

Spotting and Solving Ethical Dilemmas at Work



March 2016

VA Office of Inspector General



Veterans Health Administration

*Review of
Alleged Patient Deaths,
Patient Wait Times, and
Scheduling Practices at the
Phoenix VA Health Care System*



Flint Water Crisis: Local EPA Director Resigns

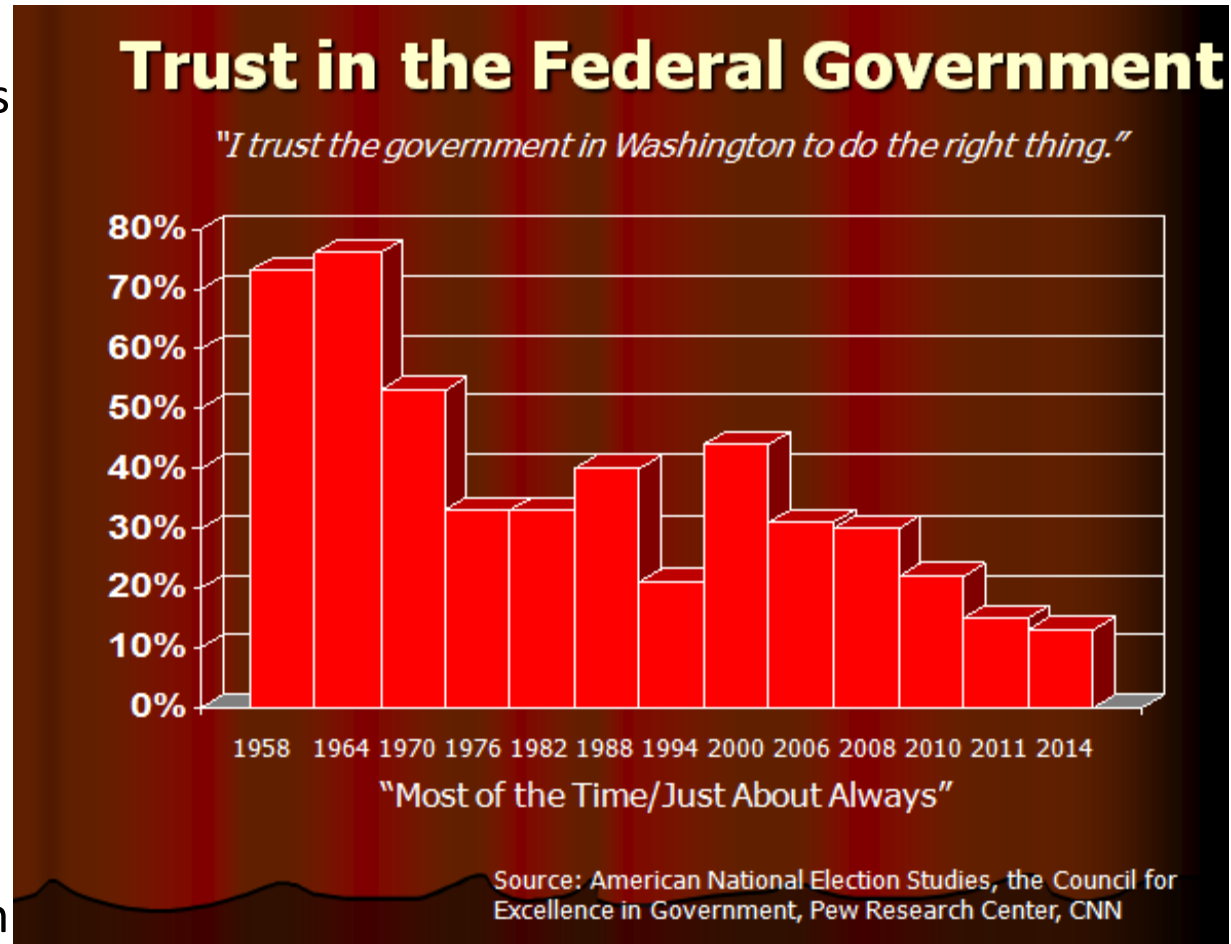
A regional director has resigned in connection with the drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan.



Course Objectives

Improve Your Ability to:

- Identify ethical dilemmas that arise in work situations;
- Identify the value conflict(s) that must be confronted in resolving an ethical dilemma;
- Define and apply an ethical decision making model;
- Act to implement an ethical decision; and
- Avoid key mental traps in ethical decision making.



What is Ethics?



An iceberg floating in dark blue water. The tip of the iceberg is above the water surface, and the much larger base is submerged. Three text boxes are overlaid on the image: one on the tip, one on the submerged base, and one to the left of the submerged base.

Violations of Law/Regulation

**Technical and
Management Issues
with Ethics
Components**

**Other
Technical
and
Management
Issues**

Efforts to Define Ethics

Ethics as:	Key Questions:	Major Thinker:
Virtue	What does a person of good character do? Have I reached the “golden mean?”	Aristotle
Principles	Am I using people as ends in themselves, not means to an end? Is my action a maxim for all people?	Immanuel Kant
Consequences	What is the greatest good for the greatest number?	Jeremy Bentham

"I can't be bought by..."

