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](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 7 – Reasons and Rationalizations

Mary Gentile suggests that there are common arguments and rationalizations that are used to defend unethical or questionable practices, whether in business or in our wider lives. These rationalizations are predictable and vulnerable to reasoned response. Preparing ahead of time to respond to them can make it easier to address ethical problems.

Discussion Questions: G.V.V. Pillar 7 – Reasons & Rationalizations

1. Brainstorm some common rationalizations (e.g., “everybody’s doing it,” “it’s just standard operating procedure,” “I don’t want to hurt my friend, colleague, boss, firm, club, etc.”), and discuss ways to respond to them. (See “Keeping Your Colleagues Honest” by Mary C. Gentile in Harvard Business Review, March 2010 for more on this.)

2. If you suspect that your ethical objections will not be heard, is it still worthwhile to make them? Why or why not?
3. Is it necessary to have a foolproof argument when raising an ethical objection?

4. Think about a time when you (or someone you observed) were able to effectively respond to those “reasons and rationalizations.” What are some effective ways to re-frame the challenge and/or respond to them?

5. When raising an ethical concern, how might you balance the need to prepare responses to common reasons and rationalizations with the need to remain open to legitimate arguments raised against your position?

Additional G.V.V. Resources

http://www.givingvoicetovaluesthebook.com/

For a discussion of the “Reasons & Rationalizations” pillar, see Chapter Eight of *Giving Voice To Values*, “Reasons and Rationalizations.”

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

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15416518.2012.708854

Transcript of Narration  
Written and Narrated by Mary C. Gentile

“Reasons and Rationalizations” refer to the objections we hear from our colleagues when we try to point out an ethical problem in the way things are being done. Or sometimes we don’t hear the objections because they are the unspoken assumptions of the organization.
It can be difficult to make a strong argument against the assumed “prevailing winds” in an organization if we feel in the minority; or if we don’t feel we have the time to come up with a workable alternative; or if we don’t want to take the chance to present a half-baked response.

If, on the other hand, we anticipate the types of arguments we are likely to hear when we face values conflicts, we can work on pre-scripting persuasive and well-reasoned responses. Just think about the challenges you have faced thus far in your lives, or the kinds of issues you read about in the business press. Certain industries and professions and regions of the world trigger their own types of conflicts, and all of these are fairly predictable.

Likewise the arguments used to justify or explain questionable behaviors are similarly predictable, such as:

- It’s not my responsibility to deal with this.
- This is just standard operating procedure in this industry or in this part of the world
- This may be wrong but it’s not “material” – It’s not a big enough deal to worry about
- I don’t want to get someone in trouble by raising this issue.

These types of arguments are among the most common “reasons & rationalizations” we hear and they are all vulnerable to counter-argument. For example, if we hear “It’s not my responsibility” to deal with this, the good news is that the speaker is already acknowledging, at least implicitly, that there is a problem. So often the best way to respond to him or her is not to argue that it’s their responsibility, but rather to engage them in brainstorming ways that the situation might be addressed effectively. Once they have some workable ideas for an implementation plan, motivating action is likely to be easier.

Similarly, each of the other “reasons and rationalizations” we might face are surmountable. The responses that have worked for individuals who HAVE found ways to voice and enact their values weren’t necessarily foolproof; they just had to be credible.
For additional information, please contact:

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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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