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REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS ON

INTRODUCTION

Ethics and integrity are not just fads, as some cynics would say. Humans have been debating virtuous behaviour and working for the good for at least 2500 years.¹ Yet, we are often falling short of the good. Why is that?



Over the years I have dealt with leaders, great and poor, and observed ethical dilemmas played out in various settings. My observations have been primarily in the public sector including the Armed Forces as well as in the not-for-profit sector where I have worked with numerous organizations. I have also had the opportunity to work with certified fraud examiners in both the private and public sectors. This paper is not necessarily the summa of my journey in the field of applied ethics; rather it is a series of observations that have impacted my perception on how to do the right thing and do things right.

In my involvement with organizations such as the Ethics Practitioners' Association of Canada² and in establishing a formal ethics program in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, I have faced a number of important questions. Regrettably, I have not always found suitable and useful answers to these questions. One can only do the best possible with what is available at the time.

It is therefore my aim in this short paper to share some of my observations and questions with the reader in order to stimulate thinking and dialogue on relevant issues of applied ethics. It is my hope that in the ensuing discourse, useful and useable suggestions will come to the fore, thereby assisting those who are focused on improving workplace atmosphere and ethical performance.

In collecting various perspectives, I have drawn on a multitude of sources. Over the years, I have attended numerous conferences on ethics and on leadership as well as participated in discussions at events held by organizations such as:

- The Ethics Practitioners' Association of Canada – L'Association des praticiens en éthique du Canada
- The Canadian Defence Academy / Royal Military College / Canadian Forces Leadership Institute
- The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (US)
- The Conference Board of Canada
- The Ottawa Round Table on Ethics

BACKGROUND

Humans have been talking about ethics for a long time, yet I am not sure that there is one acceptable definition of ethics. It appears to me that "ethics" and "ethical behaviour" mean different things to different folks. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this paper I have opted for the following definition of ethics: "It is an intellectual process to help us find the best way to live up to our core values and most often to our shared values in our social/cultural surroundings." Ethics is a personal and collective responsibility that calls for leadership, judgement and dialogue.



In my view, ethics is using personal and shared values to do the right thing and is a commitment to doing the right thing. Ethics is what you aspire to do. To simplify it to an extreme, ethics is often described as what you do when no one is watching. Here is a simple formulation that I have used in presentations:

ETHICS stands for:

E	for <i>everyone</i> – Would you want everyone to do what you are doing? Everyone is responsible for ethical performance..
T	for <i>tradition</i> – Are your actions in line with the expectations, norms, values and customs of society?
H	for <i>humiliation</i> – What would your family, friends, neighbours think if you had an ethical lapse?
I	for <i>illegal</i> – If the police found out, would you be charged?
C	for <i>consequence</i> – Will your actions result in a good outcome?
S	for <i>situation</i> – What circumstance requires extraordinary action?

The difficulty appears when you try to put these concepts into practice. Two differing schools underpin different types of organizational ethics programs. One is compliance-based while the other is values-based. Let me paraphrase from a Department of National Defence paper on the fundamentals of Canadian Defence Ethics. Compliance is rule-based. Individuals are asked to simply obey the law and

the rules. It is a legalistic approach and minimizes the decision-making process. Such a system does not promote positive ethical attitude and behaviour. Values-based ethics is more inspirational. It states in general terms what is desirable and allows some latitude in application. People must use their judgement based on their shared values.³

The debate on compliance- versus values-based approach to applied ethics has led nowhere so far because what is really needed is a balanced approach. After all, the legal requirement (obeying the law) is only the mandatory minimum standard. To be a good citizen demands much more than just obeying the law.⁴ We need to seek a much higher standard. A friend of mine often says that the law is what you have to do while ethics is what you ought to do.

Nan DeMars⁵ outlines the six levels of moral development that Lawrence Kohlberg wrote about in 1961. They include obedience to powerful authority, looking out for number one, meeting the expectations of the group, preserving the social order, adopting free arguments and social contracts as well as universal ethical principles.

