IntegratedEthics® (IE) Journal Activity

PARTICIPANT GUIDE


Overview
This journal activity provides a venue for reflection, discussion and inquiry about the practice of ethical leadership in your organization. While reading “Managing to be Ethical: Debunking Five Business Ethics Myths,” by Linda K. Treviño and Michael E. Brown, participants should consider how the authors’ observations fit with their own opinions and beliefs about ethical behavior at work, and reflect on the key questions in the participant handout. At the journal meeting, these key questions will be used as the basis for collegial discussion about the ethical environment and culture in VHA.

Objectives for the Journal Activity
• Provide an opportunity for staff to reflect on their own thinking and behavior with regard to ethical practices in their work.
• Familiarize staff with resources available to them in their local IE program.
• Foster collaborative discussion among staff to improve the ethical environment and culture in your facility.

Preparation
• Read the article critically and consider how the authors’ observations fit with your own observations and opinions about how organizational culture can cause individuals to rationalize unethical behavior.
• Reflect on the key questions, below. At the journal meeting, those questions will be used as the basis for collegial discussion about your experiences with the ethical environment and culture in your facility.
Key questions:

**Myth 1: It’s Easy to Be Ethical**
The authors begin by debunking the idea that it is easy to be ethical, emphasizing that ethical decisions are complex and require moral awareness to address the complexities and the multistage process.
- How often do you see ethical challenges or questions underestimated or minimized?
- How can we promote moral awareness in our work areas?
  - Example: What can you say to describe a situation when someone asks you to document in minutes of a meeting that he was present in a meeting when he was not?
- What are your thoughts about the five stages or levels of moral reasoning?
- Can you give examples of communications, memos or statements at different levels?

**Myth 2: Unethical Behavior in Business Is simply the Result of “Bad Apples”**
The next section challenges the “bad apples” myth, provides a number of private sector examples, and specifically discusses the phenomenon of obedience to authority.
- How might this apply to our work settings?
- Without giving specifics, give an example of the “obedience to authority” phenomenon?
- What activities help us lead employees toward ethical behavior?

**Myth 3: Ethics Can Be Managed Through Formal Ethics Codes and Programs**
The federal government and VHA have significant resources dedicated to ethics codes and programs. Yet recent events indicate that in spite of all of these resources, things can still go wrong.
- What have we learned from corporate America, and what have we learned from VHA?
- Do formal codes and programs have an impact? If so, are they enough?
- How do organizations follow through to support ethics codes and programs?
- What are examples of formal programs in VA?
- How can we help leadership support formal ethics programs?

**Myth 4: Ethical Leadership Is Mostly About Leader Integrity**
Perhaps the greatest challenge we face in promoting ethical leadership relates to this myth.
- Without naming names, have you heard of leaders who have resisted doing the ELSA or other leadership exercises on the grounds that it is not necessary because they are ethical?
- How do we convey that “being ethical” and “being a leader” does not mean that one is necessarily an “ethical leader?”
What did you think about the grid with one axis representing levels of Moral Person and another showing levels of Moral Manager?

Can you think of times when you have been an ethically silent leader, or failed as an ethical leader in spite of high ethical standards, for failing to engage in ELSA-type behaviors?

**Myth 5: People Are Less Ethical Than They Used To Be**

The authors cite recent polls indicating that people believe senior corporate executives are less ethical than they used to be.

- What are your thoughts?
- For those of you who have been with VHA for 10 or more years, please share your experiences. Are you seeing a change?
- What is behind this myth?

The authors close the article with Guidelines for Effective Ethics Management. This is a good opportunity to compare VHA’s initiatives and to look for affirmation (“continue to do this”) and opportunities (“do more of this”).

**First: Understand the Existing Ethics Culture**

- Are we doing this?
- How else might we do it?

**Second: Communicate the Importance of Ethical Standards**

- Does this sound familiar?
- What EL Compass Points are consistent with this statement?
- How do we do this in this facility? Give examples.

**Third: Focus on the Reward System**

- How can we reward ethical behavior?
- What are we learning in VHA with respect to performance measures and management systems?

**Fourth: Promote Ethical Leadership Throughout the Firm**

This guideline addresses much of the content in Myth 4.

- What are we doing to help ethical people in leadership become ethical leaders?
- How can we help them make ethical values visible?