VIRTUES

**Ethical
Action**

CONSEQUENCES

Expediency
Self-Serving Behavior

PRINCIPLES

Rigid application of rules
Following blindly



**Bill White
And the
Veterans Administration**



Two Kinds of Ethical Issues

Rules-Based

“Moral Temptations”

- A conflict between moral and immoral values
- Right vs. Wrong
- Governed by law or regulation
- One right answer

Values-Based

“Ethical Dilemmas”

- A conflict between moral values
- Right vs. Right
- Governed by conscience
- Two or more right answers

Source: Rushworth Kidder
How Good People Make Tough Choices
Institute for Global Ethics

Ethics and the Clash of Values



Constitutional Values

Representative government
Due process
Separation of powers
Equality
Responsiveness
Justice
Community

Organizational Values

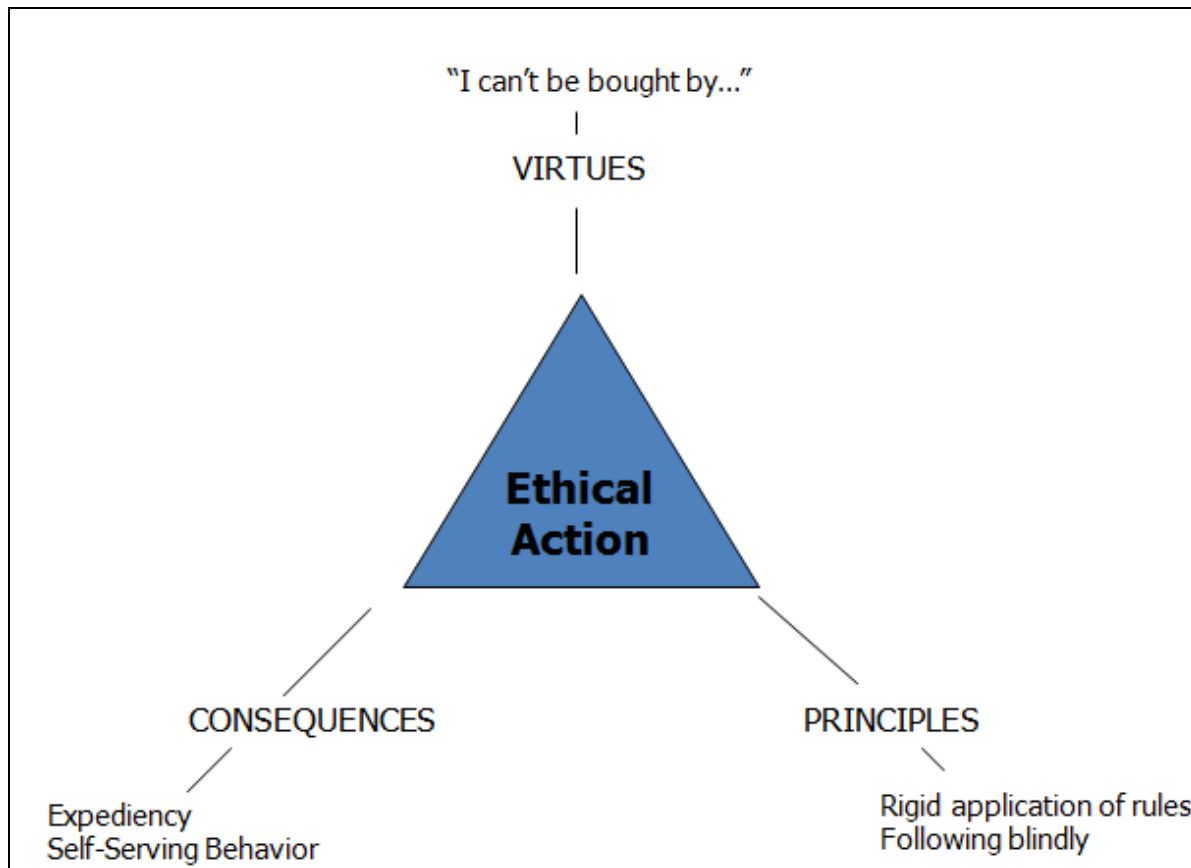
Efficiency
Effectiveness
Chain of command
Timeliness
Collaboration
Creativity
Stewardship of resources

