

# Practicing Ethical Public Leadership

Michigan Municipal League



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#InspiringLeaders



# So . . . What is Ethics?

*“moral principles for living and making decisions.”*

Larry Z. Leslie (2004) *Mass Communication Ethics: Decision making in postmodern culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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*, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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

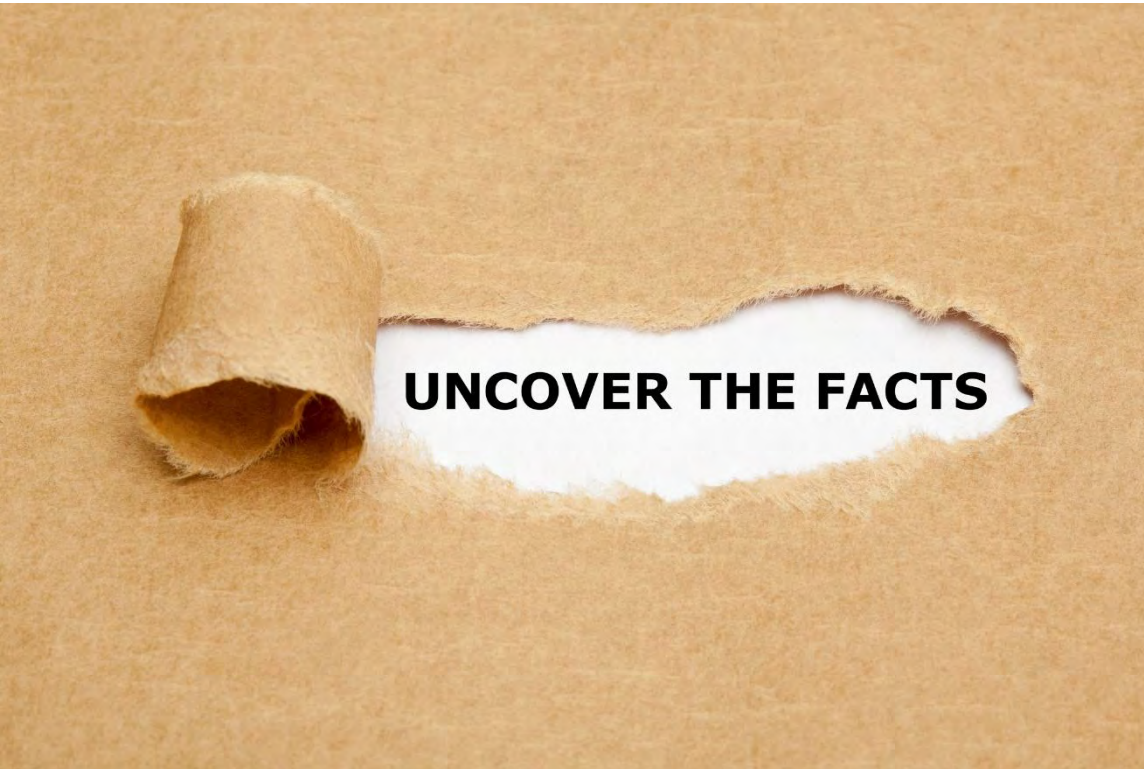
The values of our constituents

Institutional values

Public goods for which we have special responsibility



# The 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



# 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





# Character/Virtue

Do that which avoids both the extremes of too much and too little.

The “Golden Mean” (Aristotle)



# Character/Virtue

Do that which you can justify and  
for which you are willing to take  
complete responsibility.

Existentialist (Jean-Paul Sartre)



# Ethic of Care

A commitment “to flourishing and growth of individuals, . . . [while] acknowledg[ing] our interconnectedness and interdependence.”

(Maurice Hammington)

“more a characterization of a social relation than the description of an individual disposition.”

(Virginia Held)



# Duty

Do that which you would want every person to do,  
as if required by law.

The “Categorical Imperative” (Immanuel Kant)



# Duty

Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.

The “Golden Rule” (Jesus of Nazareth)



# Consequentialist

The greatest good for the greatest number,  
while doing the least harm possible.

Utilitarianism (John Stuart Mill)



# Consequentialist

Imagine that you do not know anything about who you are in the society in which the results of your decision are to be experienced. What decision would you choose?

‘Veil of Ignorance’ (John Rawls)



# Reason and Intuition

Some ethicists insist that ethics is all 'in our heads'

- We must set aside everything except rational thought

Some ethicists insist that an important element of ethics is in our hearts

- Call it conscience, or intuition, or inspiration, or discernment
- Something that is not strictly 'irrational', but more accurately nonrational





# Making Ethical Decisions



# 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**



# Case #1 – The Parking Ticket

## Fact summary:

- You have parked illegally
- No 'harm' has resulted
- A ticket is being written as you approach
- When the officer recognizes you, he/she starts to put the ticket book away.



# Case #1 – The Parking Ticket

- Fact summary:
  - You have parked illegally
  - No 'harm' has resulted
  - A ticket is being written as you approach
  - When the officer recognizes you, he/she starts to put the ticket book away.
- Relevant values???
- Ethical principle???
- Decision and rationale???



# Case #2 – Help from an Old Friend



## Fact summary:

- You have an old, wealthy and powerful friend in town
- Your adult child is looking for that first career job
- Your friend personally offers him/her an unadvertised position with your friend's firm



# Case #2 – Help from an Old Friend



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  - You have an old, wealthy and powerful friend in town
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- Ethical principle???
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# Case #3 - Renewal



## Fact summary:

- A well-funded, well-respected developer proposes a major revitalization project for a blighted area
- In order to implement the project, the city will need to exercise its power of eminent domain
- The residents of the area are unified in their opposition to the project and the threat of the loss of their properties



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- Ethical principle???
- Decision and rationale???





# Concluding Thoughts



# Ethical Decision Making Involves . . .

Applying relevant **values**

To the **facts** of a situation

By means of one or more tested **ethical principles**



# Being an Ethical Public Leader . . .

Requires us to **consider values unique to our role**

Requires us to be able to **explain** our actions so that others can at least understand, if not agree with, our actions

- And see them as the **legitimate acts** of a **public servant**



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More than Self

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