ADVANCED ETHICS for ADDICTION PROFESSIONALS

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Preface xi
Acknowledgments xiii

PART I: THE FOUNDATION: A THINKING WAY TO APPROACH ADDICTION ETHICS  1

1  INTRODUCTION TO ETHICAL THINKING    3
   Judging    5
   A Few Ground Rules    9
   Positions, Stands, and Foundations    10
   Gaining Ethical Perspective    12
   The Least You Need to Know    15

2  BEYOND ORDINARY ETHICS: WHY AND HOW   17
   Ethical Example: What Would You Decide?   20
   The Full-Scale View: A Distinction Between
      Ethics and Morality   21
   The Full-Scale View: Big Ethical Questions   21
   The Full-Scale View: Ethical Parameters   24
   Taking a Stand   27
   Critical Thinking Basics   28
   Ethical Self-Exam   30
   The Least You Need to Know   31

3  THE EMOTIONAL ASPECT OF ETHICAL THINKING   33
   Your Brain and Moral Judgments   33
   Biology and Moral Decision Making   34
   Fair-Mindedness and Emotion   35
   The Place of Emotion in Ethical Decision Making   36
   The Moral Emotions   39
Moral Pride 42
The Least You Need to Know 43

4 A FEW MORAL ISSUES TO GENERATE THOUGHT AND FEELING 45
Moral Issues 46
Common Ethical Dilemmas 47
More Challenging Ethical Dilemmas 48
The Least You Need to Know 50

PART II: ETHICAL THEORIES AND APPLICATIONS 51

5 AN ARRAY OF MORAL FOUNDATIONS 53
Your Intuitive Ethical Tendencies 53
Formal Ethical Concepts 55
Four Main Ethical Theories 57
Divine Command 58
Deontology 59
Utilitarianism 66
Virtue Ethics 70
The Least You Need to Know 73

6 A FEW OTHER ETHICAL THEORIES 75
Social Contract Theory 75
Feminist Ethics 76
Ethical Egoism 77
Existentialism 77
Justice and Rights-Based Approaches 78
Relativism/Subjectivism 78
The Least You Need to Know 83

7 THEORY APPLICATION TIME 85
Moral Decisions Based on Different Perspectives 86
Different Ethical Perspectives on This Situation 86
The Least You Need to Know 90

8 HOW THE MIND DULLS GOOD ETHICAL DECISION MAKING 91
Innate Biases 92
Knee-Jerk Responses 92
Meaning Making 94
Diagnostic Bias 96
Simplification  97
Confirmation Bias  97
Biased Assimilation  99
Belief Perseverance  100
Stories Versus Facts  100
Memory Problems  101
Believing You Are Right  102
False Pride  103
Anchoring and Conservatism  104
The Least You Need to Know  105

9  THE ALL IMPORTANT NEED FOR CRITICAL THINKING  107
Critical Thinking Principles and Processes  107
Arguments  108
Arguments as They Relate to the Ethics of Addiction Counseling  111
Argument Types  112
Two Types of Arguments: Deduction and Induction  117
Moral Arguments  121
The Least You Need to Know  126

10  ETHICAL FALLACIES  129
Appeal to the People or Masses (Ad Populum)  129
Belonging to a Group  130
Red Herring  131
Two Wrongs Fallacy  132
The Straw Person  132
Character Assassination  133
Appeals to Authority  133
Mistaking People or Groups with Claims  135
The False Dilemma Appeal  135
The Believability of Bold Statements  135
If It Stands Out, It Has to Be the Reason  136
Overconfidence  136
Appeal to Ignorance  137
Begging the Question  138
The Least You Need to Know  139

11  ETHICAL THINKING: A SET OF PROCEDURES  141
The Spirit of Decision Making  141
The Addiction Ethics Judgment Kit  143
Case Study  145
criticism of ethical arguments  148
the least you need to know  149