Personal Values

Achievement
Truth
Fairness
Compassion
Responsibility
Freedom
Loyalty

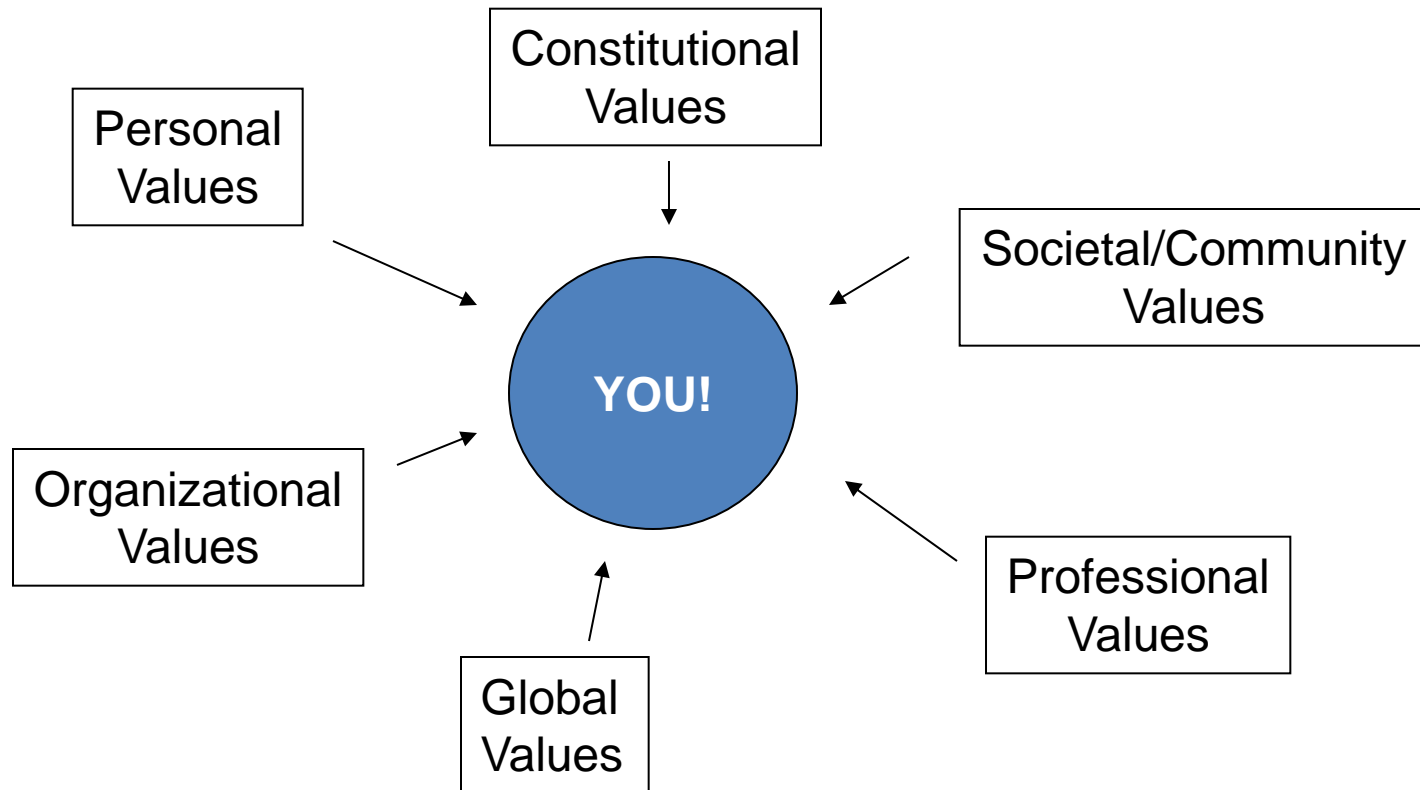


Find a Trilemma Option



What did we do in these cases to help us make the best possible ethical decision?

Whose Values Count?



Exercising Moral Empathy

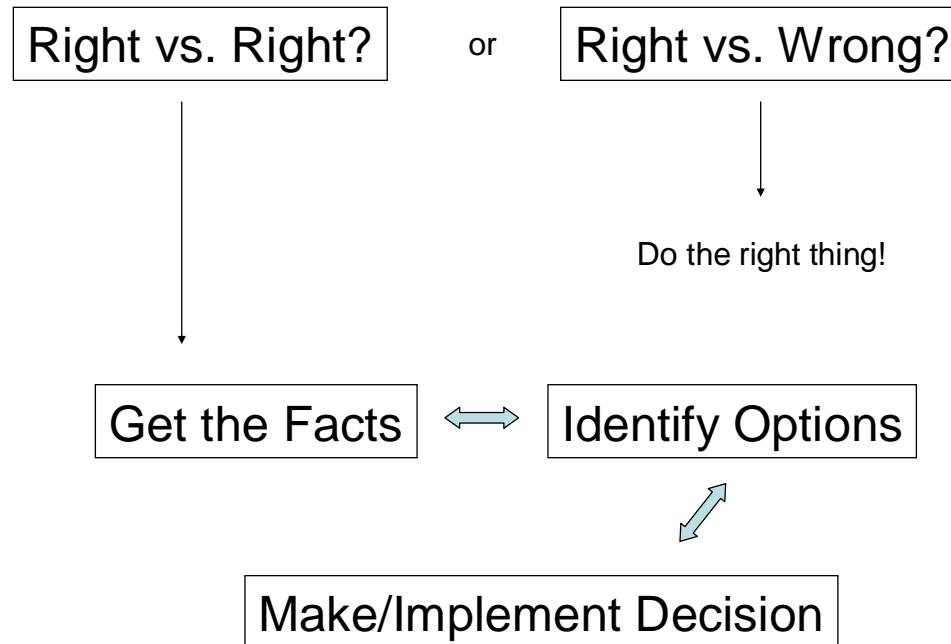
As You See It:

- What is the ethical dilemma?
- What's at stake for you?
- What values are primary for you?
- What options do you see?
- How can your core values be satisfied?

As Others See It:

- What is the ethical dilemma?
- What's at stake for them?
- What values are primary for them?
- What options might they see?
- How can their core values be satisfied?

Ethical Decision Making Model



Get the Facts

What's the ethical dilemma as you define it, in everyday language?

Who are the stakeholders and how do they see the issue?

What's at stake for you? What are your motives?

What are the relevant facts?

What values are in conflict?

What assumptions are you and others making that might need to be tested?

Identify Options

Who has responsibility to resolve this ethical dilemma?

What results would define success for you? For other stakeholders?

What are all of the possible options?

What are the positive and negative consequences of the most promising options?

Make and Implement a Decision

What option best satisfies your core values while being acceptable when viewed from the perspective of fairness and history?

How will you implement the chosen option and mitigate negative impacts?



