Everyday Ethics – What Would YOU Do?

Presented by
Dixie A Jones, MLS, AHIP
President-elect, Medical Library Association
Director, LSU Health Shreveport Health Sciences Library
djon17@lsuhsc.edu

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What Would YOU Do?

Professor Brighteyes would like to know who checked out a book. WWYD?

a – tell him who has the book
b – refuse to tell him who has the book

This is a matter of confidentiality. Any of our ethical codes would uphold the principle of maintaining confidentiality. There might be some additional actions you could take, but none of them should involve revealing who checked out the book. [ALA Code, III.]
Two major philosophical frameworks:

- Deontological
  - Categorical imperative
  - Universal law
- Teleological
  - Utilitarian
  - Situation-based

Codes of ethics usually draw from both frameworks.
What Would YOU Do?

An administrator has told you in confidence that layoffs are impending. A staff member tells you that he is getting ready to buy a house. WWYD?

a – do nothing (maintain confidentiality)
b – tell your colleague about possibility of impending layoffs
c – don’t know
d – depends on unknown factors not mentioned in the scenario
e – would take alternative action of some sort

Analyze the situation. This is an ethical dilemma—confidentiality versus beneficence/respect/veracity toward employee. This is not a matter of client confidentiality, but nonetheless confidentiality. Which principle do you uphold? Does one rank higher than another for you? Is there a “greater good” to be considered? Are there alternatives? [ALA Code, V.]
One of the hallmarks of a profession is a code of ethics. Most codes address ethical principles such as beneficence, justice, honesty, nonmaleficence, confidentiality, autonomy, and fidelity. Codes for librarianship are no exception.

American Association of Law Libraries. [AALL Ethical Principles](#)

American Library Association. [Code of Ethics of the American Library Association](#)

American Medical Informatics Association. [AMIA's Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct](#)

American Society for Information Science &Technology. [ASIS&T Professional Guidelines](#)

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. [IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers](#)

Medical Library Association. [Code of Ethics for Health Sciences Librarianship](#)

Society of American Archivists. [SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics](#)

Special Libraries Association. [SLA Professional Ethics Guidelines](#)
A client at a public workstation is obviously having trouble finding what he needs but makes it clear that he does not want any help. WWYD?

a – offer again to help  
b – respect his wishes to be left alone  
c – don’t know  
d – depends on unknown factors not mentioned in the scenario  
e – come up with an alternative

This situation illustrates a dilemma where the conflict is between helping the client get the best information, the information that he needs (beneficence) and respecting his wishes to choose to do it on his own (autonomy) as well as respecting his privacy. [ALA Code, I., III.]
Ethical Dilemmas

This flow chart helps to determine whether a dilemma exists. If you would not place the law above all other considerations, you would need to change this flow chart or use some other form of analysis.

**Ethical Situation**

- Is there a law governing the situation?
  - NO
  - Is there a statement in Code or institutional policy which applies?
    - NO
    - Use your professional judgment and take action accordingly. *
  - YES
    - Obey the law. *

- YES
  - Is there a conflict between ethical principles or between principle and policy? (dilemma)
    - NO
    - Use the code or policy as your guide for action. *
    - YES
      - Apply a decision-making model, a hierarchy, or other analysis and choose action. *
      - * An end point
Ethical Decision Making

- Hierarchy of values
- **Potter Box** – Ralph B. Potter
- **A-B-C-D-E worksheet** – Frank J. Sileo and Mary Kopala
- **A Framework for Ethical Decision-Making** – Michael McDonald
- **A Practitioner’s Guide to Ethical Decision Making** – Holly Forester-Miller and Thomas Davis
- Creative thinking
One moves through the box in a counter-clockwise direction, beginning with the situation.
A - assessment—conducting a careful examination of all the factors involved in the decision to be made.

B - benefit—determining the action that will benefit the greatest number of individuals. Beneficence is an ethical principle that requires professionals to use their knowledge to promote human welfare and avoid doing harm.

C - consequences and consultation—thinking about the possible ramifications of action taken and consulting with professional colleagues, supervisors, legal counsel, administrators, etc., to determine the action most in accord with accepted professional standards.

D - duty—considering to whom duty is owed: the client, the institution, the profession, society, or self.

E - education—familiarizing one’s self with ethical principles and guidelines, decisions made in similar cases, and ethical case books.
McDonald’s Framework for Ethical Decision-Making

1. Identify the problem.
2. Specify feasible alternatives.
3. Use your ethical resources to identify morally significant factors in each alternative.
4. Propose and test possible resolutions.
5. Make your choice.
Forester-Miller and Davis advocate exploring a dilemma in regard to the five moral principles identified by Karen Kitchener: autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, and fidelity. If examining the dilemma in light of these principles does not bring about an obvious solution, they recommend applying the model below, based partially on the “A-B-C-D-E Worksheet.”

1. Identify the problem.
2. Apply the ACA Code of Ethics. (We would apply a code applicable to librarianship.)
3. Determine the nature and dimensions of the dilemma.
4. Generate potential courses of action.
5. Consider the potential consequences of all options and determine a course of action.
6. Evaluate the selected course of action.
7. Implement the course of action.
Carolyn Whitbeck states that when dilemmas do exist, we are too likely to treat them as “math problems with human beings.” Rather than reducing a dilemma to a choice between limited alternatives, she advocates using creativity and wisdom to devise a course of action that is better than any of the obvious choices.

