

Ethical Framework Signature Assignment

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Ethical Framework

In the present study, I will describe my own ethical framework. I will then describe a difficult ethical decision that impacted both my personal and professional life. As I describe this incident, I will discuss how I applied my ethical framework to the situation. Lastly, I will assess how I may apply a different or more complex decision-making process in the future to complex ethical issues.

My Personal Ethical Framework

Our life decisions are shaped by our personal, societal, cultural, and organizational experiences coupled with the relationships with those we share our experiences with. Developing how we determine what is good or bad based on those experiences requires introspection where we examine our own mental and emotional process. This is more commonly seen as a form of exercising emotional intelligence. As individuals, when we lack experience, we supplement our views through the lens of others. In this, we choose who we allow to see for us to aid our perspective of how we see the world. Ultimately, we choose the decisions we make for ourselves; decisions which we find to be reasonable. Due to several experiences and events in my life, my ethical framework has dramatically shifted throughout my adult life. Those paradigm shifts have much to do with both good and bad relationships I have formed with others, moments of both prosperity and misfortune, and realities that have contributed to my character growth and what I value.

What I value has created a set of principles that govern a series of rules I choose to live by, who or what I care about most, and my desired goals in life. My strong convictions that drive my morality have culminated to following key tenants of assessment:

Does my decision deliver justice?

Am I exercising neutrality?

Am I demonstrating compassion?

Do I connect with empathy?

Am I still maintaining a person's dignity?

Am I providing service with equity?

These are the same tenants I have expressed before in recent writings over the years but it is most often through public speaking that I share specific experiences that caused me to arrive to who I am today.

When Personal Absence Influences Professional Presence

In September of 2009, at the age of 24, I was well into my law enforcement career as a low tenured Deputy Sheriff for one of the largest law enforcement agencies in the nation. During this time, I was assigned to a low to high security jail facility that included the temporary housing of male prisoners who were arrested and were awaiting arraignment. I was very accustomed to the operations of the housing areas recognizing that the challenges of supervising incarcerated males were much different than those of females at this facility with an understanding that they were not afforded the same privileges as the female inmates due to their status. It was also understood that the males were often new arrivals, only confined for less than a week. The challenge to this is how aggressive they may be after recently being arrested and not fully acclimating to the jail environment. Furthering this challenge is them remaining in the clothing they were arrested in posing a higher risk of possessing contraband not allowed in a custodial environment.

Each shift started with the same protocol; a physical check of every prisoner's wristband and description to ensure no escapes occurred during or before the shift. With the security

challenges in mind, I always conducted my count in a random fashion to reduce my predictability of movement potentially resulting in an ambush attack. On this day, I walked the lower floors passing through a series of segmented areas of a module style housing unit. Coming up to each cell door, I greeted each inmate the same. Holding a clipboard containing the list of those in my care, I knocked on the door with my foot followed by the announcement:

“Gentlemen, I need to see your wristbands”. Typically, the inmates would approach the cell door, place their wrist through a tray slot where I would visually inspect them, confirming they were in good health and that they were present on my list. Short of any comments or questions from the prisoner, I would end the short interaction with “Thank you”.

Arriving at one door, I repeated the same greeting observing 2 prisoners inside. Immediately, one prisoner came to the door and presented his wristband. After saying “thank you” to him, I noticed the second was a bit slower. Climbing from an upper bunkbed, he appeared lethargic suggesting he had just awakened and under the influence. As he turned toward the door, I began to become uneasy with forestalling curiosity. Coming closing to the door, my suspicions were confirmed yet definitive establishment lied in the checking of his wristband. Reaching his arm through the door, I read the wristband and it was at that moment I authenticated that the man behind the door was my father. I thanked him and immediately retreated to the control booth area where I informed my partner that I needed to stop the count of wristbands and report that my father was currently housed in the facility as required by my organizations policy and procedures.