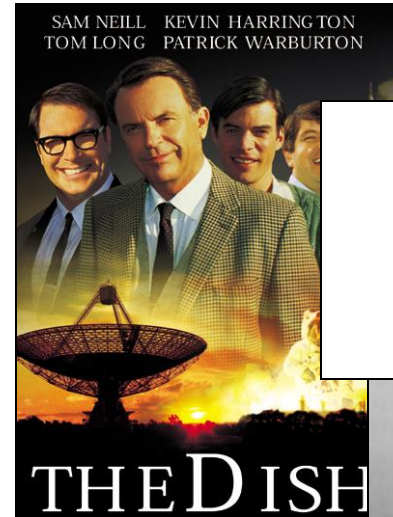
Frances Perkins Leaves a Legacy



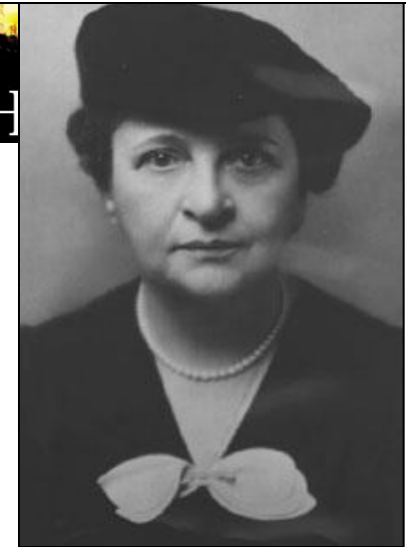
How did Perkins address the challenges she faced?

Eight Tactics of Quiet Leaders

- Don't Kid Yourself
- Trust Mixed Motives
- Buy a Little Time
- Invest Wisely
- Drill Down
- Bend the Rules
- Nudge, Test, and Escalate Gradually
- Craft a Compromise



**Bill White
And the
Veterans
Administration**

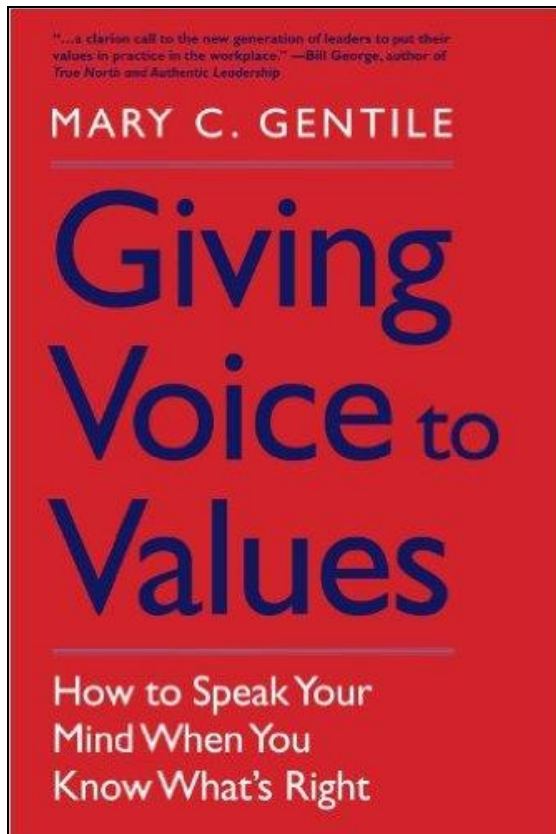


Social Power

- **Interpersonal power**
 - Emotional intelligence
- **Informational Power**
 - Pertinent knowledge
 - Business acumen
- **Associational Power**
 - Personal networks
 - Social intelligence
- **Expertise Power**
 - Mastery of facts/context

