The Ethics Unwrapped “Giving Voice To Values” Video Series

The Giving Voice To Values (GVV) video series summarizes the introductory points of Giving Voice to Values: How To Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right, developed by Mary C. Gentile with support from the Aspen Institute and the Yale School of Management.

The GVV videos can be watched individually or collectively, although they will be most useful if used together and viewed with the introductory video. This series can serve as a springboard for further classroom discussion of ethics and values as they pertain to students’ personal and professional lives.

Although GVV was created for business ethics programs, the lessons in GVV are broad and applicable to a variety of fields including education, fine arts, liberal arts, communication studies, engineering and the sciences, and professional schools. GVV case studies, curriculum and teaching pedagogy are available at http://www.babson.edu/academics/teaching-research/gvv/Pages/home.aspx

The G.V.V. Approach

Giving Voice to Values (GVV) is an innovative approach to values-driven leadership development. GVV identifies the many ways that individuals can – and do – voice their values in the workplace and provides opportunities to build the “moral muscles” necessary to do so.

Most people want to bring their whole selves to work. Yet, experience and research demonstrate that values conflicts will occur during the course of a person’s life and career – those times when what we believe and want to accomplish seem to be in opposition to the demands of others, including peers, supervisors, organizations, etc. The GVV curriculum helps people build and practice the skills individuals need to recognize, speak and act on their values when these conflicts arise.

GVV identifies and builds upon SEVEN PILLARS or principles that represent ways of thinking about values and our own capabilities and identities in order to enhance our ability to voice and enact our values effectively. The SEVEN PILLARS are: Values, Choice, Normalization, Purpose, Self-Knowledge & Alignment, Voice, and Reasons & Rationalizations. Each video in this series introduces a GVV PILLAR.
The GVV approach includes:

- A focus on how a leader or manager raises values-based issues in an effective manner—what he/she needs to do to be heard and how to correct an existing course of action when necessary;
- Positive examples of times when people have found ways to voice and thereby implement their values in the workplace;
- An emphasis upon self-assessment and a focus on individual strengths when looking for a way to align one’s individual sense of purpose with that of the organization;
- Opportunities to construct and practice responses to frequently heard reasons and rationalizations for not acting on one’s values;
- Practice in providing peer feedback and coaching.

G.V.V. VIDEO: Pillar 2 – Choice

When faced with difficult ethical decisions, it is easy to think that one has no choice except to compromise one’s values for the sake of protecting one’s friends, colleagues, job, company, organization, family, etc. However, reflecting on occasions both when we have acted on our values and also when we have failed to do so can help us to recognize that we have the power to make genuine—though not necessarily easy—choices about whether to give voice to our values.

Discussion questions: G.V.V. Pillar 2 - Choice

1. BEFORE viewing the video, you may wish to poll students with the following questions:

   * When it comes to values conflicts, I often feel as if I don’t have a choice.
     - Strongly Agree  Somewhat Agree  Not Sure  Somewhat Disagree  Strongly Disagree

   * I have often voiced my values effectively.
     - Strongly Agree  Somewhat Agree  Not Sure  Somewhat Disagree  Strongly Disagree
I can think of times when I did not voice my values effectively.  
Strongly Agree  Somewhat Agree  Not Sure  Somewhat Disagree  Strongly Disagree

I would like to voice my values more often and more effectively.  
Strongly Agree  Somewhat Agree  Not Sure  Somewhat Disagree  Strongly Disagree

2. AFTER viewing the video, you may wish to re-visit the polling questions above and discuss whether participants have any new insights.

3. Think of a time when you have, in fact, effectively voiced/enacted your values, either in the workplace or elsewhere in your wider lives – student clubs, internships, study groups, sport teams, classroom, etc.
   a. What made it easier for you to do so? (the “enablers”)
   b. What made it challenging? (the “inhibitors”)
   c. What enabled you to overcome the “inhibitors”?

4. What can you do to maximize the “enablers” and avoid/transform the “inhibitors” in your future experiences?

5. Think about a time when you did not, in fact, voice/enact your values. Now that you have identified the “enablers” and “inhibitors,” as well as the ways to maximize the “enablers” and minimize the “inhibitors,” how might you respond effectively if you had a chance for a “do-over?”

