ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

A simple definition for ethical behavior is recognizing and doing what is right. Applying that definition to leadership seems like a straightforward step—ethical leadership is knowing the right decision and being accountable for following through with that choice on behalf of a group or organization. Challenges arise when the decisions facing a leader are complex, have a result that is good for one party and not another, or are difficult to make because no option is clearly right.

In this project, you will identify the key elements of ethical leadership, recognize the impact of ethical and unethical decisions, identify the steps and considerations involved in making an ethical decision, and recognize and assess your own ethical framework.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to develop a clear understanding of your own ethical framework and create an opportunity for others to hear about and discuss ethics in your organization or community.

Overview: Define a framework of your personal ethics. This may require you to complete personal research beyond the contents of this project. Organize and moderate a 20- to 40-minute panel discussion about ethics, followed by a question-and-answer session. If you have never facilitated a panel discussion, review the "Moderate a Panel Discussion" elective project.

Note: You may also complete this assignment at an event outside of Toastmasters with approval from your club vice president education and at least one Toastmaster member in attendance.

For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 15.

Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.

Video: Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.

Interactive Activity: Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.

Resource: Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.

Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

5	4	3	2	1
EXEMPLARY	EXCEL	ACCOMPLISHED	EMERGING	DEVELOPING

Pre-Project	Statement	Post-Project
5 4 3 2 1	I have a clear understanding of ethical leadership.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I can identify the key elements of ethical leadership.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I can recognize and comfortably discuss the impact of ethical and unethical decisions.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I can give distinct examples of ethical leadership in my decisions.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I have a clear ethical framework that I can address and describe.	5 4 3 2 1
5 4 3 2 1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5 4 3 2 1

COMPETENCIES

The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.

- Identify the key elements of ethical leadership.

- Demonstrate an understanding of ethical leadership.

- Recognize and address the impact of ethical and unethical decisions both professionally and personally.

- Demonstrate a clear understanding of the value of ethics in every decision.

- Identify the steps and considerations involved in making difficult decisions.

- Develop an ethical framework and demonstrate how it can be used to make difficult decisions.

THE MEANING OF ETHICS

One of the greatest challenges facing any leader motivated to make ethical choices is defining ethics. At face value, it should be a simple, straightforward assessment of what is right and what is wrong. Most leaders soon discover that right and wrong can be open to interpretation. Ethical choices can be affected by many factors including: the situation, culture, and professional expectations.

A situation can create ambiguity in making an ethical decision by having specific expectations or limitations on conduct.

For example, one organization may feel it is appropriate to wait three days before responding to correspondence, while another might insist on responding within a day. Those expectations are ethically neutral until you place them in the context of a particular organization which would see a break with its established response time as unethical.

Ethical leadership is also affected by culture. A person only needs to watch the international news to be surprised by another culture's expectations and norms. If instead of looking at ethical behavior we look at social behavior, it is easier to define ambiguity.

For instance, in some cultures it is very rude not to make eye contact with a person to whom you are speaking. In others, eye contact is the height of disrespect. A definition of ethical behavior can vary just as widely as social expectations that are based on an individual's cultural view.

Other areas that affect ethics are an individual's profession and its inherent expectations, a personal set of values based on religious or familial expectations, or rules set by an organization.

Ethics can be based on fairness—the desire to ensure that everyone is treated fairly—or the belief that ethics should be tied to generally accepted principles such as honesty, justice, fairness, and avoiding harm to others.

To make ethical decisions, you have to start with an ethical framework.

DEFINING YOUR ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

An ethical framework is developed over time through your experience, learning, and the impact of role models in your life. It is assembled from everything that makes you who you are.

Use the Ethical Framework resource on page 20 to begin articulating your personal ethical framework.

An ethical structure is necessary to provide a foundation for making ethical choices. The content of your framework is unique to you and is not necessarily permanent; it may adjust over time and in different situations. Having a framework in place, one that you have thought about and questioned, allows you to make difficult ethical decisions. It is the difference between driving a car when you are trained and licensed and choosing to drive without any training at all, struggling until you learn what to do.

The three characteristics of a useful ethical framework include internal consistency, proactivity, and a design that is dynamic enough to adjust to different settings and decisions.

Internal Consistency

Internal consistency is a pattern of principles that work well together. Your framework should not include principles that contradict each other. For instance, if you establish a framework that includes the idea that honesty is fundamental, and also that it is acceptable to be dishonest if you are under pressure, then you have an inconsistent set of principles.