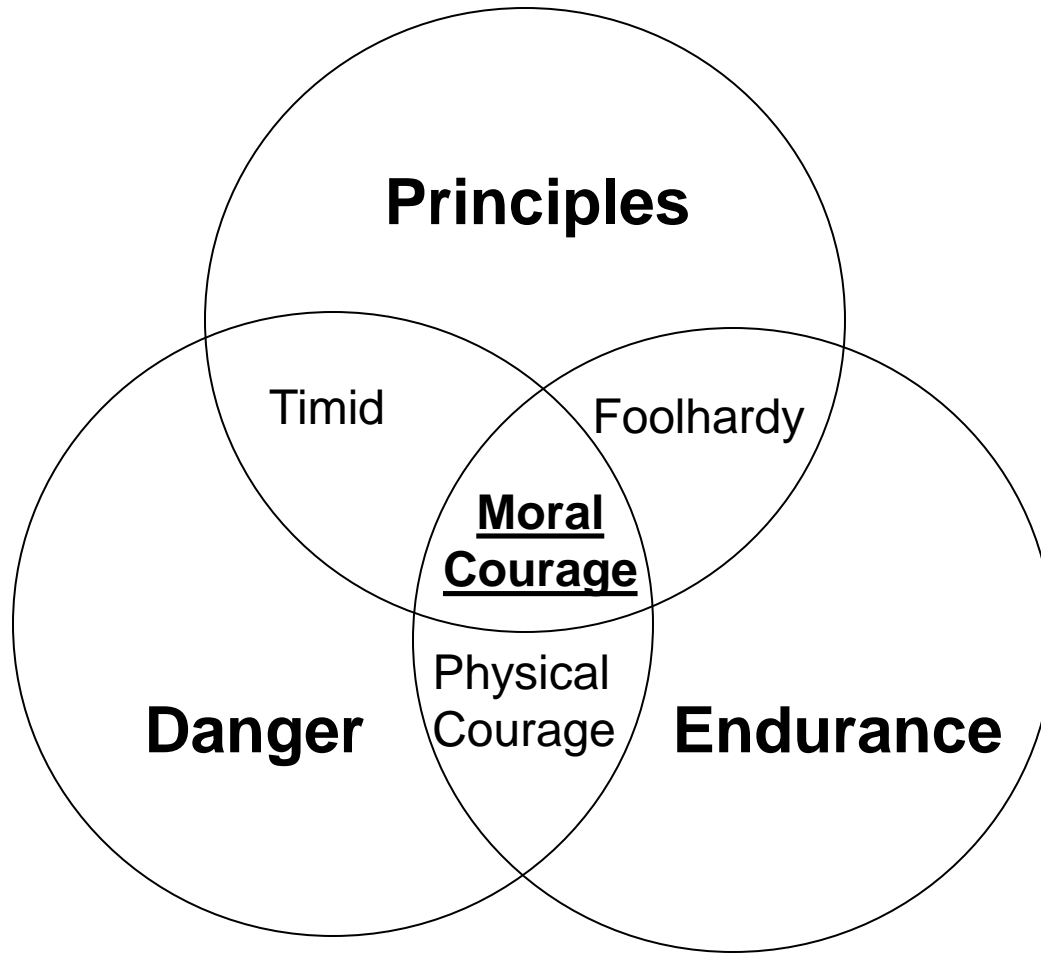


Voicing Your Values



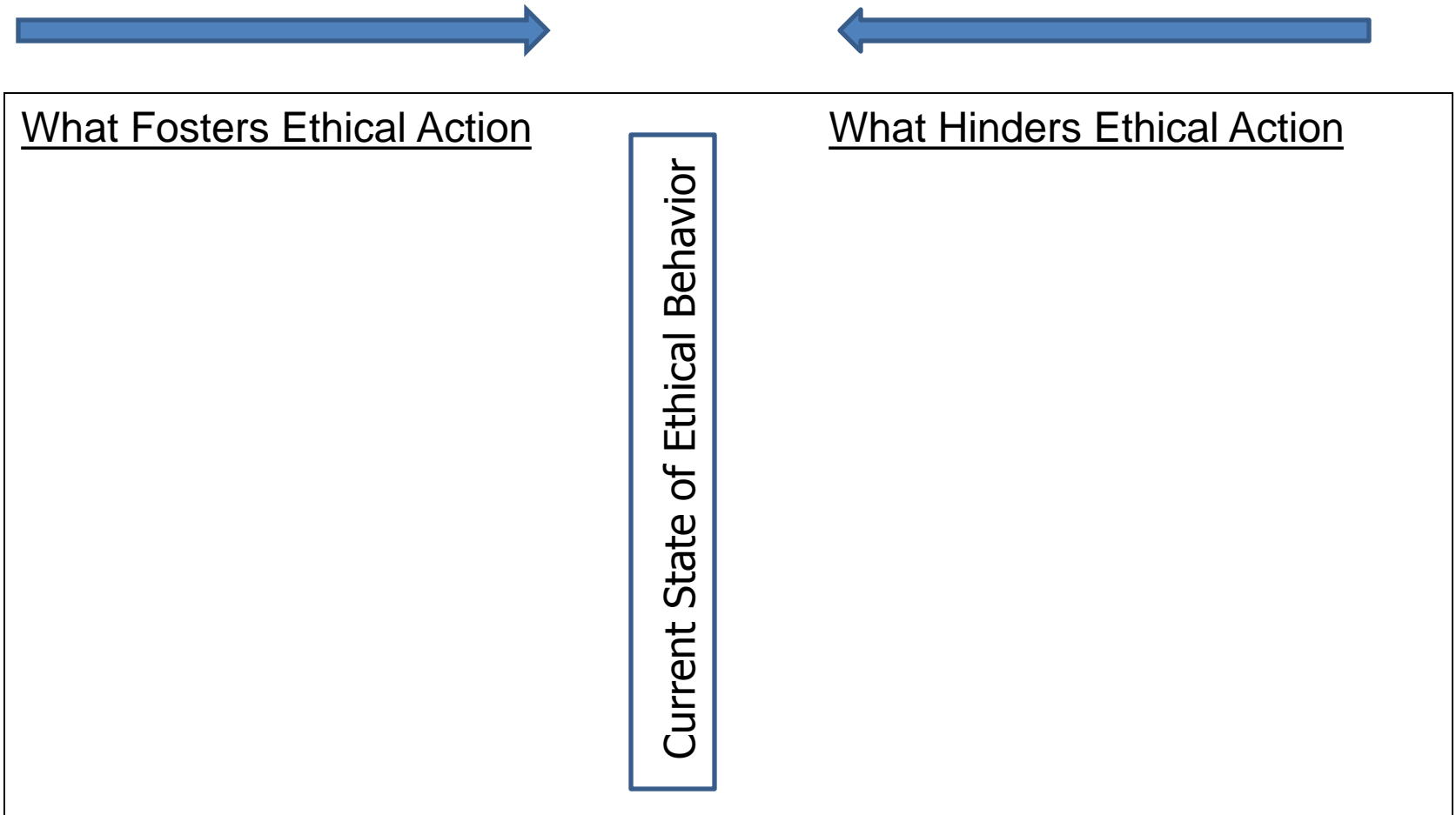
- Enlist allies
- Lower threats to others' status
- Reframe the problem as an opportunity rather than a reproach
- Identify and prepare to counter reasons and rationalizations you will hear
- Identify levers you can use.
 - Long-term vs. short-term needs
 - Core purpose/values of the organization
 - Actionable alternatives
 - Dangers of inaction
 - Full accounting of costs of options
 - Pay to your strengths
- PRACTICE THE WORDS!