The Personal Absence

I grew up in a household with a single mom raising 3 kids. My mother rarely spoke about the absence of my father only to say that while he was a highly intelligent man, he had a drug addiction believed to be exacerbated by his service in the army during the Vietnam War as a helicopter gunner. Returning to civilian life, he had made the decision to continue his use of cocaine to cope with his experiences, choosing this over building a relationship with his children. In May of 1992, my mom moved our family from the city of Los Angeles to a neighboring area of Los Angeles County due to the destruction of our neighborhood from a notorious riot and my mother having no transportation to get to everyday necessities in neighboring areas. Age 17 marked close to the 10th year that I had lived in this second area. It was also the age in which I would meet my father under some very unusual circumstances. In short, My mom and I were tipped by my father's mom (my grandmother) via phone that my father lived on the next street over. To put it in a better perspective, if I were to go to the rear of the apartment we lived in, climb a wall on the next street, my fathers apartment was less than 200 yards away from us. With my mom seeking consultation and approval from me and my twin brother, we went to meet my father. In this meeting not only did I meet him but I was greeted by 3 kids at his home, kids I had played with in the neighborhood some time over the last 10 years without knowing that we were step-siblings. It was then I also discovered that my father had lived at this home during and prior to the same time that we had moved to the neighborhood.

During our introduction, my father made a commitment to play a role in our lives with a promise to spend time with us at least 3 days a week. This only lasted approximately 3 weeks before he disappeared again. Seeking answers, I looked for my father a few days later at his place of employment. In locating him, he expressed anger as I asked for answers. It was in this

moment that he shared that he no longer wanted to have a relationship with us stating that we were a “mistake,” and “accident,” and that we “...were not meant to be born.” Resigning from the possibility of building a relationship, we ended ties with him. I would see him again accidentally in passing a month later in which he doubled down on his decision, walking passed me on a local bus as if I were just another stranger. It wouldn't be until our moment in the jail facility that I would see him again.

Influencing Professional Presence

A cliché question asked by background investigators determining the suitability of a law enforcement officer candidate is “If you pulled over a family member for a traffic violation, would you give them a ticket?” For me, this question was no longer a hypothetical but something I have always held as a strong possibility and what was now an even more severe ethical dilemma before me. So that I could distance myself from having to make any decisions that would impact my father's jail experience and to adhere to the organizations policies and procedures, I immediately reported the interaction to the jail's commanding officer. In short, I was directed to complete several tasks to prepare for what I was promised to be my father's immediate transfer to another jail facility. Upon completing these tasks, I was surprisingly directed to return to the housing area my father was in and to continue my normal duties pending his removal. This was a direct violation of the organization's policies and procedures. I accredit my obedience to the order given to being young, lacking in maturity, and lacking the ethical morality to be an advocate for myself by citing how damaging this could be to me psychologically and recognizing that supervising leaders of the organization were putting their interest before my own.

Returning to the housing area, I made the decision to carry on the shift with business as usual while having as little contact with my father as possible and with uncertainty as to whether he recognized me or not. Not only did I remain in this housing area for that shift, but I was then drafted to work the following shift due to staff shortages in which I was reassigned to the same location. I was informed this was due to being one of the very few males working the next shift and that it was important for me to present for a large prisoner movement occurring during the early morning hour. No one supervising the following shift was informed of my father's presence until I again reported it to which my notification was ignored, and I was told they had nowhere else to put me.

The situation before me undermined my trust in the individuals I relied upon to lead me. "If there is anything that undermines trust, it is the feeling that the people at the top lack integrity, are without a solid sense of ethics" (Bennis, 2009 pg. 110) Being what I sum up to being a "good soldier following orders," I returned to the module where I continued to supervise my father another 5 hours before he was finally picked up and transferred to another facility. This was done in my presence and in that experience, I was once again surprised by the lack of empathy and professionalism demonstrated in his removal.

It wasn't until I received word of my father's interaction with law enforcement personnel at the facility that he was transferred to that I confirmed my father did in fact recognize me. Uncertain how speaking to me would impact my job, he chose not to speak to me. I also learned years after that through that experience, my father expressed how proud he was to see his son living a lifestyle of success.