The President of the Ethics Resource Center in Washington, DC recently wrote inter alia: “Not that we needed it, but Wall Street has handed us its latest lesson in the importance of ethics programs and what happens when they are ignored. ... Making regulatory and legislative walls higher probably won’t hurt. But neither should anyone assume that staking laws upon laws makes for impregnable defenses. Rogue traders – and mortgage lenders and even some CEOs – will find a way. Remember, Enron [sic] had rules and a picture perfect code of conduct. ... The lesson here is not that crime does not pay, but that organizations have to rely on trust, as well as rules, to safeguard their businesses, customers and stockholders. You

set rules for your teenager, but you trust them [sic] with the car keys.”⁶

When speaking of values-based ethics programs, one needs to clearly define what values are. Here again, we find a number of definitions but I tend to use the one adopted by the Public Service of Canada. “Values are enduring beliefs that influence attitudes, actions and the choices and decisions we make.”⁷ However, like laws and rules, values evolve over time.

In 1995, the UK Nolan Committee outlined the qualities expected from all holders of public office: selflessness (pursue the public interest, not gain for self, family or friends), integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.⁸

Donald Savoie⁹ in his seminal book *Court Government and the Collapse of Accountability*, published in 2008, makes a number of observations that are relevant to these issues and have greatly influenced my perspective on applied ethics.

During an EthicsCentre.ca presentation on codes of conduct in the private sector in October 2008, Dr. Mark Baetz was quoted on specific values. Baetz focuses on six fundamental values that underpin ethical behaviour. They are: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.¹⁰ The positive position of ethics in the profession of arms in Canada is that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces have a “Defence Ethics Program” that is well established, comprehensive and sustainable. The Defence Ethics Program lists six core defence ethical obligations: integrity, loyalty, courage, honesty, fairness and responsibility.

Over time, I have observed ethics in practical terms and reflected on its impact from different perspectives.

Social Contract

I found a short anonymous text on the unwritten social contract that exists between an individual and society (or system). By society I mean everything from family through the workplace to a nation as a whole. The two perceptions of needs (or wants) are outlined in Table 1.

Individual Wants	System Needs
Fair compensation and benefits	Productivity (efficiency)
Chance to learn and grow	Cost effectiveness (economy)
Meaningful work	Loyalty (concentration)
Compatible people (shared values)	Innovation (forward looking)
Boss I can respect (trust)	Teamwork (trust)
Reasonable security	Flexibility

Table 1: Unwritten Social Contract

These two groupings can appear to be challenging each other. However, it is possible to balance them such that there is value from both perspectives. The major difficulty arises when they become seriously out of balance, leading to clashes where no one wins.

In a military context there is more to the social contract mentioned above. It is the concept of unlimited liability that makes a world of difference.¹¹ If individuals voluntarily commit to defend the nation’s national security at all costs, there is a need to ensure that they and their families receive the support that they justifiably deserve. This would include ethical and effective leadership, fair compensation and full comprehensive support in case of injury or death. The book *Duty with Honour: The Profession of Arms in Canada*, published by the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, is very instructive in the matter.¹²

Morality

There remains in each individual a sense of morality—of what is right and what is wrong. This sense of morality has a religious context, a family and social context and even an organizational context that can be explored in depth. A study of morality in diverse groupings may lead to establishing the fundamental values that are shared by all humanity.¹³ These can be useful when attempting to establish an ethical basis for dialogue in a multicultural environment.

Individuals

In my work in applied ethics and working with fraud examiners, I have often heard that any human grouping follows a bell curve. At one end, 5 to 10 percent of the people are pure of spirit and action. If they were to stumble on a room full of money, they would quickly lock the door and run to security to report it. At the other end of the curve there is a similar percentage of people who would do anything to get to the money and abscond with it. Between these two extremes are the rest of us. Most individuals are loyal, dedicated and hard working but may need occasional reminders of what is expected. These good people need to be reminded to stay focused on the task at hand and to avoid an ethical accident where individuals as well as organizations may see their reputations damaged and suffer the consequences.

In the military, as in many other groupings, it is the behaviour of the leader that sets the tone. Great military leaders set an example that most want to follow in order to excel. That is not to say that all military leaders are perfect, some use questionable techniques to obtain results. In the main it is what you do that counts and not necessarily what you say.¹⁴

Integrity

Many use the word integrity in the same sense as ethics. Ethics is a philosophy or way of thinking while integrity is a virtue or quality that an individual possesses, or not.

