

GVV Pillar 4: Purpose

GVV Pillar 4: Purpose introduces the fourth principle of “Giving Voice to Values” (GVV). Mary Gentile encourages us to ask ourselves, “What am I working for?” Defining our personal and professional purpose before conflicts arise, and appealing to this sense of purpose in others, is important. If we answer this question explicitly and in a broad way, we can accept values conflicts more easily as a normal part of a career and of everyday living. Gentile suggests that we identify the personal values that underpin our professional lives. If we have an expansive, inclusive understanding of our professional purpose, we can find greater motivation to act on our values in service to this grander purpose, as well as find compelling ways to appeal to a shared purpose in others whom we wish to influence or persuade.

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, groupthink, integrity, moral agent, morals, moral emotions, moral reasoning, prosocial behavior, social contract theory, subject of moral worth, values, veil of ignorance, 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 4: Purpose

1. What are the overarching values that guide your personal life? What are the overarching values that guide your career path or professional life? Consider the following questions:

- What impact do you want to have? On whom?
- Whom do you want to know you benefited? In what ways?
- What do you want to learn?
- How do you define your impact as a/n: auditor, investor, manager, product developer, marketer, senior executive, teacher, health care professional, designer, entrepreneur, architect, attorney, etc.?
- What do you hope to accomplish? What will make your professional life worthwhile?
- How do you want to feel about yourself and your work, both while you are doing it and in the end?

2. Consider how Charles Handy responded to the question “what’s a business for?”

“Both sides of the Atlantic would agree that there is, first, a clear and important need to meet the expectations of a company’s theoretical owners: the shareholders. It would, however, be more accurate to call most of them investors, perhaps even gamblers. They have none of the pride or responsibility of ownership and are, if truth be told, only there for the money. Nevertheless, if management fails to meet their financial hopes, the share price will fall, exposing the company to unwanted predators and making it more difficult to raise new finance. *But to turn shareholders’ needs into a purpose is to be guilty of a logical confusion, to mistake a necessary condition for a sufficient one.* We need to eat to live; food is a necessary condition of life. But if we lived mainly to eat, making food a sufficient or sole purpose of life, we would become gross. *The purpose of business is not to make a profit, full stop. It is to make a profit so that the business can do something more or better.*”

Source: “What’s a Business For?” by Charles Handy. Harvard Business Review (December 2002, Reprint #R0212C), p. 5, emphasis added.

- a) Do you agree with Handy’s response?
- b) If you accepted it, how might it affect your decision-making
- c) What might be some examples of the “something more or better” that he mentions?

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 “Purpose” pillar may be found in Chapter Five of *Giving Voice to Values*, “What Am I Looking For?”

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

"Those people who find ways to voice and act on their values effectively are often folks who have reflected, in advance, on what they are really trying to accomplish in a particular situation. They have thought about the kind of meaning and impact they want their work and their organizations and their lives to have. Are they just trying to get the highest bonus this quarter? Or are they trying to build a successful career and have a positive impact on their companies and in their communities?"

Having thought about the meaning of their lives in this broader way allows them to tap into strengths they didn't know they had, when facing values conflicts. It also gives them language – actual “arguments” – which they can use to inspire and persuade the folks around them to act ethically as well.

It's easy to get into a narrow and short-term way of thinking when we are busy, over-worked, and goal-oriented. But if we step back and explicitly take time to think about the meaning we want our academic experiences or our career experiences to have in the long run, we can find confidence and strength to act, and we can also serve as inspirations to others.

Think about times when you felt you were a positive influence on your friends or colleagues or family. And think about times when others were a positive influence on you. What was the type of purpose that drove those inspirational behaviors? Define your personal and professional purpose explicitly and broadly before conflicts arise. Decide what is the impact you most want to have. This is the type of purpose you can use to strengthen your resolve and from which you can draw language for your values “scripts.” And remember to appeal to this sense of purpose in others as well."

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.

Copyright Mary C. Gentile 2010.