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## Starting Assumptions for *Giving Voice to Values*<sup>1</sup>

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Before we begin to practice possible approaches and scripts for voicing our values in the workplace, it is useful to be explicit about our starting assumptions. You may or may not be certain that you share all these assumptions but in order to gain the most from this curriculum, it is useful to approach it *as if you do*. This is the “story line,” if you will, behind this work:

**1. I want to do this.**

Most of us want to find ways to voice and act on our values in the workplace, and to do so effectively.

**2. I have done this.**

Despite the fact that research and our own experiences reveal many individual and organizational inhibitors, most of us have, in fact, *chosen* to voice and act on our values on some occasions.

**3. I can do this more and better.**

We have the potential to expand our capacity, our effectiveness, and our likelihood to voice and act on our values by acknowledging that we have such a choice, and by practicing what we would say and do if we made that choice.

**4. It is easier for me to do this in some contexts than others.**

Developing the “muscle” for voicing our values does not diminish the importance of selecting and developing organizational cultures and policies and incentives that *encourage* such choices. In fact, our effort to promote the development of such cultures, policies, and incentives is, in itself, an instance of voicing values. And the more such organizational enablers are in place; the more likely it is that individuals will choose to voice their values. It is a virtuous circle.

**5. I am more likely to do this if I have practiced how to respond.**

There are certain frequently heard reasons and rationalizations for NOT voicing and acting on our values. But there are also possible responses or reframings that we can use to counter these reasons and rationalizations. If we familiarize ourselves with these responses in advance, we are more likely to be able to access them when needed and to potentially shift a conversation or change a mind. Prior reflection on responses to value conflicts can expand our confidence in the degree of freedom we have in any given decision situation.

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<sup>1</sup>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.

**6. My example is powerful.**

Just as we want to voice and act on our values, we can assume that many of our colleagues do as well. If we can access credible responses to frequently heard reasons for not voicing and acting on our values, we may encourage and empower others to join us.

**7. Mastering and delivering responses to frequently-heard rationalizations can empower others who share my views to act, but I cannot assume I know who those folks are.**

The responses we develop and practice for frequently-heard reasons and rationalizations are intended to strengthen our own confidence in voicing and acting on our values, as well as that of others who share our value conflict but are unable to find a way to explain their reluctance. However, we cannot assume we know who feels the conflict and who does not simply by observing their behavior because, as we have already acknowledged, we all have chosen to suppress these felt conflicts at some points in our past.

**8. The better I know myself, the more I can prepare to play to my strengths and be protected from my weaknesses.**

The greater our self-knowledge, the more likely we are to be able to anticipate and manage our responses to value conflicts. Prior reflection on our own personalities and behavioral tendencies under pressure enables us to *play to our strengths* and to *put mechanisms in place to protect us from our weaknesses*. Research tells us that often these mechanisms need to be external (incentives, deterrents, automatic review processes, transparency, a preestablished network of sounding boards, and so forth.). *Internal awareness of self-bias is important but not enough to prevent us from falling prey to it*: we need to go beyond awareness to action and/or external mechanisms.

**9. I am not alone.**

We can utilize our personal support networks as sounding boards; reach out to our colleagues to build a network of allies or to gather supporting information; and engage in strategic use of the managerial hierarchy. However, we must consider carefully which approach is most appropriate in a particular situation.

**10. Although I may not always succeed, voicing and acting on my values is worth doing.**

Just as with any other managerial action, we do not always succeed at what we set out to achieve. We are more likely to voice our values if we have decided that the cost of not doing so, and/or the benefit of doing so, is important enough to us that we would pursue them whether or not we were successful. In order to get to this place of clarity, we need to spend some serious time thinking about our own identity, personal purpose, and definition of success and failure. It is also important to reflect upon the risks associated with voicing our values, so that we make this decision with our eyes open and prepared to handle the risks.

**11. Voicing my values leads to better decisions.**

It is often difficult to be certain that a course of action is right, but we are more likely to come to the best decision if we feel empowered to voice our concerns about value conflicts and discuss them with others.

**12. The more I believe it's possible, the more likely I will be to do this.**

We are more likely to voice and act on our values when we believe it is possible to do so effectively. If we pay attention to positive examples of such voice and action and spend time developing support mechanisms and practicing the development and delivery of responses to frequently heard reasons and rationalizations for unethical actions, we can expand our sense of what's possible—another virtuous circle.