VA IntegratedEthics®: Value of the Day Discussion Activity

Activity Overview

The Value of the Day Discussion Activity is a week-long activity that prompts staff to talk about VA core values—Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence (ICARE)—and how they can affect the work that is done in VA on a daily basis. The goal is to hold an open, respectful discussion of what the ICARE value of the day means to staff members, how they see the value acted on—or not—at work, and how they can demonstrate the value in their daily activities. Participants seek to understand each other’s perspectives, not to persuade or solve problems.

(This activity is a modification of the Value of Month activity, which was based on an activity developed by the IE Council at the Providence VA Medical Center. For more information on the Value of the Month activity and other Ethical Leadership tools, see the Ethical leadership section of the Index to IE Resources.

Things to Consider

Value of the Day discussions can be conducted with employees from many different work groups, or with employees from the same unit or team. Discuss with facility leadership whether these activities should be conducted in central locations among employees from different areas, or in work groups with fellow team members. Groups should be of manageable size so that all participants get a chance to contribute. Remember to consider employees who work evenings, nights, weekends, or in locations other than the main facility. Consider conducting Value of the Day activities in locations all over your facility, inviting leaders from those locations to facilitate the discussions.

Recommended Process

1. Identify a discussion leader for each session. See below for more information on selecting a discussion leader.

2. Reserve one or more conference rooms (one per discussion leader) for 30 minutes, every day for one week. If possible, please schedule activities at multiple times to cover all shifts.

3. One week before the first session, send an email to employees inviting them to a discussion session. Make sure employees from all shifts and all areas of the facility are invited. See below
for a sample invitation.

4. Send an email reminder early in the morning of the first discussion session.

5. Print copies of the Value of the Day handout (attached).

6. As the discussion session begins, the leader should welcome participants and provide a brief overview:

   “This discussion will get us talking about how VA ICARE values impact the work we do in the VA on a daily basis. The goal is to hold an open, respectful discussion of what the ICARE value of the day, X, means to us, how we see it acted on – or not – at work. We want to understand each other’s perspectives, and don’t intend to persuade or problem-solve.

   “Today’s value is X, which is defined as Y. …”

7. The leader should then proceed by asking the first discussion question, giving people plenty of time to respond. When people stop responding, the leader should prompt involvement of others by asking, “What do others think about this question?” until no one else responds, and then move on to the next question.

8. After going through each of the questions, the leader should thank everyone for coming, encourage participants to continue to consider ways to demonstrate the ICARE values in their everyday activities, and invite them to the next scheduled session.

More Information

Selecting a Discussion Leader. Whoever leads the Value of the Day discussion must be a skilled facilitator. Because people care deeply about their values, they may find it difficult to talk openly and calmly about them, especially when their values seem to conflict with the values of others. Getting people to listen to each other’s values can be an even greater challenge for the leader. Moreover, leaders must be aware of their own values and avoid overprivileging them in the discussion. In order to increase the impact and significance of this activity, you could request that a member of the facility leadership team or IE Council facilitate the discussion.
Sample email invitation:

During the week of [dates], you are invited to a special series of discussions on how values affect the work we do every day in VA. Each day, we will discuss one of the VA core values—Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence—and the effect it has on our daily activities. Bring your lunch and join an open, respectful discussion of what these values mean to you and your fellow employees, and how you see them acted on—or not—at work.

[OPTIONAL] Discussions will be held simultaneously in several locations. Seating may be limited – come early!

Monday, Month/Day: Integrity
Tuesday, Month/Day: Commitment
Wednesday, Month/Day: Advocacy
Thursday, Month/Day: Respect
Friday, Month/Day: Excellence

Location(s):

Bring a co-worker, bring something to eat or drink, and join in the discussion. Hope to see you there!
Value of the Day Discussion Activity Handout

Monday: Integrity
Act with high moral principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.

1. What actions have you seen among your co-workers that demonstrate integrity? How do these actions influence your own behavior and/or your relationship with your colleagues?
2. Are there times when “acting with high moral principle” or “adhering to the highest professional standards” seems to conflict with other values? If so, how do you address the conflict in yourself or with other people?
3. Describe a work situation that requires integrity. What would be the consequences for your facility of failing to act with integrity in that situation?

Tuesday: Commitment
Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA’s mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.

1. What actions have you seen that demonstrate commitment? Would these actions be possible without “an earnest belief in VA’s mission?”
2. Do other employees share the same level of commitment on a day-to-day basis? What are the consequences when people don’t have the same ideas about commitment?
3. Has commitment ever been a barrier to change in your experience at VA?

Wednesday: Advocacy
Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.

Scenario: A physician requests a level of service for a particular patient that can’t be provided to other patients in the facility. The service chief and the physician meet to discuss the issue.
1. What does it mean for the physician to be an advocate in this situation? Should she “plead” for her patient’s special treatment? What about her other patients?
2. What does it mean for the service chief to be an advocate in this situation? Should he grant the physician’s request? What about other patients?
Thursday: Respect
Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.

1. In your experience at VA, have you observed a leader showing respect to an employee, even when the employee has done something wrong? What did the leader do or say? What was the outcome? How were you affected by the respect the leader showed?
2. If others are disrespectful, how can you not “drop to their level,” but remain respectful yourself? What motivates you to “treat all those you serve and with whom you work with dignity and respect”?

Friday: Excellence
Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.

Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better. —Pat Riley
When you realize you've made a mistake, make amends immediately. It's easier to eat crow while it's still warm. —Dan Heist

1. Do these quotes apply to your work at VA? To the work of your facility? To the VA organizational culture?
2. How is excellence supported and recognized in your facility?
3. What are the obstacles, if any, to achieving excellence in your work at VA? How can these obstacles be addressed?