Driving My Morality

In the experience shared, several ethical challenges are presented that questioned my loyalty to the core values of the organization, the loyalty to my family, and loyalty to myself with a focus on my emotional wellbeing during what was surely a traumatic experience that most cannot say they will ever have to live with. In this situation, I was unexpectedly faced with sorting through an opposition of wants and needs. "...these needs influence the desire for good relationships with coworkers, participation in a work team, and a positive relationship with supervisors" (Daft, 2017). I felt I could not rely on anyone to assist alleviate me from the burden. I made several decisions in the moment which I later identified over the years as solid foundations to my ethical framework:

1. **Delivering Justice:** As an integral component of a very complex legal system, my decisions must be guided through understanding the situation at hand. This includes knowing the right that has been infringed upon, seeking the gathering of evidence, statements of those involved, and completing a narrative that creates a clear picture for people to understand what happened. Through my experience, I have learned the value of supporting the justice system process and those within by adhering to understanding the situation not just from the lens of a victim and those who are having their freedoms taken away but too those within the justice system who may be impacted by such arrest. When colleagues may be psychologically impacted through personal interest, I find ways to remove them from the involvement as a form of care for their wellbeing but too as a measure that does not jeopardize the justice system process.
2. **Exercising Neutrality:** It's important that I recognize my own biases. By reflecting on my own biases that may exist and how they may influence my perception of a situation, I can

make decisions that are focused on the facts at hand. This involves listening to all sides with the intent to understand instead of jumping to conclusions or making a predetermined decision that is self-serving.

3. **Demonstrating Compassion:** This can be demonstrated through both sympathy and empathy with a concern for others. Like the efforts of neutrality, one must actively listen, paying attention to what a person has to say and being present in the moment, not dwelling on the past. This is significant for me as I reflect upon my past interaction with my father and how that would impact how I would treat him in the future. I came to learn that I had the freedom to choose how I responded to his declaration of my place in life and in making a choice, I decided to treat him in the same manner I would want to be treated which was with care, free of animosity. Despite his lack of presence in my life and his personal views stated years ago of my existence, I avoided judgement by simply accepting him for who he was, maintaining my oath to his health, safety, and security while avoiding making assumptions.
4. **Connecting With Empathy:** Although I may have never been in the same position as a person I am engaging, it is important that I ask myself how I would want to be treated if I were in the same situation. This is a step beyond compassion as exercising empathy requires validating a individual's feelings and being cognizant of your own non-verbal cues. It also requires reframing from the temptation of wanting to fix a person's problems or circumstances. This was highly evident in my experience as I could not undo his jail confinement.
5. **Maintaining a Persons Dignity:** According to Johnson (pg. 386), Dignity has been identified as one of four cardinal or hinge virtues essential to encouraging global

cooperation. No matter the deeds of an individual, they must be afforded the opportunity to be treated with respect, have a right to due privacy, and freedom of autonomy. Dignity “...forbids using others as a means to an end” (Johnson, 2021 pg. 386). This includes the avoidance of stereotyping. Reflective of my own experience is a father who has a criminal history versus a son with no criminal history and too enforces the law. People have the right to make their own life decisions and maintain their independence. Lessons learned in this situation are how vital it is to provide support and practical assistance to colleagues who are going through difficult times without being patronizing. In maintaining a person’s dignity both in a professional and personal life, it helps foster a positive and respectful environment where everyone feels valued.

6. Providing Service with Equity: One can never be more tested when the authority of controlling a individual’s freedom is asked to be applied to both strangers and family. It is important that we engage the people we serve with the same respect and professionalism we would give to our families. This includes ensuring everyone is given equal access to the services and resources being provided without bias. This also includes communicating the same expectations of all so as to not show any favoritism, adverse, or disparate treatment toward any particular individual or group of people. This does not necessarily mean in the legal realm that harsh punishment must be equally applied but instead the practice of the core values outlined in my ethical framework should be applied to all when engaging with others both in my personal and professional life.

Conclusion

Although this is one of several life experiences that have shaped my ethical framework, it is one that most significantly challenged the commitment to making decisions or taking action that align with my own values and beliefs even when others around me may not have my best interest in mind. A takeaway from this experience is that in providing shelter, clothing, food, amenities, safety, and security to my father, I did more for him in 13 hours than he did in my entire life. By doing so, it helped me recognize through ethical leadership the importance of modeling the way; a lesson that my father unintentionally and indirectly taught me through this unfortunate but equally shared moment. This has helped me in my later years through sharing this story as “leaders often look up to followers who model high moral standards and are willing to sacrifice and take responsibility” (Johnson, 2021). It has also helped me through other decision making processes by demanding solutions from my leaders when I know the psychological welfare of myself or my colleagues is at stake during a dramatic incident. I choose to no longer follow instructions out of simple convenience or obedience to authority. Instead I look at every situation in the form of a risk assessment to the short and long term consequences of a team member and to myself.

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