I am inclined to use “ethics and integrity” as a dual approach to doing the right thing and doing things right. In my view, integrity in a person means that you get the total package; the whole person, who is trustworthy, has strong values that are in constant action and is consistent in their actions and utterances. Some of the values that one expects from such a person include the ability to speak truth to power. Having integrity also implies that the person can be reasonably expected to do what they said, finish the task that the person has initiated, maintain commitments made to others and be accountable. That individual is considered an ethical leader because they actually “walk the talk.” Integrity, therefore, means being a whole person who is trustworthy and transparent.¹⁵

Workplaces

Organizations seek to have an environment including a decision-making process that will minimize errors and obtain the best performance out of individuals. In that way, the reputation of the organization will be preserved, if not enhanced; trust will be ensconced throughout; and the corporate and social goals will be met. How that is accomplished makes a world of difference to the workplace atmosphere and performance.

The nature and scope of an ethics program determines how this will be done and what success will accrue. However, no ethics program will be successful if the tone-at-the-top is neutral or negative. It is a question of ethical leadership that is missed by many through indifference or lack of understanding of what makes an organization the best in its field.

Ultimately, it is the judgement of our ethical efforts by others that determines our trustworthiness. Ethics is doing the right thing while good management is doing things right.

QUESTIONS

The fundamental question that will emerge in the remainder of this paper is,

“why, with all our knowledge of ethics do we still have recurring ethical lapses?” We are, after all, human but might we do better? I have elected to open four windows into our communal behaviours.

Workplace Observations and Questions

My observations below are focused on garrisons (i.e., a relatively stable environment), not in the field of human conflict or operational stressful environment where there is little time for decision making. As I observe individuals in these garrison workplace environments, I note that they have tight timelines that must be dealt with. The issues that they are faced with are often laced with ethical dilemmas, not the major kind perhaps but stressful nevertheless. I also note that the pressures are not relieved with the data at hand. In fact, they appear to suffer from data overload (Blackberry ringing, cell phone vibrating, pager going off and dozens of irrelevant emails). The sum of all this is that they have precious little time to focus on the task at hand and the consequences of their decisions and their acts.

Yet, in a military context, decisions made in garrison (base or headquarters) can have life and death impact in military operations. Thus the importance of always keeping focused on what the task is all about.

Savoie mentions that the 2004 Office of the Auditor General Report highlighted “six root causes of management problems in government: losing sight of fundamental principles; pressures to get the job done that compromises program integrity; failure to intervene to correct or prevent problems; a lack of consequences for inadequate management; a lack of organizational capacity to deal with risk; and unclear accountability.”¹⁶

When pressed for time and overwhelmed with data in a poisoned workplace atmosphere due to poor leadership

or lack of defined shared values, individuals often reach for the goal without adequate ethical analysis and find themselves in trouble. The aim does not justify the means employed in many cases, and a disregard for our shared values has resulted in failure to reach the mid- to long-term goals of the organization. When the boss says: “I don’t care how you do it, just get it done,” it is time for a very careful analysis of what is at hand.

Most of my focus has been on the workplace and its atmosphere. This is largely due to the number of times that I have met individuals who were working in a poisoned environment. When discovering issues of abuse, misuse, fraud or worse I have discovered that inevitably the workplace had a terrible atmosphere.

When a problem is observed, what is an organization member’s obligation to act? Is there really a risk to your livelihood if you report potential wrongdoing? We know what the law demands but what do our values say to us? These are terribly difficult questions to answer in the reality of the workplace. They are useful in starting a meaningful dialogue on ethics.¹⁷

I have observed that in some very large organizations mixed messages are being sent. The recruiting system is aimed at attracting and hiring good people. The system is looking for people who understand and live virtue ethics. However, having hired them we place them in a compliance-oriented workplace. We incessantly tell them to use their judgement but the actions of the leadership of the organization clearly imply that errors are not tolerated. There is an active blame game going on. When you have a compliance environment where you seek absolute flawless behaviour from individuals coupled with very harsh sanctions, you end up with very scared and timid members where many either break or leave.

Savoie makes two observations that are relevant: “Civil servants who have learned the art of lying low and not drawing attention to themselves or to their units from either the media or politicians will survive and flourish.”¹⁸ “It is not too much of an exaggeration to suggest that accountability in government is now about avoiding mistakes, even the most trivial ones, so as not to embarrass the minister and the department.”¹⁹

My fundamental questions are: Why do we still have to raise these issues? Why is it so difficult to deal with them? Is this a human nature issue, a cultural issue or a moral issue? For example, media forms public opinions that, in turn, form the basis of popular pressure on politicians, yet maintaining high journalistic ethics is a challenge when dealing with infomercials media aimed primarily at increasing circulation or viewership.

