

ETHICS AND POWER IN LEADERSHIP: ETHICS & VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP

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What are your core values and how do you know?

Community has always been important, you know, wherever I am situated in life, whether it's family, whether it's friends. Faith has been very present throughout my life as well. So that helps me guide some of my decision-making, as well as the life that I lead.

I know these are my core values through reflection. A lot of the times we just go through life, we go through life and life experiences, and we really don't take the time to make meaning of these experiences. And I think as I've grown up and had new positions and had different relationships, I've definitely been able to be introspective as to who I am and why do I make some of the decisions that I make.

I know these are my core values because I had somebody who challenged me after I graduated undergrad, who really said to me, what do you value and why is the work that you do so important? And I took some time to really reflect and think about, OK, what is it that's important to me? What do I need to do in this world in order to feel purposeful? And how do I lead people and influence them the best I can?

I've had these values since before I can remember. They were instilled by my family and my parents and brothers and my grandparents. And they keep me focused on making the best decisions for myself and everyone around me.

Have you ever been in a situation where two or more of your core values were at odds? If so, how did you deal with that situation?

I've been in situations before where maybe I was working with a student in fraternity-sorority life and I knew that maybe later in the day they might have a police officer coming to their house and checking on their house in terms of doing a check for drugs or alcohol. And I can't say anything to them, because that goes against my job, and that's a law, and I have to follow that policy. So even though I value authenticity, I also have to recognize that there's a realm of, you know, sphere of control that I have, and sometimes that's going to conflict, whether that be the nature of politics, or the laws that I have to really, really stick to. And so that can be hard at times, for sure.

When I was a manager at Publix, I had a really good associate, a friend of mine, and so being loyal to him, but also loyal to the company and having that integrity, my friend was stealing from the company. And ultimately I had to make the tough choice of either to report that or to let it go. Obviously, I could not let it go because it impacted not only my work, but my entire store, and for our customers' sake. So I had to provide that information to my superior. And ultimately, unfortunately, he did lose his job. But it was in my mind the right thing to do for myself, as well as the entire company on a whole.

How do you handle a situation in which your values do not align with a higher authority, be that a supervisor or a university policy or task that you're up against.

If I feel as though my personal values don't align with perhaps a task or a university policy or something that's going on within the workplace, you know, I'm the type that I really need to take a step back and really consider all of the options. So moving forward, what can I do? What do I have control over?

So whenever I'm dealing with a situation where my personal values don't align with my institution or just higher authority, I always have to take a step back and really look at the overall vision or the overarching goals for whatever that organization is. So really, I need to understand the overall context for why that decision has been made and really look to see where my personal values, where there's some disagreement.

I have some good, honest conversations with my supervisors where I share some of my concerns, but also feel like I'm not compromising my values, because I think that there's always a place where you can meet people halfway and in the middle.

In what ways do you live your values in your professional life?

I know my strengths and I know my weaknesses. I know the areas in which I can improve upon. And in that, I know in order for me to bring my full self and for me to be committed to my organization, I really need to be authentic in who I am and what I'm bringing to work every day.

For students that walk into my space, they might see that, wow, she is creating an inclusive space. She has her values hanging up on her wall. She has her mission up. She's really preaching these. And so I think it's showing that to others and like showcasing that.

If I'm making decisions because I'm not happy with a student or an organization, that's not really upholding my dependability and loyalty and integrity and honesty through everything that I do. And it will make our students not really learn from the process, but just think that they're being punished for their actions.

How do you determine whether the risk is worth the action?

Making values-based decisions and really understanding, OK, well, what does this mean for me in the long run, and not only for me, but what does this mean for the folks that are around myself?

It really involves looking at all the stakeholders involved. So in my work, my stakeholders are my student staff, my departmental colleagues, the institution, and ultimately the resident. And I really need to have all of those key parties in mind whenever I'm making a decision. And I need to know

how my decision is going to impact those people. I need to know what are some of the short-term consequences, and ultimately what could be some long-term consequences.

I would say that if you ever feel like your values are being compromised, listen to that intuitive feeling, right? If something feels off, listen to that and reflect and take a moment, even if it's just writing something down or talking through it with somebody.

I look to see what's in the best interests of the organization that I'm working for, or the office in particular. And then I also take into mind as to what would my parents think if I make that decision? If that were to somehow make the front page of the news, would that be OK with them? So ultimately, if that answer is yes, then that might sway my decision to actually take that risk. But if the answer is no, then ultimately I would not take it, because I don't want to have my mom call and asking me why am I on the front page of the news.

Describe a hardship you've endured, and how that experience contributed to your personal or professional development.

I was in a situation where my supervisor was bullying certain members of the staff, so they created a very uncomfortable work environment. So what I did is I understood the relationships that I had with my supervisor's supervisor, which was the dean of students. So I felt more comfortable addressing the situation with the dean of students and letting them know personally what was going on, whereas I did not feel comfortable or that something would have really happened if I would've addressed my supervisor one on one. So that for me was just an ethical decision going above someone's head and kind of dealing with whatever repercussions that may be.

Many past experiences are used as sources of confidence for ethical decision-making. What experience or situation has played the biggest role in your ethical decision-making?

A past experience that's played a role in how I deal with ethical dilemmas now was a situation where I had to hold several staff members accountable for some choices that they made that ultimately ended in them not being able to continue with their employment. When we had to make that decision, it didn't feel well. But ultimately, it was the fair and consistent thing to do, in line with our policies and procedures here at the University. But looking at the long-term gains that they took away from that, they definitely learned how to deal with adversity. And that now is very reassuring to me, that the growth that happened with those students over the course of a year or two later will definitely stick with them long-term as they enter into their professional careers.

So growing up, I had two older brothers. And just watching them make decisions ultimately help me shaped mine and understanding what was a great decision or what definitely was not.

What advice would you give undergraduate students regarding practicing ethical leadership in their lives and their careers?

Know yourself. Know your core values. Know who you are. So you know, that may mean a bit of self-reflection and meditation, really spending some alone time with yourself, quieting yourself. I think oftentimes, you know, we're digital natives. We have cellphones, televisions, all kinds of distractions. So just take that time to be quiet and silent with yourself, and really think about what are your core values and what goals do you want to accomplish?

Some advice that I would give to undergraduate students is to truly develop your own ethical code. And in doing that, you know, truly make sure that it embraces diversity of thought, integrity, and the dignity of all people. And in that, how are you ultimately going to lead others around you? So how are you going to role model these practices and beliefs and really impacting change and being a change agent in the world?

Leadership is something that happens 24/7. You can't just decide you're going to come home at night and flip the switch and say, I'm not a leader anymore. You have to live it every day. And so just recognizing that that's really important and people are going to get behind you if they see that you're consistent with your values and your actions really do align.

People are always going to be looking at you and the way you make decisions and conduct yourself, day in and day out. So making sure that you're upholding your core values is going to be crucial and critical in maintaining the flow and the success of your office, your department, et cetera, to making sure that you're meeting your vision and mission as to what you're setting out to do every day that you come to work.

So thank you to our panelists. And I hope you've enjoyed this video and been able to make some connections between the conversations and reflections we've had in the first part of the course with where you're going in your ethical leadership beyond this experience.