Think OUT OF THE BOX.
CALVIN AND HOBBES © 1996 Watterson. Reprinted with permission of UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE. All rights reserved.
Suzy’s boss asks her to give him a disc so that he can take it home for his daughter to use. The disc has software that was purchased for the library and is licensed for only one computer. If you were Suzy, WWYD?

a – give the disc to the boss
b – not give the disc to the boss
c – don’t know

It clearly violates the license to load the disc on another computer, a computer that is not even in the library. This situation is a legal matter. [ALA Code, IV.]
What Librarians Can Do

David Stuart offers these six suggestions for achieving a library’s technological goals without sacrificing privacy and open access to information.

1. **Develop for Apple last.** Librarians can look for ways to move from apps tied to a particular technology. He suggests looking for apps in the cloud and looking at the potential of new HML5 web standards.

2. **Support open standards first.** He advocates being willing to experiment with technologies that have open standards and support users’ freedom and privacy.

3. **Support more than one platform.** While your library might engage patrons through Facebook, he suggests offering other ways, also.

4. **Take control of interactive spaces.** He finds library blogs preferable to social networking sites such as Facebook because users don’t have to give up their rights to privacy to interact on a blog.

5. **Educate library users.** If the library is going to endorse some of these technologies, it has a duty to make sure users are aware of the implications.

6. **Regularly update the library’s policies.** Keep up with technology changes and adjust policies accordingly.

Mary is standing near the reference desk when she hears her colleague Beth provide a definition off the top of her head to a client, and the answer is incorrect! The questioner is preparing to head out the door. If you were Mary, WWYD?

a – nothing
b – report the colleague
c - don’t know
d – say something to the client

One might look at this situation as a conflict between giving the client the correct information and publicly embarrassing a colleague. In a survey conducted in the past, most respondents indicated they would catch the client and show him the definition of the term in a dictionary. Many would also take the opportunity to kindly educate the colleague. [ALA Code, I., V.]
The American Library Association has a number of web pages with content on intellectual freedom issues. Here are a few:

Intellectual Freedom Basics
Filters and Filtering
Censorship & First Amendment Issues

One of the most challenged books →
You are the director of an academic library. One of the faculty members has decided to leave the university and go into business for himself. He asks you if he can have proxy server access on the library’s proxy server to maintain access to the databases in his subject area. Ordinarily, non-affiliates, even former employees, do not maintain university accounts. WWYD?

a – refuse  
b – tell the faculty member yes  
c – depends on unknown factors not covered in the scenario

There are some unknown factors here that could make a difference in your response. For example, is the proxy server account the same as the institutional e-mail (or other) access account? When the faculty member clears, will his account be deactivated? Who has authority over accounts? Is there a policy regarding employees who have terminated? Do the licenses for the databases cover remote access? Remote access by non-affiliates? [ALA Code, IV., VI.]
What Would YOU Do?

Sherry, a library director, has become friends with the vendor of an online catalog product. Her institution is getting ready to purchase a new integrated library system. The vendor friend has asked if the specs could be written so that her company’s product will be the only one that meets the specs. If you were Sherry, WWYD?

a – refuse to write the specs in favor of the friend’s company
b – agree to write the specs in favor of the friend’s company
c – don’t know

Who are the stakeholders here? What are the potential outcomes of each answer? To whom is a duty owed? Which ethical principles are involved—justice/fairness? beneficence? autonomy? honesty? [ALA Code, VI.]
• Be familiar with the ethical code that is most applicable to your area of librarianship.
• Read general ethical literature, as well as that specific to librarianship.
• Avoid the infamous slippery slope.
• Be familiar with institutional policy and with law. Make up your mind in advance which takes precedence when there is a conflict between policy or law, and an ethical principle.
• Do the right thing. Doing the right thing might create a problem for you with someone who wants you to do something else, but there’s no ethical dilemma when the right thing is obvious and there’s no conflict of values.
• Set your personal hierarchy among ethical principles or select a decision-making model to use when a situation involves choosing between two ethical principles. Most models involve consideration of the consequences. A conflict between two “rights” is a true dilemma. Be prepared to choose between two “rights.”
• Remember the Golden Rule. It is often mentioned in ethical literature.
Understanding what it means to be an ethical person is a huge challenge. Translating the results of our reflection into action each day is an even greater one. It is only by doing this that we will continue to earn and keep the trust given to us. --Toni Carbo

Thank You

Dixie Jones
djon17@lsuhsc.edu
Additional Scenarios

What Would YOU Do?

Someone comes into your library and asks for information about a disease which you know has a fatal outcome. WWYD?

a – Show him information about the disease.
b – Don’t show him information about the disease.
c – don’t know

A member of your library committee (or board) has donated a large number of books to your library, and would like a letter of receipt that he may use for tax purposes. You routinely write letters acknowledging receipt of gifts, but he donated the books in later February and is asking that the letter say that the books were donated last year. WWYD?

a – Write the letter saying the books were donated last year.
b – Write the letter with the current date on the letter but no mention of the date of donation.
c – Write the letter providing the date the books were actually donated.
Additional Scenarios

What Would YOU Do?

Your institution does not require receipts for meals when you travel. It provides a daily allowance for meal reimbursement. The maximum allowance is reimbursed unless you indicate you spent less. You are treated to lunch by a vendor, Mallory Manley, so you spend less than the allowance that day. WWYD?

a – You report that you did not have expenses for lunch one day.
b – You do not report anything about meals.

Does it make any difference if your meals the next day cost considerably more than the per diem allowance?
a – Yes, you do not report anything about meals. It all comes out in the end.
b – No, you report that you did not have expenses for lunch one day.