Proactivity

The importance of proactivity is that it gives you a basis for what to do, instead of what not to do. By defining proactive principles, you are able to look at difficult decisions in a way that moves you toward a solution, rather than reacting to a challenge by hoping only to avoid a negative impact.

Dynamism

The third characteristic of a useful framework is dynamism. To keep your ethical framework dynamic, you will need to reevaluate and adjust it as your ethical thinking evolves. Ethics can be affected by a change in position within a company or organization, adjustments in your personal life, the passage of time, or other circumstances. Openly evaluating your ethical thinking will help you prepare for challenges, both expected and unexpected.

PERSONAL ETHICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS

The vision, mission, and ethical framework of organizations you associate with need to align with your personal ethical framework. For example, if you are a highly collaborative leader and belong to an organization that expects its leaders to make unilateral decisions, you will be at odds with the organization. The situation will be difficult for you and a challenge for other members.

The only exception to that rule would be if you were specifically brought in to change the ethical framework and/or the culture of an organization. In that situation, you would have been chosen specifically for the ethics you bring to the group, not to support the organization's current framework.

MAKING ETHICS A TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION

Be willing and able to explain and discuss your ethical framework. The same is true for anyone who is part of an organization. Everyone in an organization, from the newest team member to high level leadership, must be willing to ask questions of others and answer questions about their own ethical assumptions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPARENCY

When you make a difficult decision, be prepared to defend your reasoning. Share your reasons and uphold your decision. If another's argument changes your mind, be ready to share what changed and the reason you altered your viewpoint. This type of transparency leads to a stronger bond of trust with the people affected by your decisions. Even if they do not agree, they can identify your rationale for making the choice.

Ethical Thought

Talking or thinking about ethical behavior is meaningless unless your actions reflect ethical decision making. Ethical thought is irrelevant without ethical action.

Ethical Action

An individual or organization that talks about what it means to be ethical but behaves in a way that is contrary to their words is not ethical. For example, an organization encourages others to make charitable donations and espouses the virtues of charity, but it is discovered by members that the organization has never made any donations.

Ethical Consequences

When thought and action do not align, there are consequences. Even small lapses in ethical behavior can create problems in relationships, both personally and in an organization.

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IS A SHARED PROCESS

Everyone in your organization or community needs to be given the opportunity to express and exercise her personal ethics. This can take the form of having the freedom to ask questions, being given the opportunity to lead a small group, or being a role model to others and upholding the integrity of the organization.

Encouraging others to take leadership roles is an integral part of ethical leadership. By encouraging others, you build resources for handling challenges as they arise and open the door for others to assume more responsibility.

MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS

There are many things to consider when faced with a difficult decision. The first, and most important, is recognizing that there may be more than one right answer. The second, and probably more difficult, is that even if there is more than one way to solve the problem, all of the options may be unpopular. The only goal in some difficult situations may be to make the choice that damages the fewest people or is the least destructive to an organization.

PLACING THE GOOD OF AN ORGANIZATION ABOVE YOUR INTERESTS

Perhaps the greatest challenge to any ethical leader is when the good of the organization is in conflict with his own interests or goals. An example of this is when an organization is struggling and a leader chooses to lower his salary in order to save the jobs of individuals in lower-level positions.

Though it is ethical to put the needs of an organization above the needs of the individual leader, that does not mean that the leader needs to sacrifice himself in order to be ethical. In the situation above, it is likely that others would also be asked to take a lower salary in order to save jobs. Leaders who habitually sacrifice themselves can become exhausted and choose to leave an organization. This is not effective and may ultimately be a less ethical choice.

Open a Discussion
When facing a difficult decision, provide a method for others to ask questions and share their point of view when appropriate.

Encourage Conversation
Encouraging conversation as it relates to the ethics of a choice allows for everyone to share their input before a decision is made.

Support Understanding

By sharing your viewpoint and giving others a forum for—and encouragement to—express their point of view, all members are more likely to understand why a particular choice was made.

Accept Diverse Responses

It is unlikely that everyone in an organization will be happy with the outcome of a difficult decision.

Respect Confidentiality

Though discussion is an important part of decision making, especially when the consequences affect many people, it is not always possible. There may be times when a decision requires confidentiality due to culture, ethics, or the continued stability of an organization.

CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

There is rarely a clear right or wrong answer when making a complex decision.

When faced with a challenge that affects other people, an organization, or both, the best you can do is apply your ethical framework and approach the decision with a high level of human sensitivity.

Be Honest

Even the most difficult decisions can be managed well. To see the impact of good management, it helps to understand what happens when a decision is managed poorly.

For example, a business owner knows she will not be able to keep her business open. Instead of telling employees that the company will be closing and giving them time to find new jobs, she waits and posts a sign or sends out a message on social media announcing the immediate closing of her business.

Be Fair

The business owner withholds information from the people who are dependent on her for income and security. In doing so, she does not provide them a fair amount of time to assimilate the information and make the best arrangements for their futures. Instead, she puts them in the position of having to make changes under pressure.

Be Respectful

In order to show her employees the highest level of respect, the business owner would have needed to be honest when the business began to fail and show fairness by allowing her employees time to adjust and compensate for the upcoming job loss.

Build Context

There are times when information must be withheld until high-level decisions can be made. As an ethical leader, being as honest as possible as soon as possible paves the way for fair and respectful choices.

Small ethical decisions work to build a context of larger ethical choices, making difficult decisions clearer and easier to make.

COLLABORATE

Ethical leaders can come from every leadership style. Even if a leader tends to lead in an autocratic way, there are times when allowing others to contribute ideas and suggestions to resolve a difficult decision can provide a path or solution he may not have considered. It is also possible to implement a seemingly impossible idea by solving a problem in a new and innovative way.

Some ethical decisions must be made in isolation, but whenever possible, collaborating with others can provide varied insight into the decision and lessen the burden on the leader.

COMMUNICATE

Keeping all lines of communication open with both people and organizations helps a leader access ideas and resources. Open lines also give others a method of sharing input. When everyone knows the decision you face, what you are considering, and the reason you have to make it, you can increase the level of trust, as well as limit rumors, innuendos, suspicion, and resentment. All of these benefits are lost when communication is absent or limited.

Communication is at the heart of quality leadership, and when ethics is a priority, it is essential.

FURTHERING YOUR GROWTH AS AN ETHICAL LEADER

To build your abilities as an ethical leader, work to enhance your communication. Nonverbal communication, listening skills, and written communication are all excellent places to focus your energy.

Outstanding leaders of all types recognize the need for continuing education. Ethics is no different. By spending time building her knowledge base, every leader can enhance her ability to make clear, ethical decisions and lead in a way that promotes the ethics of others.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Due to the increasing ease of connecting with people around the globe, it is important to understand different cultures. Every opportunity a leader has to learn about other cultures and incorporate that understanding into her decision-making process enhances her ability to make choices that are globally ethical and culturally sensitive. A strong leader can unintentionally compromise her history of ethical decisions and leadership by missing opportunities to build cultural understanding.

Cultural sensitivity is a powerful tool in an ethical leader's arsenal, but it is only the beginning. Putting sensitivity into action by building an environment that is inclusive is the ultimate goal.

A leader can create this environment by encouraging people in her organization to learn about, and place value on, each other's traditions and viewpoints. Showing value for all cultures and working to use diversity in creative ways is important to the ethical foundation of any organization.

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Just as an ethical leader expects the people he works with to do their jobs well and be accountable for errors in judgment or other mistakes, he will also hold himself accountable for every decision. Willingness to examine choices and accept feedback, both positive and negative, are core to maintaining leadership ethics.

Take time on a regular basis to reexamine your ethics and your leadership. Be honest with yourself and the people around you. If you have lapsed, be accountable, and whenever possible, rectify your mistakes.

REVIEW AND APPLY

Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- How do you define ethical leadership?

- In what ways do you currently practice the elements of ethical leadership?

- What are the key attributes of an ethical leader?

- What is the impact of an ethical decision? What is the impact of an unethical decision? Consider the impacts on the leader and anyone the decisions affect.

- What is the value of making decisions in an ethical way?

- What are the steps and considerations involved in making difficult decisions?

COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report.

Review: Return to page 3 to review your assignment.

Organize: Use the Project Checklist on page 15 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.

Schedule: Work with the vice president education to schedule your panel discussion.

Prepare: Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 17–19 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to develop a clear understanding of your own ethical framework and create an opportunity for others to hear about and discuss ethics in your organization or community.