Moral Courage

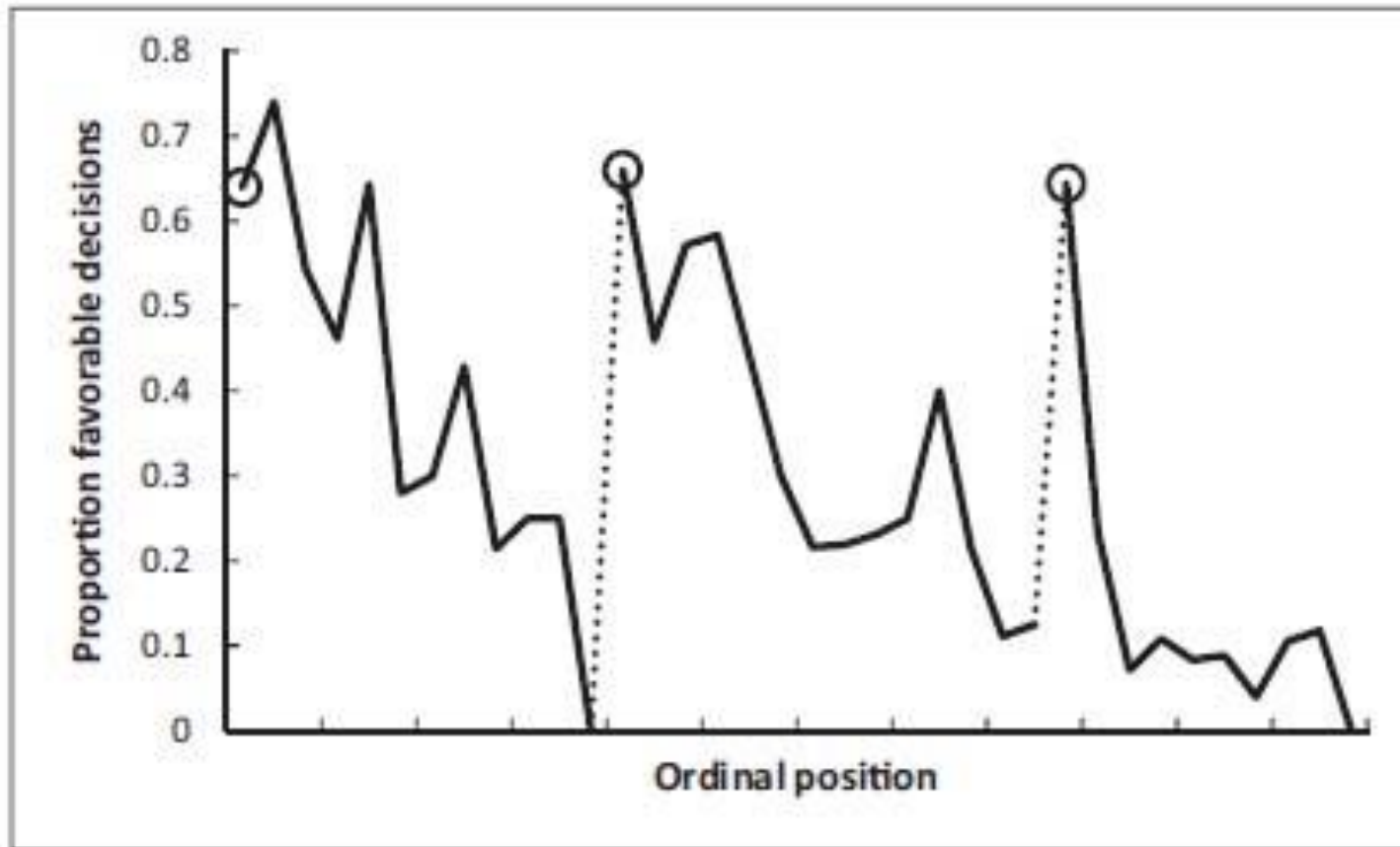


Rushworth Kidder
Moral Courage

What Helps/Harms Ethical Action in the Foreign Service?

