

GVV Pillar 5: Self-Knowledge & Alignment

GVV Pillar 5: Self-knowledge & Alignment introduces the fifth principle of “Giving Voice to Values” (GVV). To voice and act on our values in a way that is consistent with who we are and builds on our strengths is to act with self-knowledge and alignment. Self-assessment is an important way to identify our most effective strategies for enacting our values. People may see themselves as risk-averse or risk-takers, introverts or extroverts, bold or cautious. In each case, it is important to identify strategies for dealing with ethical issues that are true to our own personality. For example, if our boss asks us to “cook the books” and we consider ourselves a risk-taker, we might frame our response in terms of sticking our neck out for the sake of integrity and the long-term welfare of the company. On the other hand, if we are risk-averse, we might draw confidence from the idea that this approach is too risky and instead express concern that the company might get caught in an audit and face dire consequences.

To learn more about values systems and how they vary from culture to culture, watch *Fundamental Moral Unit* and *All is Not Relative*. For complimentary approaches to GVV that also offer methods for voicing values and making ethical decisions, watch the four-part *Being Your Best Self* videos, which include *Part 1: Moral Awareness*, *Part 2: Moral Decision Making*, *Part 3: Moral Intent*, and *Part 4: Moral Action*. To learn about pervasive social and organizational biases that inhibit voicing values, watch *Moral Muteness* and *Moral Myopia*. To discover how voicing values can contribute to professional and personal success, watch *Moral Imagination*.

The case studies on this page illustrate different ways in which individuals or groups give voice to their values. “Pao & Gender Bias” examines the debate Ellen Pao generated in the venture capital and tech industries when she filed a lawsuit against her employer on grounds of gender discrimination. “Freedom of Speech on Campus” explores how, in the wake of racially motivated offenses at Yale and the University of Missouri, student protesters voiced their values and sparked debate over the roles of free speech, deliberation, and tolerance on campus. “Defending Freedom of Tweets?” takes a look at the backlash Pittsburgh Steelers running back Rashard Mendenhall received from fans after he tweeted a criticism of the celebration of the assassination of Osama Bin Laden. “Full Disclosure: Manipulating Donors” examines the difficult position a student intern was in and how she struggled to voice her values.

Terms related to this video and defined in our ethics glossary include: altruism, behavioral ethics, ethics, fundamental attribution error, groupthink, integrity, moral agent, morals, moral emotions, moral reasoning, prosocial behavior, values, and virtue ethics.

The GVV Approach

The “Giving Voice to Values” (GVV) video series summarizes the key points of *Giving*



Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right, written by Mary Gentile with support from the Yale School of Management and the Aspen Institute. The GVV videos may be watched individually or sequentially. The series will be most useful if viewed in its entirety and with the introductory video.

GVV was created for business ethics programs, but its lessons are broad and apply to all professionals in every field including fine arts, liberal arts, communication studies, social and natural sciences, engineering, education, social work, and medicine. The GVV series can serve as a springboard for further discussion of ethics and values as they pertain to individuals' professional and personal lives.

GVV identifies the many ways that individuals can – and do – voice their values in the workplace. It teaches people how to build the “moral muscles” necessary to do so, and details the strategies people can use to find the motivation, skill, and confidence to “give voice to their values.”

The goal of GVV is to act consistently with our most deeply held convictions about right and wrong. Research and experience demonstrate that values conflicts will inevitably occur in our professional and personal lives. So, when what we believe and want to accomplish seems to be in opposition to the demands of others (peers, supervisors, organizations, etc.), the ability to successfully voice our values and navigate these differences is crucial. This is the starting point for the GVV curriculum.

GVV consists of seven principles, or pillars, that represent ways of thinking about values, our identity, and our own capabilities. The seven pillars of GVV are: *Values, Choice, Normalization, Purpose, Self-Knowledge & Alignment, Voice, and Reasons & Rationalizations*. Each video in the GVV series introduces and explains one of the GVV pillars.

