

Ethics Tools

Ethics poses questions about how we ought to act and how we should live. It asks, "According to what standards are these actions right or wrong?" It asks, "What character traits (like honesty, compassion, fairness) are necessary to live a truly human life?" It also asks, "What concerns or groups do we usually minimize or ignore? And why might that be?" Admitting our blindness is the beginning of vision. Here are some tools to help:

The Four-Way Test

Of the things we say or do:

1. Is it the truth?
2. Is it fair to all concerned?
3. Will it build goodwill and better friendships?
4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Some Basic Questions to Guide Ethical Conduct

Adapted from Owens-Corning instructions to employees:

1. Would I say or do this in the presence of my girlfriend or boyfriend?
2. Would I say or do this in the presence of a friend or co-worker of my sex?
3. Would my parents be proud of my actions or words?
4. Would I be pleased that my actions or words were reported in my hometown or local newspaper, radio or television station?
5. Does what I plan to say or do need to be said or done at all?
6. Is what I plan to say or do right or wrong?

Remember, right and wrong are not moving targets.

How Did I Live Today?

Thomas Shanks, S.J., Ph.D., Executive Director of the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, recommends that everyone ask themselves these five questions at the end of the day.

1. Did I practice any virtues (e.g., integrity, honesty, compassion)?
2. Did I do more good than harm?
3. Did I treat others with dignity and respect?
4. Was I fair and just?
5. Was my community better because I was in it? Was I better because I was in my community?