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Letter From the Editor

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…from the editor

The first step in the evolution of ethics is a sense of solidarity with other human beings. — Albert Schweitzer

“WALKING THE TALK” – a phrase so often used by so many to incite action and inspire thought, yet seemingly rarely put into play.

The authors included in this issue provide various translations and applications of this common idiom — the critical call to conform actions to words and to set ethical standards of leadership. Those who do set the example possess the necessary fortitude to assume substantial personal risk in articulating, disseminating, and abiding by their beliefs and passions; continuously engage in self-questioning to identify and understand those influences which affect their decision-making processes; instill in others a desire to seek the truth; and readily admit to failings, demonstrating full and unadulterated accountability.

It is these principled leaders who understand how easily the unfettered quest for power, reputation, and acquisition of wealth can compromise goodness, genuineness, and respect. In values-based decision-making, the authentic leader refrains from excuse and myopic thinking; accepts responsibility for the consequences of his or her decisions with reason, dignity, and equity; and embarks on creating a new paths where warranted. This display of courage may ignite controversy and temporarily set back organizations, curtail profits, generate negative feedback and public vitriol, and even cause political-social-economic ostracization. These are the accepted risks, however, of this brand of leadership.

“Treating others as you would have them treat you” – another well-known idiom grounded in the same genre of values-based phraseology – is not only interpreted similarly across all faiths and non-faith based ideologies alike, but serves as an integral component of ethical decision-making. Ostensibly, whether one acts in a principled manner is subject to a certain degree of relative analysis. However, relegating “ethics” wholly to subjective interpretation should not thwart a general conceptualization of principled reasoning.

Principled decision-making must be viewed as a process of identifying and analyzing all significant factors which have influenced and shaped an individual’s actions and thought processes. Neglecting to fully comprehend the impact of country, culture, family, friends, peers, spirituality, and workplace may result in the misunderstanding of an individual’s actions since they may indeed be viewed in various ways. These spheres of influence should never be discounted as primary motivators and shapers of attitudes and beliefs. Only by comprehensively identifying these elements can one understand his or her own motivations and areas which may be positively affected by change.
Dogmatism, power struggles, and religious fervor all serve to thwart a leader’s ability to self-analyze and be receptive to critique by others. And in an ever-increasing global society, garnering feedback from those different from us may prove to be exceptionally difficult and laden with obstacles. One’s set of values cannot, and arguably should not, relegate all human behavior — especially as the dominant values of a particular society have been shaped by history in different ways and at different times. Yet, there are commonalities present in a true leader’s ability to actively engage in ethical decision-making. He or she must always be mindful and respectful of all cultures and civilizations; actively solicit critique and feedback from stakeholders; and be open to change.

Understanding the various evolutionary levels of decision-making will assist in an authentic leader’s inclusion of other opinions and perhaps produce a consensus of what is “ethical” for that particular company, society, or culture.

— Elizabeth F. R. Gingerich, Ed.