



## DEVELOPING A PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS

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### **Leadership**

### **Video Transcript**

[TEXT: YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS INITIATIVE  
ONLINE TRAINING SERIES]

[TEXT: LEADERSHIP: Developing a Personal Code Of Ethics]

[TEXT: Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the importance of ethical considerations when leading and managing.
2. Identify the sources of ethics.
3. What are the four questions every code of ethics should address?]

[TEXT: Dr. D. Christopher Kayes, Professor of Management, George Washington University]

In this session we are going to talk about ethical management and leadership.

Learning objectives include understand the importance of ethical considerations when leading and managing. Identify the sources of ethics. The four questions every code of ethics should address.

Leaders need to consider their actions in the context of others. Leaders understand that words and actions have consequences. Understanding how others will react or perceive actions is important because a better understanding of others helps to guide actions. It's important that others continue to have trust and that others perceive your actions and words as ethical.

When others perceive that a leader has made an unethical decision, people will quickly lose trust in the leader, and that can lead to other consequences such as a loss of motivation. In extreme cases, a loss of trust can threaten an initiative or an organization.

In order to make ethical decisions, even when those decisions aren't popular, many leaders develop and follow a personal code of ethics.

Without a personal code of ethics, leaders are often left with little guidance on how to act in the face of difficult choices. One way to think about ethics is to think of a ship lost at sea without a compass to guide the captain. Without a code of ethics, leaders will be lost when they face tough situations. Developing a code of ethics will help leaders navigate difficult situations and will help the leader build confidence that he or she is making the best, most ethical decisions.

Leaders turn to several sources when creating a code of ethics. Many individuals rely on religious or spiritual teachings, others rely on the values offered by their family. Some individuals turn to other leaders, leaders for whom they have admiration, and try to adopt the values of those leaders. Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta are often cited as examples of leaders who held strong codes of ethics.





One example of a difficult ethical decision occurred in a retail company. This situation, faced by a former student of mine, shows the challenges that a person encounters when trying to do the right thing.

Brian was the manager of a store, and he had a job opening for a new sales associate. His top choice was a young woman who had previously worked in sales. She had outstanding references. Brian's boss, David, asked Brian to hire one of David's family members. This person did not have the same credentials as Brian's top candidate. Brian understood that the other employees would be disappointed if Brian hired someone who was unqualified but simply because they were the friend of David. Brian was worried that if he did not do as his boss suggested, Brian might be fired. However, Brian also knew that in some cultures, hiring someone you trust personally is more important than hiring someone who has higher qualifications.

Leaders like Brian often rely on a code of ethics that answer four different questions:

First, am I breaking any established rules or laws?

In Brian's home country, it was not illegal to hire family members, so Brian was ok on that question.

Two, is the action I am taking seen as fair by others?

Here Brian was on shakier ground because he knew, though it was legal to hire family members, hiring the boss' relative would be seen as inconsistent and unfair.

Three, how would I feel about myself if I took an action?

Brian felt that it was ok to hire the boss' family member, even though he knew he could hire someone more qualified because he knew that the job was easy to learn and that the family member seemed motivated to do the job well.

Last, is the action I take consistent with the values of my family and community?

Brian felt that he could hire the family member because, although it may be perceived as unfair by many, many organizations hired family members, especially small family-run stores like the store where Brian worked.

As you can see, making ethical decisions guided by a code of conduct is difficult.

What would you have done if you were Brian?

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