



The Ethical Action Test

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Learning Objective: The student will be able to identify eight elements of an ethical test.

On a regular basis during our careers, we are faced with ethical tests. These may come in small situations, like covering something for a friend, or big issues, like financial and moral decisions. Ethics continues to be a challenge for all of us, regardless of our beliefs and foundations. The challenge is often how to look at the issue in light of how others may see it as much as how we view the issue itself.

In a recent book called “Ethics 4 Everyone” by Eric Harvey and Scott Airitam, the authors pose eight hard questions that are worth considering whenever you are faced with an ethical challenge in your life. How could you use the following questions to guide you when you face your next ethical challenge?

1. **Is it legal?** This one seems simple, but is it? In today’s society, laws and legal rulings change daily. Have you checked with a legal expert first, such as your city or county attorney?
2. **Does it comply with our rules and regulations?** Again, this issue seems so simple, but we have to be concerned with fire department, city and often state rules. Check into this next!
3. **Is it in synch with our organizational guidelines?** This should be easy! Maybe! Look at your mission and value statements. You should have them already in place.
4. **Will I be comfortable and guilt-free if I do it?** This is a deep question that must reflect your values and personal beliefs. It should be a very simple question to answer.
5. **Does it match our organization’s stated commitments and values?** Again, have you matched your question to your organization’s values and mission? They should already be hanging on your wall. If not, you need to address this in your organization.
6. **Would I do it to my family and friends?** Another important question! Would you hurt your loved ones with such an action?
7. **Would it be perfectly okay if someone did this to me?** Another way to ask this question: What would you feel like if the same thing happened to you? Would you feel bad?
8. **Would the most ethical person I know do it?** A final test for everyone. Take someone you respect and admire. Would he or she do this? If so, you can move forward. If not, maybe you could discuss it with that person.

Simply stated, ethics affects us all. It is not a decision you can make in a second, and often you must take the time to consider these questions and others before making your final decision.

For more information on this book, look at <http://www.walkthetalk.com>.

For information on a class on this topic at the National Fire Academy, look at the website for “Executive Skills Series: Exercising Leadership Ethically” (ESS:ELE) (F0523) at <http://apps.usfa.fema.gov/nfacourses/catalog/details/10512>.

Course Description: This new two-day course provides students with the ability to recognize ethical dilemmas in the context of their environments, apply a decision model to resolve these dilemmas, render ethical decisions, and defend under scrutiny the resulting decisions that were made in an effort to resolve these dilemmas. The ESS:ELE course will become the fourth offering within the Executive Skills Series.