6. Sometimes when we ask individuals who are more junior in their careers or newer to an organization or setting about acting on their values, they will say that it is just too risky for them; that it is easier for more senior leaders to act ethically; that they will do so once they progress in their organizations, clubs or careers. On the other hand, sometimes when we talk to more senior leaders, they will say that it is easier and less risky for more junior employees to act on their values because they have less to lose and there are fewer people depending on them. In fact, we find that there are “reasons & rationalizations” for NOT acting on our values at any level, but there are also people at every level who find ways to act ethically. The trick is, you have different tools and levers at your disposal and different degrees of freedom and constraint, depending on your role and level.

So the relevant question becomes: What are some of the tools available to a junior level employee or to a newcomer to an organization or team or group? Are there ways that being new or less experienced can work in your favor? Can you think of an example?
7. Often when we discuss ethical conflicts, we focus on the extreme situation and ask “is it ever justifiable NOT to act on our values?” The problem with a focus on this question is that once we ask it, all our effort is devoted to crafting rationalizations to justify the unethical choice. Although there may be times when we feel the trade-off is indeed too steep, we are more likely to find ways to enact our values more of the time if we ask instead “WHAT IF I were to try to act on my values? How might I get that done?” We call this the “GVV Thought Experiment” and use it as a way to trigger creative problem-solving rather than rationalizations and justifications for giving up. Using this approach, can you think of a situation where you or your peers may sometimes feel as it is too difficult to enact your values? Now ask “What if?” you were going to act on your values? How does that change your ability to brainstorm solutions?

Additional G.V.V. Resources


For a discussion of the “Choice” pillar, see Chapter Three of Giving Voice To Values, “A Tale of Two Stories: The Power of Choice.”

For a discussion of the “GVV Starting Assumptions,” see Chapter One of Giving Voice to Values, “Giving Voice to Our Values: The Thought Experiment.”

For a summary of the Giving Voice To Values Seven Pillars download An Action Framework for Giving Voice To Values—“The To-Do List.” http://www.babson.edu/Academics/teaching-research/gvv/Pages/curriculum.aspx

Transcript of Narration
Written andNarrated by Mary C. Gentile

One of the most commonly heard reasons for NOT acting on our values that people will give is that they will say “I didn’t have a choice.” Giving Voice To Values is all about recognizing, first of all, that we ALL make the choice to act or not to act on our values every day. We all can think of times when we found ways to effectively voice our values and we all can similarly think of times when we failed to do so. The point is we HAVE made a choice. And we can learn from this past experience.

If we reflect on the times when we have voiced our values, we can probably generate a list of the factors that made it easier for us to do so – the “enablers.” Perhaps we had a boss or a teacher or a friend who was very open-minded and was willing to patiently listen to our concerns. Perhaps the issue at stake was very important to someone we cared about deeply and that made it easier for us to prioritize the situation.

Similarly, if we reflect on the times when we did NOT voice our values, we can generate a list of the types of things that made it more difficult for us – the “disablers.” Perhaps we were under tight time pressure and the challenge caught us off guard, with little time to prepare a response. Or maybe it was a close friend who was asking us to do something that conflicted with our values and we did not know how to say “no” to him or her.

By identifying these “enablers” and “disablers”, we can begin to think about them BEFORE we are in the actual high-pressure choice situation. For example, we can look to work in an organization that maximizes the “enablers” – a culture where open discussion is encouraged and where folks are not punished for raising questions. Equally important, we can understand the kinds of things that tend to “disable” us and practice responses in advance. For example, we can pre-script a response that we might use if a friend asked us to cheat in an exam– something that made it clear that we still cared very much for them and were willing to help them to study in advance but aren’t willing to be dishonest or cheat.

By recognizing that we ourselves have made the “choice” to act or not to act on our values, it also makes it easier for us to recognize that capacity for choice in others – and, in that way, we’ll feel more comfortable talking about our own values with them, when necessary.
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This material is based upon the Giving Voice To Values curriculum (www.GivingVoiceToValues.org). The Aspen Institute was founding partner, along with the Yale School of Management, and incubator for Giving Voice To Values (GVV). Now based and supported at Babson College.

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