

A Seven Step Guide to Ethical Decision Making

From Michael Davis, "Ethics and the University" (Routledge, London, 1999), pp. 166-167

1. **State problem.** For example, "there's something about this decision that makes me uncomfortable" or "do I have a conflict of interest?"
2. **Check facts.** Many problems disappear upon closer examination of situation, while others change radically.
3. **Identify relevant factors.** For example, persons involved, laws, professional code, other practical constraints (e.g., under \$200).
4. **Develop list of options.** Be imaginative, try to avoid "dilemmas"; not "yes" or "no" but whom to go to, what to say.
5. **Test options.** Use such tests as the following:
 - *Harm test:* Does this option do less harm than alternatives?
 - *Publicity test:* Would I want my choice of this option published in the newspaper?
 - *Defensibility test:* Could I defend this choice of option before a Congressional committee or committee of peers?
 - *Reversibility test:* Would I still think choice of this option good if I were adversely affected by it?
 - *Colleague test:* What might my profession's governing board or ethics committee say about this option?
 - *Organization test:* What does the organization's ethics officer or legal counsel say about this?
6. **Make a choice 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?
 - Are there any precautions you can take as an individual (e.g., announce your policy on the question, change jobs, etc.)?
 - Is there any way to have more support next time?
 - Is there any way to change the organization (e.g., suggest policy changes at the next department meeting)?