

GVV Pillar 2: Choice

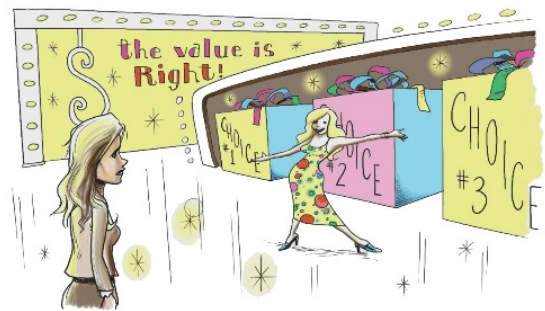
GVV Pillar 2: Choice introduces the second principle of “Giving Voice to Values” (GVV). We have a choice about voicing our values and it is important to know what has helped – and hindered – in the past so we can work around these factors. When faced with difficult ethical decisions, it’s easy to think that we have no choice except to compromise our values for the sake of protecting our friends, colleagues, job, company, organization, family, etc. However, by reflecting on occasions both when we have acted on our values and also when we have failed to do so, we recognize that we have the power to make genuine – though not necessarily easy – choices about whether or not to give voice to our values.

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.



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 2: Choice

1. BEFORE viewing the video, you may wish to poll students with the following questions:
 - a. 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
 - b. I have often voiced my values effectively.
Strongly Agree / Somewhat Agree / Not Sure / Somewhat Disagree / Strongly Disagree
 - c. I can think of times when I did not voice my values effectively.
Strongly Agree / Somewhat Agree / Not Sure / Somewhat Disagree / Strongly Disagree
 - d. 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 if 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 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 “Choice” pillar may be found in 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.”

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

Written and Narrated by

Mary C. Gentile, Ph.D.
Darden School of Business
University of Virginia

“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.”

For additional information, please contact:

Mary C. Gentile, Ph.D.

Creator & Director, Giving Voice to Values

Babson College

Mgentile3@babson.edu

www.GivingVoiceToValuesTheBook.com

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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