

CASE #1: EVERYDAY ACTIONS AND PERSONAL HARM LIABILITY

When Does It Become an Ethical Issue?

“And always, always, remember that no one can take your integrity from you...you can give it away.”

~ General Charles Krulak

Our current society is finding it more and more difficult to take personal and corporate responsibility for actions and negative consequences. During the past 50 years we have drifted away from personal and corporate accountability. Ethics have become more flexible and adjusted to fit the circumstances for the individual, company, or institution.

The question remains as to how flexible or adjustable the ethics and moral actions in everyday life situations and just plain living can be. It is more and more difficult for some individuals to have standards that fit their lifestyle but avoid harm and also contribute to the greater community. We pass more and more laws, but many of these are vague or leave interpretation to local or personal definition. The same law in state “A” may be interpreted differently in state “D.” In many situations, the laws are not necessarily enforced until violations reach a local point of no return.

Three rather simple daily activities performed by the majority of the population are outlined in a scenario to address where ethics and moral actions take place or should take place. They pose the reality of daily living.

Scenario #1: Speed Limits

Automobile speed limits vary from local communities to state to interstate systems. Each governing entity has the right and obligation to establish the auto speed limits for the roads and the perceived conditions that make travel safe. On interstate highways or freeways, a minimum speed limit may be posted to increase traffic flow and minimize the obstacle of slow drivers. A majority of drivers break the posted speed limit on a daily basis.

Questions

1. If the maximum speed limit is 45 mph, is it unethical to go 46 mph, technically a violation of the law?
2. If 46 mph is not unethical, at what speed does it become unethical...49, 52, 57? What part do road conditions and the level of traffic make a higher than 45 mph level ethical? How would school zones influence your answer?
3. How do the law and ethics differ? Can one engage in an illegal act and be ethical or moral? Can one engage in a legal act and be unethical? Explain.

Scenario #2: Handicap Parking

A car owner who is handicapped obtains a handicap parking permit (tag or license plate). The couple is going out to dinner (it could be shopping) and the driver who is not handicapped pulls up to the entrance of the restaurant and discharges the handicapped person. It is a stormy rainy night. The driver proceeds to the nearest handicap parking space and parks, thinking he is legally parking and he doesn't want to get wet. The nearest non-handicap space was 100 feet away.

The driver is not handicapped but is the principal transportation provider for the handicapped person. Legally, the driver has not violated the law. However, most of the time the driver follows this practice in assisting the handicapped person. What are the ethics of this simple life situation where the driver does not need this special permit but uses it also for his convenience? Occasionally he stops by the church office on the way to work and parks in a handicap space for just five minutes to drop off some papers for the secretary. The four adjoining handicap spaces are vacant. Is there an ethical issue here? Legal issue?

Questions

1. What situations, if any, make parking by a non-handicapped person in a handicap space ethical or unethical?
2. Do legal and ethical behaviors always agree? If not, how does a person decide what action is the best? Can we pass laws that outline moral and ethical behavior that is appropriate for all situations or is it dependent upon the individual's values and consideration of others?
3. Should we worry about these smaller issues or are they the basis of ethics and morality in our society?

Scenario #3: Texting While Driving

With the explosion of telecommunication, the technology is changing at a speed that was unheard of a decade ago. Youth and younger adults have changed the entire flow of personal and business information, communication, and global news. Time has been the primary force on changes. Acceptable communication speed is now nano-seconds not minutes, days, months, or years. The younger generations are early and fast adapters of communication, so new concepts are quickly used and become the standards.

Today's social media formats (or applications) have revolutionized communication. The strongest application to evolve from the changes has been the advent of "texting." Texting is now done by all ages and has replaced the quick phone call that was the standard less than a decade ago.

A critical byproduct has evolved from texting: people now text while driving their automobile. The practice has caused many serious accidents and deaths. The numbers are growing. Over the past several years, the problem has grown to where 47 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, have passed laws where it is illegal to operate and text at the same time. No national

law has been passed, but there is pressure to do so. In some states that have not passed a law, local communities have passed a law against texting and driving at the same time. It is a serious issue, but what is an effective method to implement guidelines and laws?

Questions

1. Is this type of behavior, texting and driving, unethical? Should it be made illegal?
2. How about other behaviors that could be considered distractions to driving safely?

“Sound moral and ethical behavior cannot be established or created in a day...a semester...or a year. They must be institutionalized within our character over time...they must become a way of life.”

~ General Charles Krulak

9-17-12 ~ Case written by John Patten and Mel Witmer