Members of the media bristle at the suggestion that ethics is being disregarded when preparing “stories.” Yet we often see reports that mix news and opinions or that present opinions as news. Misquotations are corrected in the fullness of time, and often on the back page of a paper. Then there are the banner headlines that catch your attention but have little to do with the gist of the story that follows. How about checking sources before going to print or on air? Are the facts still verified as they were decades ago? Is the subject of ethics in media taught at schools of journalism?

Some journalists who have been embedded with Canadian military units have highlighted ethical issues that they had to deal with such as how much personal information to divulge in a story. When do you release the information you have gleaned? Do you share your insights with the local commander before going public? These are only a few examples of the issues raised.²⁰

From the other side of the coin, how much private and personal information/opinions do members of the Forces share with embedded journalists?

Perhaps we can oversimplify a concern of mine by looking at what happens when an ethical “event” occurs. In any “crisis” the media and the population like to quickly identify the miscreant regardless of the evidence or lack thereof. Another issue has to do with the concept of being innocent until proven guilty which is often reversed because of the state of the “victim.”

Out of the morass should come a “saviour” or rescuer to save the day. This is what the media believes it is doing. The three elements of the villain, the victim and the saviour are simplistic. However, it is what sells papers and/or airtime and gives media such as blogs exposure; therefore, oversimplification at the expense of justice increases our collective cynicism.

Here again Savoie wades in with: “... the media are mostly interested in the drama of individuals and are in a constant search for winners and losers to make good headlines.”²¹ “... [O]nce a scandal hit the front page of the newspapers or came to dominate evening news on television, politicians were always quick to call for new centrally prescribed rules to guide the delivery of public services and the work of civil servants.”²² “For MPs, accountability is about politics – about assigning blame and scoring political points in the media.”²³

National Security and Ethics

Our society is currently facing ethical issues under the heading of national security. We claim that what we want is peace, order and good government, but we are often unable to articulate what that means and what Canadians truly cherish. It becomes a difficult articulation of our shared values.

The first thing that we ought to do is define national security; the best one that

I have ever seen is the definition given by Brigadier-General Don Macnamara (Retired) at the National Defence College circa 1986. He defined national security as “the preservation of a way of life acceptable to the Canadian people and compatible with the needs and aspirations of others. It includes freedom from military attack or coercion, freedom from internal subversion, and freedom from the erosion of the political, economic, and social values which are essential to the quality of life in Canada.” However, it raises the need for another definition, that of national values. What are Canada’s values and who accepts them?²⁴ Finally, the linkages between sovereignty, national values, national interests, national security, foreign and defence policies and ethical intervention must be exposed to understand their impact on important policy development.

Of note, a definition of war can be confusing because you have to clearly understand the spectrum of human conflict that ranges from road rage through peace-restoring operations to all-out world war. Then there are the concepts of a just war, which has been the subject of discussion since Cicero, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and many philosophers to this day. It focuses on three aspects of conflict: a just cause for entering into war, acceptable behaviour during warfare and a process to end the war. In addition, there are the Geneva Conventions of 1929 followed by the third edition in 1949 that deal with the handling of prisoners of war and the treatment of individuals in conflict. The challenge today is how to apply these principles to non-state actors such as terrorists. The changing face of battle coupled with the current use of defence, diplomacy and international social development raises new sets of questions such as what is the place of non-state actors in the spectrum of conflict and the clash of cultures.

My observations are that those who understand issues relating to national

security, national values and national interests often cannot manage the situation because they frequently have no power; those who could manage the issues don’t necessarily understand the scope and complexity of these issues. For example, politicians may use inflammatory rhetoric for local effect without regard for external interpretations of their intemperate comments. Countries and people regard each other through different sets of lenses; thus, intentions can be easily misinterpreted. As reported in *The Economist* in July 2007, “An uncompromising Iran and an uncomprehending America may be stumbling to war ...”²⁵

Islamist-terrorists promote the concept of humiliation and the frustration that results from their perception of victimization and loss of social influence. They seek vengeance for perceived humiliations, use inflammatory semantics and sophism, and commit acts of extreme destruction. It is also evident that they seek a return to 12th century human and social conditions. Yet, they do not hesitate to use computers, the Internet, motorized vehicles and sophisticated electronic devices in their weapons of terror. Terrorists vocalize an empty rhetoric in pursuit of their goals that are to strike terror for the sheer delight of causing mayhem and to feel important. The *Ottawa Citizen* opined in an editorial on 28 November 2008 that:

Terrorists who kill in the name of Islam don’t need “motives.” They kill because, in their view, they have a religious duty to do so. The hijackers who orchestrated the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. never issued demands. Killing, for them, was an expression of faith.²⁶

The American government, aided by its media networks, is in a state of fear and terror that has often led to anger, paranoia, xenophobia and over-reaction. This has further led to a serious restriction of freedoms and disregard for some existing laws. This is

contrary to the fundamental principles of the American constitution and social structure. The remainder of the Western World has responded to terrorism in a variety of ways that are generally more muted and restrained.

When it comes to Afghanistan the following emerges: There is an unwillingness to take the time and effort to consider the elements of the issue such as women's issues, damaged infrastructure, disparate social elements, organized crime, corruption, education, health and the effectiveness of the UN and NATO.²⁷ Quebec isolationism and Canadian dislike of the US Bush administration do not permit an informed dialogue on many global issues. There does not appear to be Taliban leadership available to negotiate with. (To be a leader one has to control forces at hand, which is doubtful in a warlord structured society as in today's Afghanistan.) Extremism and confused world powers make the whole environment perplexing.

Where does ethics fit in all this? There is a crying need for informed dialogue where it is important to not only keep the tone of the dialogue civil, but also to avoid extreme and/or dogmatic semantics; ensuring that respect and integrity prevail. Thus, the importance of using logic in the dialogue on issues as Habermas suggests.²⁸ The use of fundamental international values such as respect, truth, integrity is critical. Finally, there must be an absolute condemnation of terrorism in any form.

My questions are:

- How much freedom do we sacrifice to ensure what we think of as security?
- What are our responsibilities as free citizens?
- Who determines the limits of actions by the state? That is, who is ultimately responsible?
- Is it true that the higher we go the more diffuse responsibility gets?

Ethical Leadership

In any organization there are shared values, stated or not, that drive people to behave in certain ways. If the organization is to succeed there is a need for leadership and management. I see leadership as a means to get people to do something that you want done. Effective leadership will result in people going the extra mile for you and for the organization. That is why leadership is a critical element for success. It is also why the effective leader will ensure that the shared values always remain in focus.

The leader gets people to do what is required by following their example, thus the need to set the correct tone at the top of the organizational pyramid. In addition, we are all role models to someone regardless of where we stand on that pyramid; thus, the need for open dialogue on the shared values and requisite behaviours. The bottom line is: "Walk the talk!"

Lee Iacocca highlights the nine "Cs" of leadership as: curiosity, creative, communicate, character, courage, conviction, charisma, competent, and common sense.²⁹

In the last decade the Canadian Forces has published numerous books, pamphlets and papers on the subject of ethical leadership. I would draw the readers' attention to this extensive reading list.³⁰ My starting point would be *Duty with Honour* and then I would apply the values and program activities found in the comprehensive and excellent *Defence Ethics Program*.³¹

Over the years I have met many leaders of all sorts, some good, some just OK and some that I swore I would never emulate. One who left an unforgettable positive impression on me was the late Air Commodore Leonard Birchall, OC, OBE, DFC, CD, OOnt.

It is said that Winston Churchill dubbed Air Commodore Birchall "The Saviour of Ceylon" because he had given warning of the approaching Japanese fleet before he was

shot down and became a prisoner of war of the Japanese. His story of torture and slave labour is horrific, but it also highlights the need for effective leadership based on strong values when survival is at stake.

Birchall spoke eloquently about leadership, which he found was based on three major characteristics: as an effective leader, you have to have character; your personal values have to be firmly engrained into your personality; and you have to focus clearly on the shared values of the group. In addition, he held that competence was a critical element for the simple reason that no one wants to follow an incompetent, save out of sheer curiosity. Finally, comradeship is a valued characteristic of leadership. The human touch is key to developing an esprit de corps that will allow people to go the extra mile. In the circumstances of prisoners of war, comradeship became a pure element of survival. There are many other examples of ethical leadership under duress.