Gentile also describes the factors that affect ethical behavior and offers techniques for resisting unethical actions. Ultimately, the curriculum helps people build and practice the skills they need to recognize, speak, and act on their values effectively when conflicts arise.

The GVV approach includes:

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

Discussion questions: GVV Pillar 5: Self-Knowledge & Alignment

1. Consider the following questions:

- Are you an introvert? An extrovert?
- Are you a risk-taker? Are you risk-averse?
- Do you like to work alone or in a team?
- Do you deal well with conflict or are you non-confrontational?
- Do you prefer communicating in person or in writing?
- Do you think best from the gut and in-the-moment, or do you need to take time to reflect and craft your communications?
- Do you assert your position with statements or do you use questions to communicate?

The point is that not one of these styles is right or wrong, but knowing how you are most comfortable and effective functioning can help you to build on those strengths.

2. Imagine that you discover that the physical safety of employees at your organization is being compromised for the sake of cost-cutting measures, or that friends in your student club are skimming funds from the bank account. What are some strategies you might take in response if you are an introvert? What if you are an extrovert?
3. In general, can you identify some strategies that are easier or more likely to be effective for a bold person to take when confronting values conflicts? What about for a more cautious person?
4. Can you think of times when you have effectively voiced/enacted your values because you were acting in a way that was natural to you? And/or have you observed this in a friend or co-worker/classmate?

Additional Resources

Giving Voice to Values case studies, curriculum, and additional teaching pedagogy are available at no cost to educators at the [Giving Voice to Values Curriculum](#) website.

Further details about the “Self-Knowledge & Alignment” pillar may be found in Chapter Six of *Giving Voice to Values*, “Playing to My Strengths: Self-Knowledge, Self-Image, and Alignment.”

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

A summary of the seven pillars of GVV may be downloaded here: [An Action Framework for Giving Voice To Values—“The To-Do List.”](#)

For further discussion of the GVV approach, see Mary Gentile's article published in *Organization Management Journal*, "[Values-Driven Leadership Development: Where We Have Been and Where We Could Go.](#)"

Gentile, Mary C. (2010). [Giving Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right](#). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Transcript of Narration

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Sometimes we tend to think that only a certain type of person can act on their values. We may think they have to be bold, assertive, risk-takers, maybe extroverts – and perhaps they need to relish and perform well in a good argument.

The problem with this assumption is that it can imply that if we see ourselves as cautious, conservative, risk-averse or introverted, we might conclude that we will never be able to voice and act on our values. Perhaps we just think that we lack the kind of “moral courage” that would be required.

However, in our research, we have noticed that all types of people can and have acted on their values effectively – extroverts and introverts, risk-takers and the risk-averse, bold and cautious alike. The key similarity is that these folks understood who they truly were: what was most comfortable to them and what their abilities were, and they framed the values conflicts they faced in such a way as to play to their own strengths.

So for example, if we see ourselves as risk takers, we might say “Why not take a risk in the service of something that really matters to me? In the service of my deepest values?” On the other hand, if we see ourselves as risk-averse, we might frame the challenge we face in such a way that acting ethically feels like the safer route.

If we are quick on our feet and clever with words, we might be most effective in a one-on-one conversation with the person we want to influence. If we are shy and need time to think and craft our words in advance, we might be more effective with a written memo. Or perhaps we may generate a set of critical questions that will enable others to bring new and important information into the debate.

This is our “self-story” and it can be a source of inspiration, confidence and guidance in our efforts to find effective ways to act ethically. The point is there are many ways to voice and act on our values and there is always something we can try. It becomes important to reflect on who we are, who we truly

want to be, and how and when we are most effective – and then to play to those strengths and understandings when faced with ethical dilemmas.

There are many ways to align our unique strengths and style with our values. The trick is to find a way to “be ourselves” as opposed to trying to impose an unfamiliar or uncomfortable identity on ourselves when facing ethical challenges.

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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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