

Ethical Public Leadership

Michigan Municipal League



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Ethics is Not . . .

Just a matter of
personal preference



Ethics is Not . . .



What's best for me



Ethics is Not . . .



Obeying ethics laws



So . . . What is Ethics?

“moral principles for living and making decisions.”

Larry Z. Leslie (2004) *Mass Communication Ethics: Decision making in postmodern culture*, 2nd edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 6.

“the study of what we ought to do.”

A. David Gordon and John Michael Kittross (1999) *Controversies in Media Ethics*, 2nd edition. New York: Longman, 1.



The Foundation: Values

That is . . .

Whatever it is that we value

And that is relevant/important to consider

‘Moral values’

Broadly defined



The Values of a Public Servant

Not only what we ourselves value personally

Values associated with our role

The values of our constituents

Institutional values

Public goods for which we have special responsibility



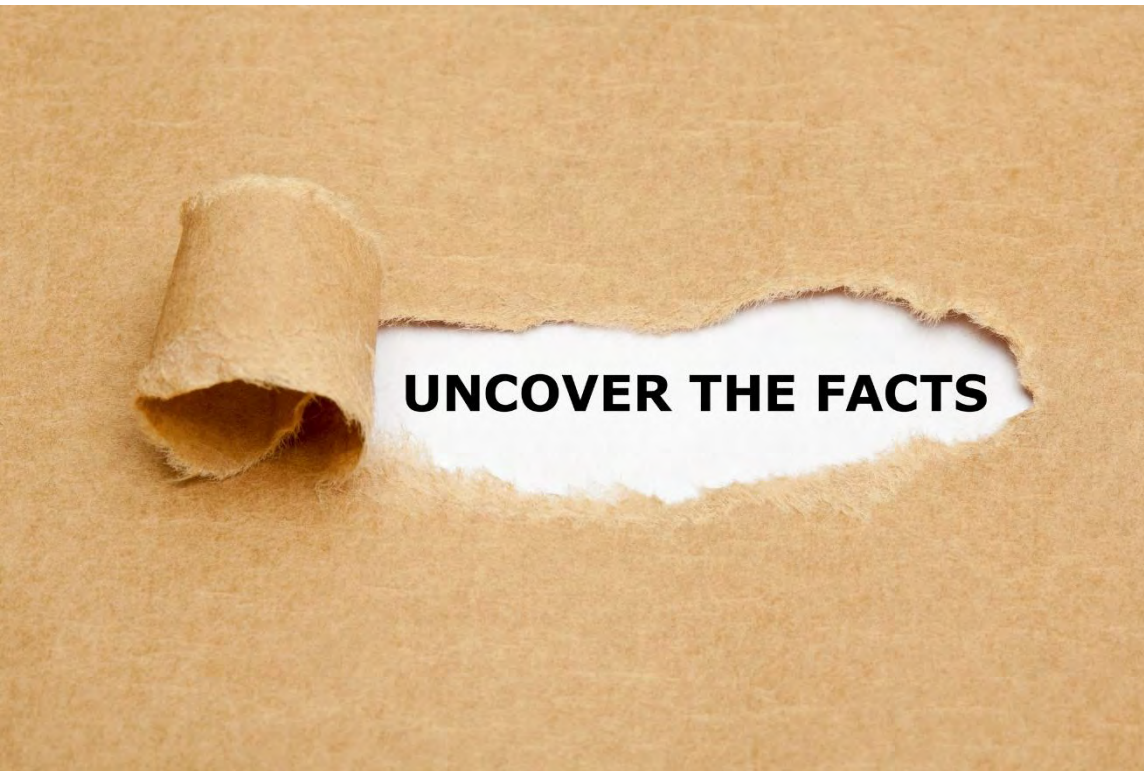
The Necessity of Inconsistency

Public servants need to adopt codes of ethical conduct that reflect their *roles*, not just their *personal values*

In this sense, *consistency* between one's conduct as a public official and one's private conduct *may not be a virtue*



