
Exercise: A Tale of Two Stories¹

In your careers thus far, you have likely encountered workplace situations when your values conflicted with what you were asked to do. Often it is not easy to align your own personal values and purpose with those of your boss, your co-workers, your direct reports, or your firm. This exercise is designed to help you identify and develop the competencies necessary to achieve that alignment.

Objectives

1. To reflect on your previous experiences, successful and less so, at effectively voicing and acting on your values in the workplace.
2. To discover which conditions and problem definitions empower you to effectively voice your values, and which tend to inhibit that action.

Instructions²

Part I

- Recall a time in your work experience when your values³ conflicted with what you were expected to do in a particular, nontrivial management decision, and you spoke up and acted to resolve the conflict.
- Consider the following four questions and write down your thoughts and brief responses:
 - What did you do, and what was the impact?
 - What motivated you to speak up and act?
 - How satisfied are you? How would you like to have responded? (This question is not about rejecting or defending past actions, but rather about imagining your ideal scenario.)
 - What made it easier for you to speak/act (the “enablers”) and what made it more difficult (the “disablers”)?

¹ This material is part of the *Giving Voice to Values* (GVV) curriculum. The Yale School of Management was the founding partner, along with the Aspen Institute, which also served as the incubator for GVV. From 2009 to 2015, GVV was hosted and supported by Babson College.

² During this exercise, you are expressly cautioned not to violate any obligations of confidentiality that you may have with a current or past employer.

³ In this exercise, a “values conflict” refers to a disagreement that has an ethical dimension to it. That is, I might disagree with your idea about the most efficient process flow design for an assembly line, but there is usually not an ethical component to that decision. However, if one design reflected a commitment to worker safety or environmental concerns and the other didn’t, for example, even this disagreement might be appropriate here.

This field-based case was prepared by Mary Gentile, Professor of Practice. Names and other situational details have been disguised. It was written as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation. Copyright © 2010 by Mary Gentile. All rights reserved. *To order free copies, send an e-mail to sales@dardenbusinesspublishing.com. No part of this publication may be altered without permission.* Our goal is to publish materials of the highest quality; please submit any errata to editorial@dardenbusinesspublishing.com.

-
- Things within your own control
 - Things within the control of others

Part II

- Recall a time in your work experience when your values conflicted with what you were expected to do in a particular, nontrivial management decision, and you did *not* speak up or act to resolve the conflict.
- Consider the following four questions and write down your thoughts and brief responses:
 - What happened?
 - Why didn't you speak up or act? What would have motivated you to do so?
 - How satisfied are you? How would you like to have responded? (This question is not about rejecting or defending past actions, but rather about imagining your ideal scenario.)
 - What would have made it easier for you to speak/act (the enablers), and what made it more difficult (the disablers)?
 - Things within your own control
 - Things within the control of others