

FOREWORD

I remember my ethics class from undergraduate school. *Boring*. It was all theories, and most of them from a long time ago. We read, and were tested on, ideas such as Relativism, Utilitarianism, and Deontology. The highlight of the course was the ethical debate. We were randomly assigned debate topics and I got animal rights. I was assigned to read *Animal Liberation* (Singer, 1975), which was a good book but I was not able to make the connection between the theories much less with my work as a future teacher. I passed the class (mostly because of my debate score) and did not think much about ethics, or moral decision making, for several years.

Little did I know how much ethics would come into play in my professional life. Ethics, as the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* tells us, “involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior” (www.iep.utm.edu/ethics). The field of ethics is generally divided into three subcategories:

- Metaethics, which focuses on the origin of ethical principles and what those principals generally mean.
- Normative ethics, which focuses on moral standards that suggest right and wrong conduct.
- Applied ethics, which requires the examination of specific controversial issues within an ethical framework.

My undergraduate class was focused mainly on metaethics with an applied ethics task. As an early professional, I was looking for more information about expectations for conduct and the ways in which I could challenge the norm of schooling while not crossing a line that would suggest unethical behavior. I needed to understand my moral compass as well as the non-negotiable standards in my profession so

that I could walk the line, pushing forward without violating the moral code of my profession.

I now realize that there is nothing wrong with learning about meta-ethics, but professionals also need normative and applied ethics. As Toni Faddis notes, leaders' days are filled with ethical decisions and leaders must be aware of their Ethical Line as well as the impact of each of their decisions. They need to understand normative ethics and how those guidelines are applied in practice. And, they need to know how to advocate for students and changes to the system without getting fired for unethical actions. As she suggests, "Ethics is at the heart of good leadership." I could not agree more. People look to their leaders to make decisions that are fair, just, and reasonable. These people include students, teachers, staff, parents, community members, district office leaders, and many others. It's a heavy burden to be faced with an ethical dilemma and know that you must make an informed decision that conforms with the standard of care expected in your community.

Thankfully, *The Ethical Line* provides case studies and strategies that leaders can use to make these decisions. I appreciate that this resource starts with getting to know your own moral core values. We all operate from these values and must check them for bias, which Toni helps us do in the first section. I also appreciate the section on legal parameters. The examples and ideas in this book operationalize the professional standards for educational leaders and provide concrete tools that we can all use when we need to make a decision.

Some decisions are easy. That's not what this book is about. This book is about those hard decisions—the decisions that we ponder and reflect on way into the night. This book is about building a habit of making decisions that serve our profession, and the students who need us, well. And it's about developing a professional dialogue about the role of ethics in leadership. I invite you to join the conversation, knowing that you will be a stronger leader as a result of engaging in this type of ethics learning.

—Douglas Fisher

REFERENCE

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- Singer, P. (1975). *Animal liberation: A new ethics for our treatment of animals*. New York: Random House.