To any person wishing to lead I would recommend reading his lecture on leadership. Allow me just one quote:

Incidentally, the most succinct definition of leadership I have ever heard is being able to tell someone to go to Hell and have them [sic] look forward to the trip. If you ever have to lead troops into combat, and I pray this will never happen, you will find that you appear before your men/women stripped of all insignia and outward signs of authority to command. Your leadership is judged not by your rank, but by whether your men/women are completely confident that you have the character, knowledge and training that they can trust you with their lives. Now men/women are shrewd judges of their leaders, especially when their lives are at stake, and hence your character and knowledge must be such that they are prepared to follow you, to trust your judgement and carry out your commands.³²

In my observations, effective leadership needs three key elements. The most important one is that of trust. If the individual is not trustworthy for whatever reason (lack of shared values, competence, etc.), no effective leadership is possible. This trust must be lateral and vertical regardless of the management/rank structure. Employees, peers and superiors must trust the individual. There is also a need to be loyal laterally and vertically as well. However, loyalty is somewhat dangerous because being overly loyal and protective of a group may result in a lack of transparency leading to ethical lapses. It is important to avoid blind obedience to power and to overprotection. Finally, for an organization to be ethically led means that there is effective leadership at all levels. I hold firmly that it is individual ethical behaviour that sustains the positive reputation of any organization.

We are dealing with human beings with their attendant frailties. Errors occur and it is important that lessons be learned from these mistakes in behaviour and leadership. Playing the blame game is not very useful in this context. I remember military leaders who held themselves above the rules of the organization and believed that they could do whatever they wished. A few got away with it but none could hide it. Their behaviours hurt the organization and the profession of arms.

Those who rely on an old wasted saying of “rank has its privileges” are waving a red flag indicating a likelihood of abuse and misuse if not even fraud. There are privileges that come with position and rank, but these are well defined often based on simple courtesy. Misuse and abuse is seldom invisible, and it usually emerges into the public eye in the fullness of time.

A reading of the Auditor General 2003 Special Report to Parliament on The Office of the Privacy Commissioner³³ highlights the failure of leadership from a bully. It is a classic description of how to ruin the

workplace atmosphere and reputation of a public organization. Then, there are the numerous varied cases of fraud in organizations. The conclusion that I draw is that in this current electronic environment it is very difficult, if not impossible, to act unethically and not have it observed by a number of people.

All these errors and crimes lead me to ask: "Why do these things occur?" In my opinion, many occur because of a lack of focus on values. I also wonder why peers or other members of the organization do not stop these people before it ruins everybody's reputation.

Ethical Decision Making

It is difficult to be an effective ethical leader in the current high-pressure environment with its many pitfalls. How we decide what course of action we will follow is often complex and difficult to resolve. Some of it may appear to be relatively simple, but we face some interesting challenges. I now turn to the decision-making process we each follow in our daily life. Keep in mind that ethics is doing the right thing, while good management is doing things right.

Much has been written about decision making. I find most of it applicable to an environment where there is time for contemplative analysis thus the process can be thorough. I am thinking of public policy writing or program development for example, but we often do not have the luxury of time. Think of the police officer facing the armed demented individual wishing to be shot, but who poses a real danger to society. What the officer does next is not the outcome of a lengthy analysis and dialogue with civil society. It has to be assessed, evaluated, decided and executed in a matter of minutes, even seconds.

There are many military examples of ethical decision making. There is one that I find particularly illuminating. On 25 April 1944, HMCS Haida, under command of Commander Harry DeWolfe, stopped in the

English Channel after contact with German destroyers to pick up survivors of the sunken HMCS Athabaskan. (DeWolfe became Chief of Naval Staff and HMCS Haida is now alongside in Hamilton.) The best narrative of the Captain's decision, against orders, to rescue fellow sailors is contained in "*The Canadians at War*."³⁴ Other descriptions of military decision making can be found in Christie Blatchford's *Fifteen Days* or in Carol Off's *The Ghosts of Medak Pocket*.

My approach is based again on observations and suggests an increasing level of analysis depending on the circumstances. For example, I start with a quick sniff test to see if there is the potential for an ethical dilemma and consequences of note. I ask:

- Is it legal?
- Is it ethical?
- Is it reasonable?
- Is it defensible?

Obedience to laws is a minimum standard. The law tells us what we **must** do while ethics tells what we **ought** to do.

