

## DAVIS' SEVEN STEP GUIDE FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING <sup>1</sup>

1. **State the problem.** Something specific – some feeling or thought – has led you to think you have a possible ethical problem. What is it? For example, “there’s something about this decision that makes me uncomfortable” or “do I have a conflict of interest?”
  2. **Check the facts.** Many problems disappear upon closer examination of the situation, while others change radically.
  3. **Identify relevant factors.** For example, the persons involved, applicable laws, professional codes or standards, other practical constraints (for example, the gift you have received would create a clear conflict of interest if it were really large, but it is worth only \$25).
  4. **Develop a list of options.** What other actions or decisions are available to you besides the original one that started you thinking? Be imaginative. Try to avoid “dilemmas.” Look for something besides a simple “yes, do it” or “no, don’t do it.” Consider whom to go to and the perspectives and/or help they can give, not just what to say or do.
  5. **Test the options.** Use such tests as the following:
    - a. **Harm test:** Does this option do less harm than the alternatives?
    - b. **Publicity test:** Would I want my choice of this option published in the newspaper? Would I want my Grandma to know?
    - c. **Defensibility test:** Could I defend this choice of option before a committee of peers, or a Congressional committee, without appearing self-serving?
    - d. **Reversibility test:** Would I still think this choice of option was good if it were applied to me instead of others, especially if some of the effects are adverse?
    - e. **Colleague test:** What might my profession’s governing board or ethics committee say about this option?
    - f. **Organization test:** What does my organization’s ethics officer or legal counsel say about this?
    - g. **Virtue test:** Would a virtuous person do this? What kind of person does this? What kind of person would I become if I did this kind of thing all the time?
- If an option fails all of these tests, it is unlikely to be ethically acceptable. If an option passes all of them, it is probably ethically acceptable. If the results are mixed for all of the options, then the options will have to be weighed against each other in terms of how well they meet the tests.
6. **Make a choice** of option based on steps 1-5.
  7. **Review steps 1-6.** What could you do to make it less likely that you would have to make such a decision again?
    - a. Are there any precautions you can take as an individual (for example, announce your policy on the question, change jobs, etc.)?
    - b. Is there any way to have more support next time?
    - c. Is there any way to change your organization (for example, suggest policy changes at the next department meeting)?

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Michael Davis, *Ethics and the University* (Routledge, London, 1999), pp. 166-67.