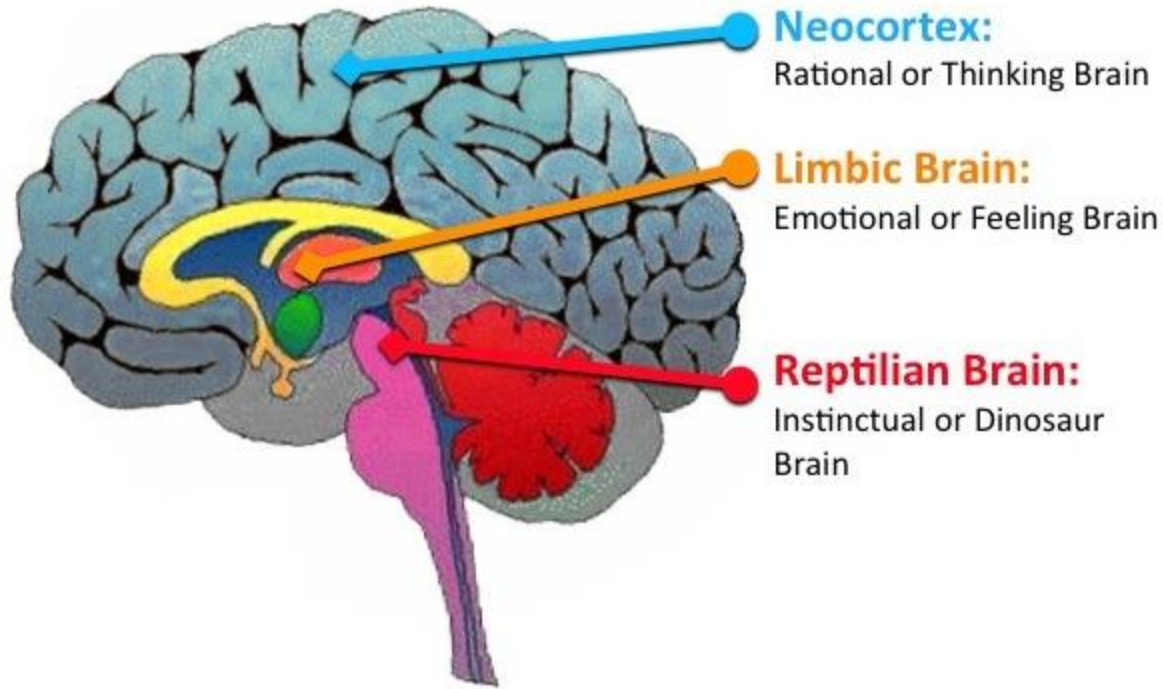


Proportion of Rulings in Favor of Parolee

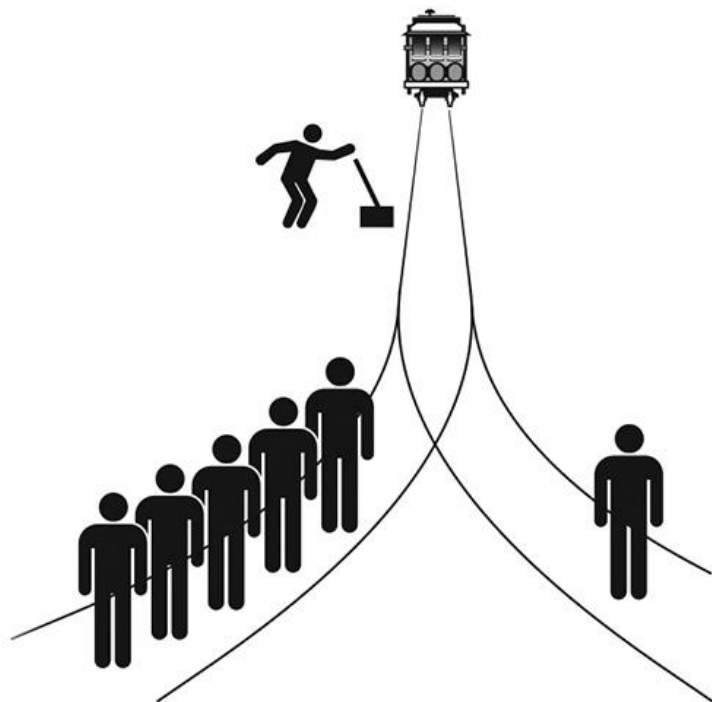


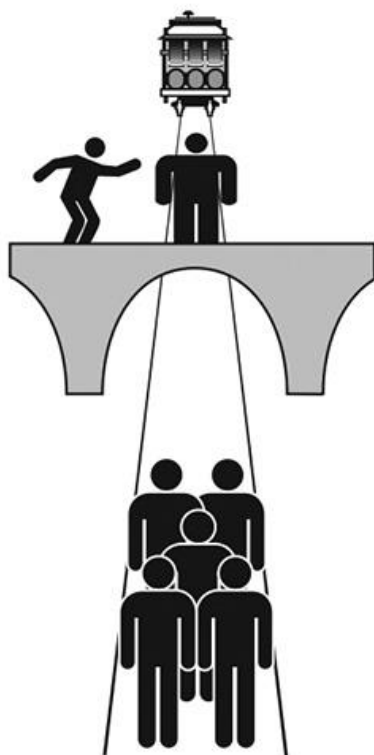
Source: Kahneman, p 43, graph: <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/14/time-and-judgment/>

Trap #1: Ego Depletion



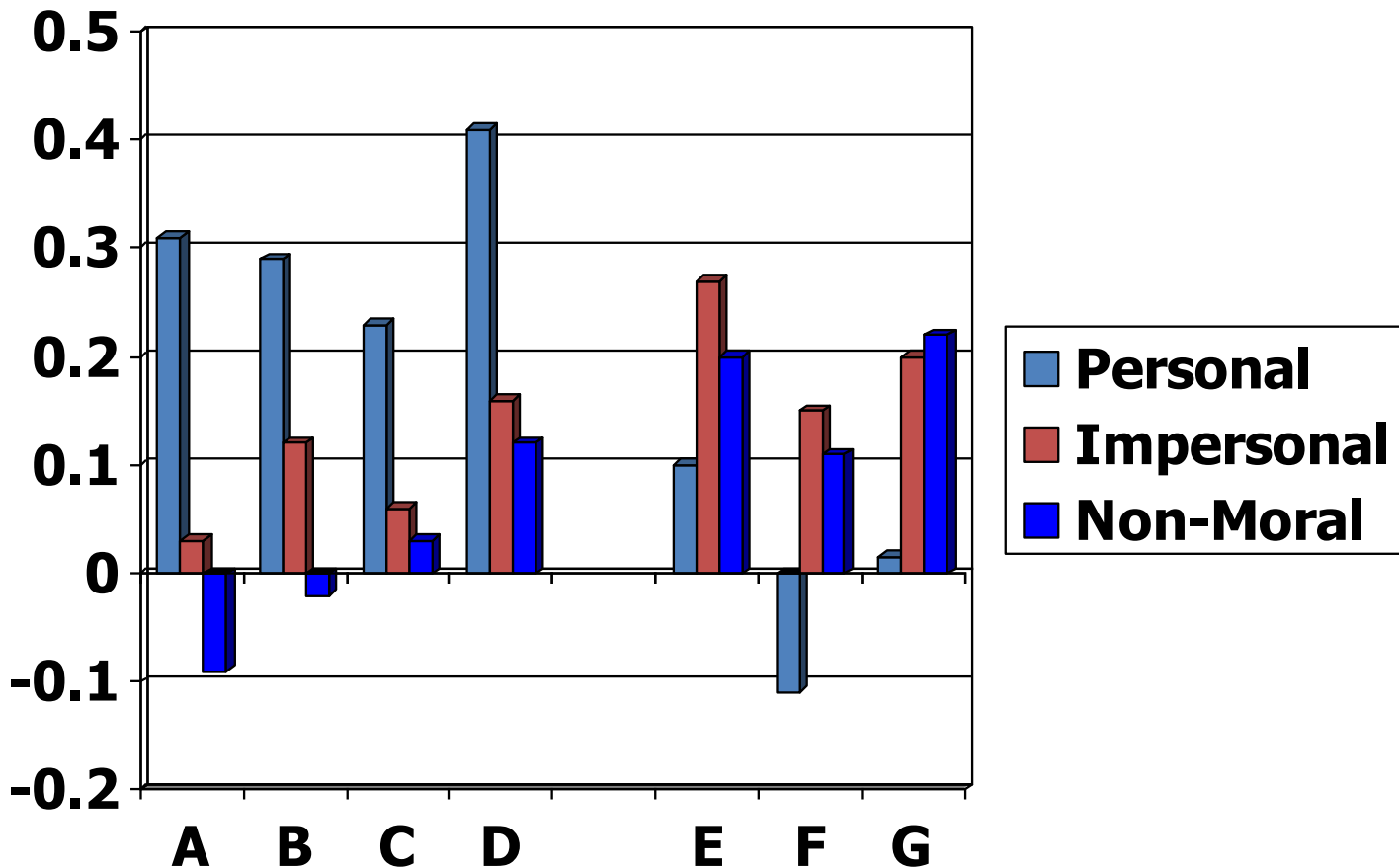
- 2% of body weight
- 20% of total body oxygen
- 25% of total body glucose





