

IntegratedEthics® Compass Point 2: Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice

BACKGROUND

Leaders of health care organizations have a strong influence on the ethical environment and culture, which in turn influences employee behavior. Without proactive, visible ethical leadership, ethical problems can prevail despite the best of intentions.

Ethical Leadership is one of the three core functions, along with Preventive Ethics and Ethics Consultation, of IntegratedEthics. Together these functions provide healthcare leaders with the practical tools they need to create an ethical environment and culture that will make it easier for employees to “do the right thing”.

The conceptual underpinnings for this activity are derived from the IntegratedEthics Ethical Leadership (EL) Compass. The EL Compass is organized around four compass points that are strongly associated with ethical culture:

1. Demonstrate that ethics is a priority
2. Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice
3. Practice ethical decision-making, and
4. Support your ethics program

This exercise focuses on Compass Point 2: Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice.

LEADERSHIP EXERCISE

Introduction

The second compass point of ethical leadership is communicating clear expectations for ethical practice. To do this, it's important to:

1. Make expectations explicit: Specify under what specific circumstances you should do or not do something; describe the standard as simply as possible.
2. Give examples: Present a real-life situation listeners can identify with and imagine themselves being uncertain about the right thing to do.
3. Explain the underlying values: Give not just a buzzword but a real, compelling and principled explanation of why you should do this.
4. Anticipate barriers: At a minimum, tell people what to do if they have problems. Even better, anticipate the specific problems they might have in trying to follow this directive. Communicate that you understand what the challenges are going to be.

Group Activity Instructions

1. Read the memo on the second page of this handout titled “**Safeguarding Removable Media.**”
2. Review the Sample Script on page 3. It is a presentation to your staff informing them about the memo and your expectations.
3. Does this sample presentation to your staff make expectations explicit, offer specific examples, explain the underlying values, and anticipate/address barriers to meeting your expectations?

Department of
Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: Somemonth 12, 2007
From: VA Chief Information Officer
Subj: IT Directive 06-06, Safeguarding Removable Media
To: Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials

1. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to protecting sensitive information, including personal data of Veterans, dependents, and employees. It is imperative that encryption protection extend to all data formats and media, including USB thumb drives. This memorandum reminds you of the vulnerabilities associated with USB thumb drives and requires you to ensure all employees, contractors, and other information systems users only use VA-approved and -encrypted USB thumb drives with VA information systems.
2. VA Directive 6504, Restrictions on Transmission, Transportation and Use of, and Access to VA Data Outside VA Facilities dated June 7, 2006, requires protection for sensitive data residing outside VA facilities on electronic storage media. Paragraph 2q of this Directive states:

Data stored—Encryption. Additional security controls are required to guard VA-protected information stored on computers used outside VA facilities. If an employee uses VA government-furnished equipment or non-VA other equipment in a mobile environment (e.g., laptop or PDA) carried out of a VA office or a PC in an alternative worksite and VA-protected information is stored on the computer, file, or electronic storage media, approved encryption software must be used.

3. Therefore, to maximally protect ALL INFORMATION within VA, personal USB thumb drives may no longer be used within VA facilities. Only VA-owned and -encrypted thumb drives may be used with VA equipment. The IT staff will be altering all VA computers so that unencrypted thumb drives will no longer be compatible with VA computers. You are responsible for ensuring that your staff is aware of and complies with this memorandum. You have 60 days from the date of this memorandum to ensure 100% compliance.

Mr. Data Chief

VA Form 2105
Nov 2013

Thumb Drive Directive: Sample Script Exercise

“VA’s IT Directive 06-06 makes clear that we have a legal and ethical need to protect how we share sensitive data and information. Everyone has an obligation to fully support this requirement. What’s on the line is whether or not patients, and many others, can trust us with their confidential or sensitive information. Consider the impact of VA’s historical data loss incidents. Patients and their families are worried that we don’t care enough about them to honor even basic protection of information about their lives. If they can’t trust us, how can we provide their health care services? This requirement applies to everyone who uses our data. And it’s the law; it applies to all of us.

Part of our commitment to you is to help you have the legal and protected equipment, supplies, and support you need to do the right thing, as well as to do your work. Ed Gomez, our Chief Information Officer, and Sandy Block, our Information Security Officer, are available to answer questions and help you. You can also reach them on email or at their telephone extensions, 32001 and 32007, respectively. You may also contact your supervisor.

Thank you for your continued support in serving America’s Veterans and their families.”

Compass Point 2: Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice

- *Recognize when expectations need to be clarified*
- *Be explicit, give examples, explain underlying values*
- *Anticipate barriers*

Fostering an ethical environment and culture: Four Compass Points

Demonstrate that ethics is a priority

- Talk about ethics
- Prove that ethics matters to you
- Encourage discussion of ethical concerns

Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice

- Recognize when expectations need to be clarified
- Be explicit, give examples, explain the underlying values
- Anticipate barriers to meeting your expectations

Practice ethical Decision making

- Identify decisions that raise ethical concerns
- Address ethical decisions systematically
- Explain your decisions

Support your local ethics program

- Know what your ethics program is and what it does
- Champion the program
- Support participation by others

For more information see: Ethical Leadership: Fostering an Ethical Environment and Culture, at:

http://vaww.ethics.va.gov/docs/integratedethics/Ethical_Leadership_Fostering_an_Ethical_Environment_and_Culture_20070808.pdf

Activity Goal:

Practice communicating clear expectations and underlying values.

Time: 8 - 10 minutes

Activity Format:

- Read sample script
- Ask questions
- Discuss

Leader Note:

Strive to gain participation from everyone in the group. Ask as many probing questions as needed to encourage a comprehensive discussion.

EL Compass Point 2:

Communicate clear expectations for ethical practice

- Recognize when expectations need to be clarified
- Be explicit, give examples, explain underlying values
- Anticipate barriers to meeting your expectations

FACULTY DISCUSSION GUIDE

SCRIPT: Today we are going to do an exercise that will practice communicating clear expectations for ethical practice. I'd like you to read the memo that is provided in this handout on page 2 titled "Safeguarding Removable Media." After you read the memo, please review the sample script on page 3 that is a presentation to your staff about your expectations related to protecting sensitive information.

I'll give you about 2-3 minutes to review the sample script and take notes. We will then discuss whether the script gives the staff explicit expectations, offers specific examples, explains the underlying values, and anticipates/addresses barriers.

NOTE: Give the groups approximately 3 minutes to read the memo and script.

ASK: Is there anything in the sample script that you find effective?

ELICIT ANSWER(S): Ask clarifying questions as necessary to engage the group. If no one speaks up, see the examples below.

Examples may include:

- It was very personal; the leader conveyed that he/she cared about the staff.
- It does a good job with discussion of the values, using inspirational and compelling language such as "need to protect," "whether patients can trust us..."
- Gives advice about how to get help including contact information.

ASK: What in the sample script do you think could be improved?

ELICIT ANSWER(S): Examples may include:

- The script should acknowledge the effects the directive will have on staff (barriers).
- It should set explicit expectations.
- Could use more examples.