TO POWER**
Someone in power is asking you to do something unethical.
- 2 MADE A PROMISE**
Conflicting commitments force you to choose.
- 3 INTERVENTION**
You see something wrong. How do you proceed?
- 4 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**
Multiple roles put you at cross purposes.
- 5 SUSPICIONS WITHOUT ENOUGH EVIDENCE**
You believe something is going on, but you're not sure.
- 6 PLAYING DIRTY**
Achieving justice but by doing something unethical.
- 7 SKIRTING THE RULES**
Bending a rule for a better outcome.
- 8 DISSEMBLANCE**
Misrepresenting the truth for better outcome.
- 9 LOYALTY**
Giving up ethical stance to protect valued relationship.
- 10 SACRIFICING PERSONAL VALUES**
Living ethically might put burden on others.
- 11 UNFAIR ADVANTAGE**
When opportunity exists to wield an unfair upper hand.
- 12 REPAIR**
When you are responsible for a mistake.
- 13 SHOWING MERCY**
You could grant forgiveness, but you don't know if you should.



employee may be reassigned to areas where the safety risk does not exist.

Conflicts between individual and organizational values are often driven by a clash of cultures. For example, a vodka toast in Russia is sometimes an important relationship-building tradition for business associates, while in a Sudan alcohol is forbidden. This dilemma is amplified when you feel pressure from others to act in a way that contradicts your values. Be aware, however, that such pressure is often more imagined than real. Most people will respect your personal decision not to participate in the toast. But be careful in these situations not to wear your values on your sleeve and act as though you are "better" than others. You are not. Your values simply differ.

Finding the Balance

Some individuals have strong convictions about supporting an industry they view as harmful or improper such as gambling, alcohol, weapons production or pornography. As a general rule, organizations will not require you to engage in practices directly opposed to your values. But what if you land a job with one of the big four accounting firms and are asked to audit a casino or an organization that makes and sells alcoholic beverages? Or what if your trucking company is asked to transport guns for a weapons manufacturer? Such circumstances might involve you in something that you deem reprehensible, but you are not being asked to directly participate in the activity. That difference is significant. You have to decide how to allocate your effort and resources, given these potential conflicts with your beliefs.

There are some questions to ask yourself when this dilemma arises:

1. Does your involvement directly promote the behavior that conflicts with your belief? If not, perhaps your tangential participation does not violate your beliefs.
2. Are you acting on your own behalf or as an agent for others? While we give up some level of autonomy when working on behalf of others, we should never completely abandon our own judgement. Although working for others separates us from direct involvement, there may be some occasions where our values still require us to step aside and end our involvement.
3. What burden is placed on others by living your personal values? Some can be lived with minimal impact on others because they deal solely with personal decisions and outcomes. However, maintaining other values necessarily impact the people around us. Sometimes creativity can minimize or eliminate those impacts on others, such as switching workdays as discussed above.
4. What costs are you willing to bear for your beliefs? Answering this question often tells you how sincere you really are in your belief. Hakeem Olajuwon, a Muslim and one of the all-time greats in the NBA, respected the fasting requirements of Ramadan. That means he played a month's worth of games while only eating and drinking before sunrise and after sundown. He would sometimes lose ten pounds during that month. He used Ramadan as an opportunity to educate others about his religious faith.
5. Do you believe the product or service hurts society? While such a justification can guide your

personal choice, keep in mind that others may not share that viewpoint.

6. Were you sufficiently aware of the conflict to have avoided it? If your job is going to put you in a conflict, let your employer know about it ahead of being hired. Involve the employer in the matter early. I recall a pitcher for the Pittsburgh Pirates, Vernon Law, a deacon in his Mormon Church who made it very clear to the team's managers that he could not pitch on Sundays. The team, the manager, the coaches and the fans were all aware of Vernon Law's conviction so there were no expectations that he would pitch on Sundays. He finished his 16-year career with over 350 starts and lived true to that value. By the way, without pitching on Sunday, Vernon Law won three games in the Pittsburgh Pirate World Series win in 1960.

In Summary

Staying true to your personal values is noble. It reveals your character and establishes your reputation. By keeping your commitments, even at a cost, you will inspire others and will feel good about yourself. Occasionally though, it may be more noble to sacrifice a personal value if such a sacrifice would achieve something of even more value. ✪



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