Moral Courage Vignettes

1. You are the social work representative on a multi-disciplinary health care team serving children with disabilities. The disciplines represented on the team vary by the nature of the child’s disability, but the typical team consists of seven members and a physician always serves as chair of the team. Most of the staff involved have a high level of regard for each other and the contributions of various disciplines. However, one doctor seems to go out of her way to exclude social work from the team, believing that the social worker’s role should only involve communicating the team’s results to the family. You are uncomfortable with this role, particularly when you had no involvement in formulating the recommendations. Further, you are concerned about exclusion of the social work perspective and this physician’s monopoly of the decision making process in what is supposed to be a team effort. It makes you wonder generally about the ethics of other aspects of the doctor’s practice. Other professionals on the team privately share your concerns but do not want to rock the boat with this individual or alienate the other physicians. You wonder, do you have a bruised ego or are these legitimate ethical and clinical concerns? Should you “go along to get along” or try to be an agent of change?

2. You are an untenured faculty member at small counseling program. A student asks to speak with you about another faculty member, who is also the program director. The student and her classmates are concerned that on at least two occasions this instructor has come to class intoxicated. The student states they can "smell liquor on his breath", that he repeats himself and his presentations are sometimes incoherent. The student states that on other occasions he is an outstanding teacher and that her main concern is that other students are "planning a revolt" and refusing to accept his grades on assignments, believing that he may have been intoxicated when reviewing their work. You understand the students' concerns. In addition, knowing that the faculty member is in private practice, you are worried that clients may also be adversely affected.

3. Rolanda's agency recently received a large federal grant to implement a "Return to Work" program as part of welfare reform. Although the evaluation protocol is very clear about what constitutes "work", the agency is pressuring Rolanda and her coworkers (none of whom are social workers) to count clients' volunteer efforts and other non-paying jobs as "work" in order to ensure that this valuable program will continue. The agency maintains that paying jobs are hard to find, so clients who are actively working, even in non-compensated jobs "fit the spirit, if not the letter of the law."

4. Andrew is a psychology student placed in a small group mental health practice. The practice has recently been accepted as a preferred provider for a large managed care firm. In a staff meeting where the procedures for the managed care contract were discussed, the administrator described the records that the firm would keep on the practice. To assure that they were providing effective and efficient services, their service statistics would be compared with other providers and their performance would be rated from time to time in a "report card." Later that month, as part of his community relations responsibilities at the agency, Andrew spoke with a group of parents of severely disturbed adults about the nature of mental illness and the services his organization offered. Several of the families followed up with phone calls to the
agency to seek services, yet Andrew was surprised to find that none were offered intake appointments. When he asked the administrator about this, he was told, "they're not the kind of people we want to serve. We know they need help and are eligible for our services, but our effectiveness ratings will go way down if we take multi-problem cases like that. Then we won't get to serve anybody."

5. In the residential school where I teach, the developmentally disabled students have programs and tasks to complete. It is important that you understand that based on my experience with many similar residential programs, this school provides very good services to its students and is an excellent placement for them. Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs), established by our behavior specialists, direct our work with students. Some of the tasks and programs set for the students in these IEPs are very unrealistic— for example, we are expected to be teaching one student to brush his teeth independently, yet he is incontinent, oblivious to any of his body’s needs, and is unable to control his arms or legs. Throughout the day we (residential workers/teachers) are required to record data on student behaviors.

Our behavioral specialists are doing research, publishing their findings, and gaining national recognition for the effectiveness of their approaches. The real results of our interventions and teachings do not correspond to the results these behavior specialists/researchers want. Documentation that supports their research efforts favorably has become more important than accurate documentation about the students. If I follow the IEPs and record accurate data, it will make me look less competent than those staff members who are recording favorable results. If I am less accurate in recording data, the programs will look like they are working. If I, an entry-level professional, try to change the programs to be more realistic ones and record the data correctly, I will be labeled as someone who rocks the boat, making relationships with the other staff difficult and possibly endangering my job. (From: Kenyon, P. (1999). What would you do? An ethical case workbook for human service providers. P. 211, Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole).

6. Kay is a school social worker who spends roughly one day per week at each of the five schools she serves. Hawthorne Elementary is a new school for her this year and she is appalled to find that the staff, teachers and administrators talk freely about the students and their families, trading gossip in the lunch room, on the playground and in the halls. Last week she stopped at a convenience store for a soda and overheard a teacher and a secretary in the check out line talking about one student’s disciplinary problems. That student is not a client of Kay’s but is the son of a friend.

7. Darrell is a social worker employed by a faith-based homeless shelter. He is also a member of the religious community that sponsors the shelter. Last Sunday, the Pastor announced a new initiative in the congregation “to rehabilitate homosexuals from their destructive lifestyles.” Darrell feels he has been able to keep his professional ethics distinct from the premises of his faith which might contradict his personal and professional values, but he wonders if and how he should act in this case.
The Five Principles of Ethical Power for Individuals

1. **Purpose:** I see myself as being an ethically sound person. I let my conscience be my guide. No matter what happens, I am always able to face the mirror, look myself straight in the eye, and feel good about myself.

2. **Pride:** I feel good about myself. I don’t need the acceptance of other people to feel important. A balanced self-esteem keeps my ego and my desire to be accepted from influencing my decisions.

3. **Patience:** I believe that things will eventually work out well. I don’t need everything to happen right now. I am at peace with what comes my way!

4. **Persistence:** I stick to my purpose, especially when it seems inconvenient to do so! My behavior is consistent with my intentions. As Churchill said, “Never! Never! Never! Never! Never! Give up!”

