

# Steps Toward Ethical Decision-Making

## 1. Identify and state the problem.

Gather as much information as possible. Outline the facts, separating out bias, innuendos, assumptions, hypotheses or suspicions. There are several questions you can ask yourself:

- ▶ What is the issue?
- ▶ Are there underlying issues?
- ▶ Does this situation make you uncomfortable? Why?

## 2. Identify relevant factors and players.

- ▶ Who is affected by the decision? Individual? Small groups? An organization?
- ▶ What are the consequences for the affected parties (including yourself)?
- ▶ Do any laws/professional codes exist that should be considered?

## 3. Generate potential courses of action.

Brainstorm as many possible courses of action as possible.

## 4. Test your options.

The following tests can be used to evaluate the courses of action you brainstormed.

- ▶ **HARM Test:**
  - *Does this option do less harm than the alternatives?*
- ▶ **PUBLICITY Test:**
  - *Would I want this option to be published in the newspaper with my name?*
- ▶ **DEFENSIBILITY Test:**
  - *Could I defend my choice of this option to the government?*
  - *Could I defend my choice of this option to a committee of my peers?*
  - *Could I defend my choice of this option to my parents or family members?*
- ▶ **REVERSIBILITY Test:**
  - *Would I still think the choice of this option was good even if I were the one adversely affected by it?*
- ▶ **VIRTUE Test:**
  - *What would I become if I choose this option?*
- ▶ **PROFESSIONAL Test:**
  - *What would my profession's ethics committee say about this option?*
- ▶ **COLLEAGUE Test:**
  - *What would my colleagues say when I describe the problem and suggest this option?*
- ▶ **ORGANIZATION Test:**
  - *What might the organization's ethics officer or legal counsel think about this option?*

# Test Your Options Chart

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
HARM Test				
PUBLICITY Test				
DEFENSIBILITY Test				
REVERSIBILITY Test				
VIRTUE Test				
PROFESSIONAL Test				
COLLEAGUE Test				
ORGANIZATION Test				

## 5. Make a decision and implement the course of action.

At some point, you have to make a decision and move forward with a particular course of action. It often takes courage and strength to follow through with an ethical decision.

## 6. Evaluate the course of action.

It is important that you learn from your choices. Be sure to reflect on the decision and results/reactions. Are there any lessons from this decision that you can apply to future decisions?

### Sources:

1. <http://www.alabamacounseling.org/pdf/ACAguide.pdf>
2. <http://ethics.iit.edu/index1.php/Programs/Ethics%20Across%20the%20Curriculum/A%20Format%20for%20Ethical%20Decision%20Making>