

# WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE

## OBJECTIVES:

1. To help participants identify their value system.
2. To identify differences between what “is” and what “should be” ethical considerations.
3. To make participants aware why people behave differently in similar situations.

## GROUP SIZE:

Participants should be divided into small groups of 3 or 4 members.

## TIME REQUIRED:

Approximately 45 to 50 minutes.

## PHYSICAL SETTING:

Arrange groups in circles or around tables in different parts of the room.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

1. One Decision Form for each group
2. One Situation Form for each participant (Each group receives a different set of situations.)
3. One overhead transparency Summary of Decision Form and marking pen
4. One Summary of Situations Form for each person to use during debriefing

## PROCEDURES:

1. Introduce the value system concept by **asking the participants** if 1) They think it is acceptable for a secretary to tell a phone caller “Dr. Steel is not in right now” when he is right there but does not want to be disturbed. 2) Do they think it is acceptable to lie in a crisis situation to save a life? 3) Would everyone agree?
2. **Divide** the students **into groups** at the tables. The tables should be labeled as M, O, R, A, and L respectively.
3. Each **team receives** one Decision Form for the group and a Situation Form for each member. **Be sure groups do not realize they have received different forms!**

4. **Tell** the groups **to read** each situation **and decide** whether the behavior is acceptable, neutral, or not acceptable to the group members. Then, they should **determine** how they think most business people would react to the same situation.
5. When the groups finish, **one member** of the group should **report** their **findings** to the facilitator. The **responses are recorded** on the overhead transparency.
6. Participants will probably be surprised that all the groups did not come to the same conclusion. **Begin debriefing before telling participants that all the groups did not have the same situations.** When the groups discover the difference, **hand out** the **Summary** of Situations forms and **continue debriefing.** If they have not discovered the differences by the *generalizing stage*, tell them.

Situation R (Rick) deals with stealing \$10

Situation J (Jan) concerns influence—gratuity vs. bribes.

Situation K (Ken) is about income tax evasion or avoidance.

Situation C (Cheryl) uses “victimless crime” situations.

7. Participants should realize that ethics are MORAL LAWS determined by each person’s value system. All decisions are not black and white and may not have one correct answer. They also need to understand that “everyone does it” or “it’s okay if we don’t get caught” are not appropriate reasons for ethical decision making.

By Craig Talbot adapted from Colleen Vawdrey, Summer 1990.

# SITUATION FORM

## M

Rick owns a company. The accountant has found that a new employee was shorted \$10 on his last check. Knowing that it will cost \$20 to correct the error, Rick takes no action.

Jan bought a lot on which she hopes to build an apartment house. New city ordinances require two more parking spaces than she has room for. She offers a friend in the planning and zoning commission a free apartment for a year if he'll make sure the plans are approved as submitted.

Ken collects the maximum unemployment each week. He must swear that he doesn't have a job and has been looking for full time employment. He actually earns \$900 a month doing odd jobs for people in the community. He is always paid in cash for those jobs.

Cheryl has received "A's" on all history exams. A short research paper is due in a week. She believes that she will get an "A" regardless of what kind of paper she turns in. She is overloaded with school work and decides to hand in a paper written by her boyfriend for his history class.

# SITUATION FORM

## O

Rick works for a large supermarket chain. Last week he ate \$10 worth of snacks without paying for them. He signed a statement when he began working there promising to pay for everything he ate. All of the employees eat snacks without paying for them, even the manager.

Jan takes the chairman of the county supervisors to dinner at company expense. While there, she expounds on the importance of environmental restrictions on air quality being enforced gradually to give her and other businesses time to comply without hurting their trade.

Ken earned \$4,000 in wages and \$3,100 in tips while attending the university. He reported his yearly income as \$6,800 on his tax return.

Cheryl backpacks into the mountains. She builds a small fire to cook her dinner in spite of a sign reading "*Extreme Fire Hazard! No campfires allowed.*" She does not start a forest fire and her fire is not detected by the forest rangers.