Trap #2: Failure to Integrate Reason and Emotion

% Change in MRI Signal Relative to Baseline



Brain Areas:

Emotion

Working Memory

People who bring reusable bags for their groceries buy more organic food. They also buy more junk food than those who use plastic bags.

Why?



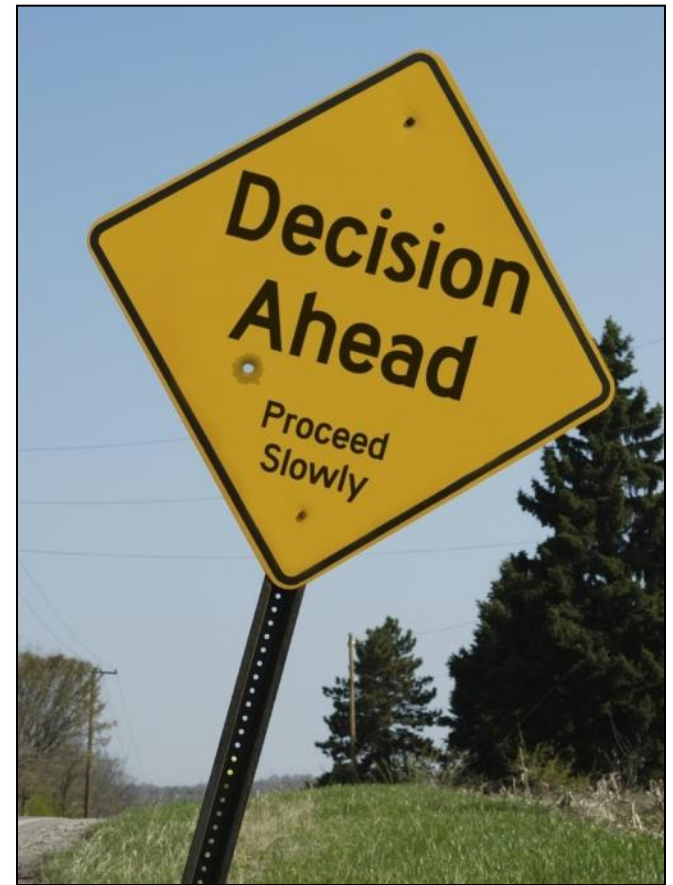
Source: Uma Kamarkar and Bryan Bollinger, Harvard Business School

Trap #3: Moral Licensing

Words to Use in a Story	Amount (of \$10) Donated to Charity
Neutral: book, keys, house	\$2.71
Negative traits: disloyal, greedy, mean, selfish	\$5.30
Positive traits: caring, generous, fair, kind	\$1.07

Ethical Decision Making Tips

- Don't make key decisions when you/your team are tired
- Name your emotions and engage others to help integrate reason with emotion
- Be wary of rationalization – in yourself and others: recall the “should” self
- Cultivate productive dissent





“Great learning and superior abilities, should you ever possess them, will be of little value and small estimation unless virtue, honor, truth, and integrity are added to them.”

Write down the first answer that comes to mind for the following problem.

A bat and ball cost \$1.10.

The bat costs one dollar more than the ball.

How much does the ball cost?

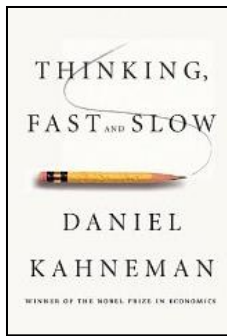
Write down the first answer that comes to mind for the following problem.

A bat and ball cost \$1.10.

The bat costs one dollar more than the ball.

How much does the ball cost?

- More than 50% of students at Harvard, MIT and Princeton said 10 cents.
- More than 80% of students at less selective universities said 10 cents.



How We Think

System 1

- Automatic; can't turn it off
- Fast
- Little or no mental effort
- When overwhelmed, calls on System 2 for help
- Has the first word
- Has biases-systematic errors
- Maintains/updates your model of the world

System 2

- Deliberate; must turn it on
- Slow
- Requires mental effort
- When overwhelmed, System 1 may take over
- Has the last word
- Can catch biases-may need help
- Questions your model of the world