Overview: Define an ethical framework for yourself. To do this, you may need to complete personal research beyond the contents of this project. Then, organize and moderate a 20- to 40-minute panel discussion about ethics, followed by a question-and-answer session. If you have never facilitated a panel discussion, review the "Moderate a Panel Discussion" elective project.

This project includes:

- The Ethical Framework resource
- Organizing and moderating a panel discussion as well as a question-and-answer session

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

☐ Work with your Toastmasters club leadership to set a date for a panel discussion on ethical leadership.

_____

_____

☐ Invite the members of your panel to the event. (Your panel must have a minimum of three members and one member of the panel must be a non-Toastmasters member.) All panelists must have leadership experience.

_____

_____

☐ Develop the discussion points you would like to cover for your panel discussion. These may be designed as questions or topic statements.

_____

_____

☐ Prepare panel members by sharing questions and/or discussion topics. It is recommended you provide all information at least one week before the panel discussion to allow panelists time to review the information and give feedback.

_____

_____

☐ Act as moderator for the panel discussion.

_____

_____

☐ Allow time for a question-and-answer session after the panel discussion.

_____

_____

☐ After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your panel discussion, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

_____

_____

Additional Notes

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

EVALUATION FORM
Ethical Leadership

Member Name _____   Date _____

Evaluator _____   **Panel Length:** 20 – 40 minutes

Speech Title

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is for the member to develop a clear understanding of his or her ethical framework and create an opportunity for others to hear about and discuss ethics in the member's organization or community.

Notes for the Evaluator

During the completion of this project, the member:

- Spent time developing a personal ethical framework
- Organized this panel discussion, invited the speakers, and defined the topic

About this speech:

- The topic of the discussion should be ethics, either in an organization or within a community.
- There should be a minimum of three panel members and at least one of them should be from outside Toastmasters.

Listen for: A well-organized panel discussion and excellent moderating from the member completing the project. Consider how the member sets the tone, keeps panelists on topic, fields questions from attendees, and generally runs the panel discussion.

General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5	4	3	2	1
EXEMPLARY	EXCELS	ACCOMPLISHED	EMERGING	DEVELOPING

Clarity: Spoken language is clear and is easily understood

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comment:

Vocal Variety: Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comment:

Eye Contact: Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comment:

Audience Awareness: Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comment:

Comfort Level: Appears comfortable with the audience

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comment:

Moderating: Moderates the panel discussion well

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comment:

Topic: Panel discussion stays focused primarily on some aspect of ethics

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comment:

Question-and-answer Session: Question-and-answer session is well-managed

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Comment:

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

Clarity

5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood

4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word

3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood

2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand

1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

Vocal Variety

5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection

4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools

3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools

2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice

1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

Eye Contact

5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response

4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response

3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience

2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement

1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

Audience Awareness

5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs

4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively

3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs

2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice

1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

Comfort Level

5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience

4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience

3 – Appears comfortable with the audience

2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience

1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

Moderating

5 – Sets an exemplary example of leading a panel discussion

4 – Excels at moderating the panel discussion

3 – Moderates the panel discussion well

2 – Struggles to lead the panel discussion

1 – Skills related to leading a panel discussion need improvement

Topic

5 – Panel discussion is highly focused on ethics with exceptional contributions from all members

4 – Panel discussion is tightly run and focused on ethics

3 – Panel discussion stays focused primarily on some aspect of ethics

2 – Panel discussion is off the topic of ethics for a significant amount of time

1 – Panel discussion is often off the topic of ethics

Question-and-answer Session

5 – Moderator demonstrates exemplary management of question-and-answer session

4 – Question-and-answer session is highly effective and well-managed

3 – Question-and-answer session is well-managed

2 – Question-and-answer session is limited and disorganized

1 – There is no time for a question-and-answer session

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Define the current issue.

List the facts.

List your core values that are impacted by the issue.

Define your options.

Who are the stakeholders?

List possible decisions.

List the rules of the organization that affect your decision.

Describe the impact of each decision.

Match decision choices to statements below:

Does this solution best address the entire issue?

Produces the most good and the least harm. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Respects the rights of all stakeholders. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Treats everyone equally. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Best serves the community. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Leads me to act as the person I want to be. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Describe the best decision for the current issue. It may be one you listed or a combination.