5. **Perspective:** I take time to enter each day quietly in a mood of reflection. This helps me to get myself focused and allows me to listen to my inner self and to see things more clearly.

Moral Courage Bibliography


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**Online Resources - Moral Courage**

*Association for Practical and Professional Ethics* (Indiana University) [http://appe.indiana.edu](http://appe.indiana.edu)
Focuses on interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching practical and professional ethics.

*Bioethics Discussion Pages* (University of Southern California, Health Sciences Center) [http://www-hsc.usc.edu/~mbernste/](http://www-hsc.usc.edu/~mbernste/)
This site features a general discussion group for specific ethical topics raised by participants.

*Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions* (Illinois Institute of Technology) [http://www.iit.edu/departments/csep/](http://www.iit.edu/departments/csep/)
This site promotes education and scholarship relating to the professions. It has links to a library of resources relating to the study of ethics as well as a collection of codes of ethics from various fields to use when comparing codes from different professions.

*Ethics in Mental Health Research* [http://www.emhr.net/](http://www.emhr.net/)
This site offers a range of resources for education and study involving mental health research ethics. Resources include case studies, guides for discussing cases, lecture slides, links to various codes of ethics, and lecture slides on subjects such as informed consent, conflicts of interest, and confidentiality.

*For Moral Courage* [http://www.formoralcourage.com](http://www.formoralcourage.com)
This is Kim’s personal website, a location for information on seminars and upcoming events. It is also the site for information and resources on moral courage and ethical action.

This site contains a K-12 curriculum where the project creators identify and praise “giraffe heroes,” who are individuals who have had the vision and courage to stick their necks out to solve tough problems.

GAP is the nation's leading whistleblower organization. GAP promotes government and corporate accountability by advocating occupational free speech, litigating whistleblower cases, publicizing whistleblower concerns, and developing policy and legal reforms of whistleblower laws.

*Image Archive on the American Eugenics Movement* (Dolan DNA Learning Center, Cold Springs Harbor Laboratory) [http://eugenicsarchive.org/](http://eugenicsarchive.org/)

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This site features virtual image galleries and a searchable image database. The main page also contains interactive lectures on eugenics-related topics such as the social history, scientific origins, research methods and flaws, traits studied, marriage and sterilization laws, and references.

**Institute for Global Ethics**
http://www.globalethics.org/
The Institute’s mission is “To promote ethical behavior in individuals, institutions, and nations through research, public discourse, and practical action.” They offer various workshops, resources, online and print newsletters, and books, curricula and other publications.

**Institute for the Study of Applied and Professional Ethics at Dartmouth College**
http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ethics/
The Institute’s mission is to study applied and professional ethics within the Dartmouth community. They study ethical issues ranging from medical, business, legal, engineering, and the teaching of ethics.

**Markkula Center for Applied Ethics** (Santa Clara University)
http://www.scu.edu/ethics/homepage.html
Extensive website offering ethics case scenarios on a range of contemporary issues. Includes articles on ethical topics and links to other ethics sites. Provides an ethics reading list and an articles database. Includes their online journal Issues in Ethics with access to back issues.

**The Moral Courage Project**
https://www.irshadmanji.com/moral-courage-project
Founded at the Wagner School of Public Service at New York University by Irshad Manji, author of The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim’s Call for Reform in Her Faith, the Moral Courage Project is a multi-faceted educational campaign intended to develop young leaders willing “to break silences for the sake of a greater good.” This site describes the programming offered through the project, contains transcripts and recordings of interviews about moral courage with Irshad Manji, and links to a moral courage blog.

**National Whistleblowers Center**
http://www.whistleblowers.org
The National Whistleblowers Center (Center) is a nonprofit, tax exempt, educational and advocacy organization dedicated to helping whistleblowers. Since 1988, the Center has used whistleblowers’ disclosures to improve environmental protection, nuclear safety, and government and corporate accountability.

Among numerous FBI whistleblowers being helped by the Center is Jane Turner, a 24-year veteran special agent, who exposed possible theft by FBI agents at the World Trade Center’s “Ground Zero.”

**Nonprofit Board Resource**
http://www.nonprofitboardresource.com
Too often, nonprofit boards and leaders focus so much on mission that they put good governance at risk. Marci Thomas and I help executives, board members, and their professional advisors meet accounting, regulatory, and governance standards, by offering technical tools and resources and well as sound guidance on understanding and acting on fiduciary responsibilities.
The Responsibility Project by Liberty Mutual
http://responsibility-project.libertymutual.com/
Liberty Mutual Insurance’s site offers a “place to think about—and discuss—what it means to do the right thing,” with resources on a variety of topics ranging from education and entertainment to green living and relationships.

Southern Poverty Law Center (n.d.). Speak up! Responding to everyday bigotry.
http://cdna.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/SPLC_speak_up_handbook_0.pdf
This is a meaningful and helpful guide for effectively addressing challenging situations in day-to-day life. This guide includes relevant vignettes on comments that arise in the workplace, family gatherings, neighborhood events and casual, friendly conversations, and it provides specific guidance about responding in order to create a climate of civility and mutual respect.

Virtual Mentor (American Medical Association Journal of Ethics)
http://virtualmentor.ama-assn.org/
“Virtual Mentor is the American Medical Association’s online ethics journal...Founded in 1999, Virtual Mentor (VM) explores the ethical issues and challenges that students, residents, and other physicians are likely to confront in their training and daily practice...Each monthly issue of VM contains original articles and commentary on a given theme-e.g., access to care; quality-of-life considerations in clinical decision making, public roles of physicians, ethical issues in endocrinology, conflict of values in the clinic.”