# SITUATION FORM R

Rick works for a large corporation and uses the office phone to make long distance personal calls totaling \$10 during office hours. He logs it as business.

Jan lives and works in Country B and sells tractors to Country A. An official of Country A tells her that he can guarantee her the contract for \$10,000 payment in cash since it is illegal in his country. Jan's company pays the \$10,000 but makes sure it complies with all the legal requirements of Country B.

Ken own a company that sells expensive gift items through the mail. The company does not report cash orders less than \$35 as income on the company's tax return. Such orders average \$35,000 a year.

Cheryl is quality control manager for a large fruit canning company. One of the employees got sick after eating a can of fruit cocktail from a contaminated batch. Only 1,000 cases have been sold. The company physician assures her that any sickness will last only 1 to 2 hours and is likely to be diagnosed as indigestion. She decides not to mention the incident as required by government regulations.

# SITUATION FORM

## A

Rick took \$10 worth of pencils from his company and gave them to the young boys from the poor section of town who were playing paper and pencil games during a church weekend.

Jan slips \$5 to the maitre d' in order to get seated promptly at a good table.

Ken donated some old clothes to a charitable organization. He paid \$900 when they were new but probably couldn't sell them at the local consignment shop for more than \$50. The charitable organization gives him a receipt for a \$525 contribution that he claims on his income tax return.

Cheryl is vice president for a large construction company. She is responsible for awarding bids to subcontractors. She awards the electric work on an apartment house to a longtime friend even though the friend missed submitting the lowest bid by \$30. All the companies bidding were considered equally competent. The friend's company is known for its quality work.

# SITUATION FORM

## L

Rick stole \$10 from Valerie's wallet while she was away from her desk.

Jan is principal of a junior high. She accepts an expensive pen and pencil set for Christmas from the sales representative of a large supply company with whom the school has done business.

Ken gets a mail order license as an ordained minister of an unorthodox religious group for \$1. To avoid payment of high property taxes, he claims his house as a church. He holds "church" on Saturday night with three friends where they play loud music and poker.

Cheryl has a Ph.D in math but has been unemployed for some time. She has been turned down for several jobs as "overqualified." When she applies for a job as a computer programmer, she states on the application form that she has had only two years of college. She is not required to sign the form.

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# DECISION FORM

In your group's opinion, how would most business people rate the behavior described?

Your group's opinion of The behavior described.

	ETHICAL	UNETHICAL	CRIMINAL		ETHICAL	UNETHICAL	CRIMINAL
R							
I							
C							
K							
J							
A							
N							
K							
E							
N							
C							
H							
E							
R							
Y							
L							

# SUMMARY OF DECISIONS

		<b>GROUP</b>		<b>BUSINESS</b>
	M			
	O			
<b>Rick</b>	R			
	A			
	L			
	M			
	O			
<b>Jan</b>	R			
	A			
	L			
	M			
	O			
<b>Ken</b>	R			
	A			
	L			
	M			
	O			
<b>Cheryl</b>	R			
	A			
	L			

# DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

## **PUBLISHING:**

4. How did you feel about the exercise?
5. Were the decisions easy or difficult for you?

## **PROCESSING:**

1. Did all of your group agree with the decisions made?
2. What assumptions did your group use in making your decisions?
3. Did your group think most business people would behave the same way or differently? (This will already be obvious from the decisions they have given. Ask specific groups why.)
4. Was your group more ethical than you believe most business people are?

## **GENERALIZING:**

1. Does it really matter where the \$10 out of the purse was stolen from?
2. How do people decide their ethical behavior?
3. What is the motivation for the decisions made?

## **APPLYING:**

1. Do we have an ethical code that society agrees to use? Should we have one?
2. Would it be better to have a few general principles and let everyone judge each situation for themselves? What would be the implications?
3. Can this exercise relate to your home?
4. Can this exercise relate to your school or work place? Does your school or work place fit the judgement for the "business person"?