The Role of the Facts on the Ground



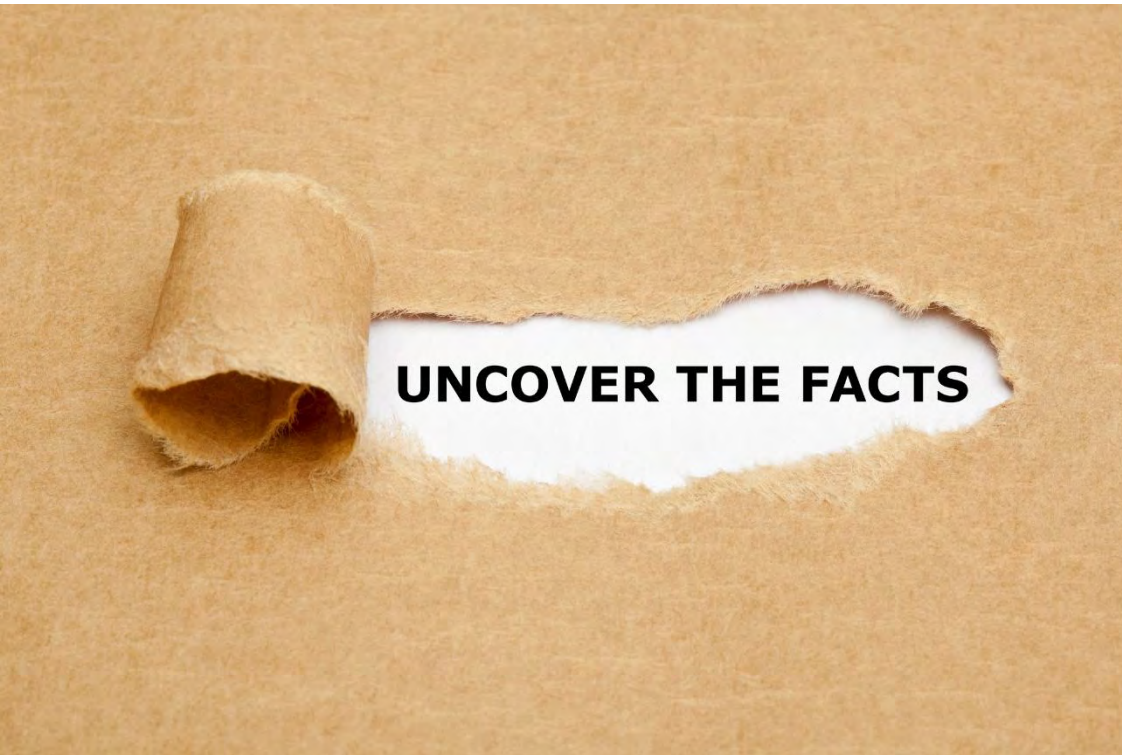
Guide us in determining which of our values should be considered

Determine the decision(s) that must be made

Guide us in evaluating the merits of various options



The Role of the Facts on the Ground



DO NOT determine whether something is or is not valued

DO NOT change the rules



Ethical Principles

Guides to deciding what to do, given our values and the facts on the ground

Methods of applying our values to the facts



Ethical Principles

Character/Virtue

Consequence/Outcome

Duty/Obligation

Care/Relationship



Ethical Dilemma

A difficult choice between two or more alternatives, each of which can be defended plausibly in ethical terms

Struggling with doing the right thing, when the right thing is obvious, is *not* an ethical dilemma

It is a **character test**



On Being an Ethical Public Leader

Being ethical can be costly

- Emotionally
- Interpersonally
- Socially
- Economically
- Politically

Of course, being *unethical* can be costly, too!



On Being an Ethical Public Leader

Your office brings with it unique ethical obligations

Your office also brings with it a higher degree of visibility and public interest in your activities

- Which is a form of **power** that you have received



On Being an Ethical Public Leader

Use the power you have to change the way others see government and politics . . .

. . . and what it means to conduct oneself with honor and integrity



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