

# Format for Ethical Decision Making

1. **State problem** (e.g. “Do I have a conflict of interest?” or even “This makes me uncomfortable”)
2. **Check facts** (some problems disappear upon closer examination of situation; others change radically).
3. **State specifications** (limits and objectives)—laws, professional code, and corporate rules to be satisfied, cost constraints (e.g. under \$200), children to feed, place in life plan (e.g. save company).
4. **Develop list of at least five options** (be imaginative, try to avoid “dilemma”—not “yes” or “no” but who to go to, what to say).
5. **Test options**, using such tests as the following:
  - **Harm test**—does this option do less harm than any alternative?
  - **Publicity test**—would I want my choice of this option published in the newspaper?
  - **Defensibility test**—could I defend my choice of this option before a Congressional committee, a committee of my peers, or my parents?
  - **Reversibility test**—would I still think the choice of this option good if I were one of those adversely affected by it?
  - **Virtue test**—what would I become if I choose this option *often*?
  - **Professional test**—what might my profession's ethics committee say about this option?
  - **Colleague test**—what **do** my colleagues say when I describe my problem and suggest this option as my solution?
  - **Organization test**—what **does** the organization's ethics officer or legal counsel say about this?
6. **Make a tentative choice** based on steps 1-5. Did you solve the problem with which you began?
7. **Make final choice (after reviewing steps 1-6), act, and then ask:** What could make it less likely you would have to make such a decision again?
  - What precautions can you take as individual (announce policy on question, change job, etc.)?
  - What can you do to have more support next time (e.g., seek future allies on this issue)?
  - What can you do to change organization (e.g., suggest policy change at next dept. meeting)?
  - What can you do to change larger society (e.g. work for new statute or EPA regulation)?