Linda Treviño and Katherine Nelson remind us that our gut is also important. In the second edition of their work *Managing Business Ethics* they highlight eight steps to sound ethical decision making in business—one of which is checking your gut. They also state that empathy is an important emotion that can signal awareness that someone might be harmed.³⁵

If something does not feel right then another look is required. The gut reaction and the sniff test will likely determine if you need to review the situation in depth. The required analysis then becomes more elaborate, and many authors have offered their approach to ethical evaluation. They appear to all follow some relatively similar path and ask similar questions.

In a 2007 paper, Cornelius von Baeyer of Ottawa highlighted the need for the decision to take into account the four pillars of ethics: rules, consequences, values and discourse. Indeed, duty-based ethics demand compliance with the rules—my “is it legal?” Results-based ethics ensure maximizing outcomes; values-based ethics ensure making integrity come to life; and, discourse ethics ensure reaching good decisions.³⁶ It would seem to me that decision making is complex and must be practiced to hone the required skills. It is important therefore to define the problem; identify rules, desired outcomes and values; establish consultative dialogue; make the decision; and follow-up. In military operations speed is of the essence, as is accuracy. Common sense and drills come into play, often with life and death results.

All these authors and I have stressed that in resolving ethical dilemmas or challenges to our values, we must ensure that we know:

- What the facts are.
- Why we have a potential or real problem.
- What our obligation to act is.
- What alternatives are open to us.
- What the consequences of our actions or inactions are.
- Who we should speak to about the issue(s).

The Defence Ethics Program offers guidance on dialogue by making an intranet site available on the subject, issuing an annual Canadian Forces General message (CANFORGEN), making presentations, ensuring that there are Level 1 plans and engaging senior leadership. In addition, the Defence Ethics Program offers specific guidance on decision making by reminding members that they must assess the situation (who, what, when, where, why and how),

develop options, assess risks, consider values and ethics, select a course of action and act upon it.

Let me add a note of caution. When dealing with ethics and ethical decision making, one must avoid paying too much attention to delaying comments or excuses such as:

- It is not illegal.
- We have always done it this way.
- Everybody does it.
- It is the only way to achieve the expected results.
- This is how we can say “thanks” to the members.
- It will be beneficial to the organization.
- No one will be hurt.

A Final Thought

The “self” is the focus of our daily interaction as individuals living and working in organizations in a social context. To function we need to work with others and balance our needs with those of the group and of our society. This forces us to deal with organizational cultures and often face a clash of values. To function effectively and to ensure a positive workplace atmosphere, we must make ethics in organizations alive and buoyant, thus the need to harmonize our values with those of specific organizations and society as a whole.

The reader will have understood by now that it is important to know not only where we, as individuals, come from but also the social, cultural and religious biases that drive us. In other words, we need to first identify our personal fundamental values such that we are able to establish our requisite behaviours in order to lead effectively. I have always said that it is important to brief

what you are about to do, then do what you have briefed. While acknowledging that it is not easy to be a good leader, a military acquaintance recently said: “I mean what I say, I say what I mean, and I do what I said.”

It is important for individuals to get actively involved in positive ethical behaviours by ensuring that there is time available to think, to achieve ethical decision making and to provide effective leadership.

In our current social environment, the big challenge that remains is that some people appear not to care about organizational ethics but appear more self-centered as they put self before community. It is interesting to note that the Defence Ethics Program clearly states as its principles “serve Canada before self” and “respect the dignity of all persons.” Perhaps we could consider that as a personal motto.

CONCLUSIONS

At the start of this paper I alluded to a number of leaders that I observed and to the human condition that drives our actions. My observations lead me to believe that most folks are well intentioned but often face formidable circumstances that distract them from the ethical path of doing good. We wish to do the right thing and do things right, but we are not always successful. That led me to ask some fundamental questions. It remains my hope that this paper may continue the fruitful dialogue on values, integrity and ethics that has been implanted in the Forces and its civilian associates.

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We live in a complex and dangerous world where we are often in need of guidance. To that end, I am left with some fundamental questions, some of which must be discussed while others should be discussed:

- What are the shared values of my Canada, my social environment, my workplace, my family, and are these values underpinned by a specific dogma?
- What are my personal values?
- Was managing behaviours and social expectations better in the days of a perceived unique Western culture?
- Walk the Talk. Why is it so difficult to do?
- How can we each, personally, make a difference?

It still remains that we need to individually and collectively decide if these are the most important questions. Are they the best ones to sustain a dialogue or will they tend to close the conversation? Perhaps we can augment these by using case studies / examples from actual workplace and operations dilemmas. ■

NOTES

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