12  addiction ethics principles with a critical thinking twist  151

rights  152
respect for persons  153
autonomy  154
compassion  155
confidentiality  156
privacy  157
truth telling  158
nonmaleficence  159
beneficence  159
justice  160
the least you need to know  161

13  some practical guidelines  163

common ethical violations  163
boundary issues  164
addiction counselors in recovery  165
limits of professional expertise (scope of practice)  166
the ethics of harm reduction  167
ethical warning signs  168
what is the best judgment you can produce?  175

14  caveats in ethical thinking  177

power  177
obedience and power  178
arrogance  178
last warnings  179
the least you need to know  179

appendix  181
references  189
index  195
This book idea grew out of a series of advanced ethics workshops I presently conduct for addiction counselors. To retain certification, counselors always need a certain number of continuing credit hours between certification periods. Each certification period generally extends for 2 years. Out of the total hours required, 6 hours have to be in the area of ethics.

Yet there is a little problem with the ethics requirement. Every 2 years, presenters are offered basically the same ethics workshop over and over. After sitting through the same workshop a few times, participants desire something a little different. An idea occurred to me that the addiction field could use something new and innovative to fill that desire. The idea coincided with Springer Publishing Company’s offer to publish my book, *Critical Thinking for Addiction Professionals*. It occurred to me that one could combine ethics with critical thinking. This way, participants could expand their ethics knowledge beyond the same old set of dos and don’ts so often presented in traditional ethics workshops and books. The most intriguing possibly of such a combination was to get an audience to seriously think about the complicated ethical problems facing our field. The ultimate goal was to ponder addiction ethics and to make it interesting and challenging. Hence, the advanced ethics for substance abuse counselors workshop was born.

A pivotal goal of this workshop has been to make sure participants leave the presentation with more questions than answers. Hopefully this creates a thinking itch that needs to be scratched by forcing participants to closely examine how and why they come to their ethical decisions rather than mindlessly spouting ethical pronouncements minus the deliberation. This is an important purpose of both the workshop and this book.

The first time I offered the workshop, it was surprisingly successful, and the attendance has remained strong for the last few years. Between each presentation, I tweak the workshop slightly. This is due to the
spirited discussions of the workshop that force me to rethink a position, and also to my constant reading. Both bring something fresh to each new workshop presentation. In this manner, the workshops do not become stale. The presentations have evolved and even include elements of philosophy, which I personally think the addiction field could use.

The next logical step was to extend this workshop to a book. I hope this volume captures the spirit and utility of the workshops and encourages readers to think more fully about their own ethical decision-making process.
Books rarely come about without the influence and advice of others. Several people were instrumental in the creation of this one. First, I wish to thank Jennifer Perillo at Springer Publishing Company for approaching me with an idea for a book. Second, I wish to thank Chris Brown and Ralph Marsh from the Hawaii Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division for initially allowing me to present the idea for an advanced ethics workshop. I have appreciated the support throughout the years. Third, I wish to thank the many participants of the workshop and my students. Our sometimes spirited but thoughtful interactions pressed me to think and to make improvements to the workshop, and the many suggestions eventually ended up in this book.
The Foundation: A Thinking Way to Approach Addiction Ethics
Today professionals working in the addiction field face ever-increasing and complex ethical problems. The intensity of such issues demands meaningful moral reasoning on how to address them. Professionals do not need a simple laundry list of “don’t do this” and “don’t do that,” yet many of the existing books on the subject typically follow this format. However, that is not the only way to teach ethics these days. We need to move on a bit, and offer addiction professionals the ability to really reflect on ethical decisions. Therefore, the emphasis in this book is on how to make those difficult ethical decisions.

It is also past time for something really fresh in addiction ethics. This book is remarkably different in that it will not only press you to think and process addiction ethics issues, but throughout the book it will press you to examine yourself. Not in terms of how ethical you are, but in terms of how well you ethically think.

Addiction counselors are busy and need books that are easy to read with a friendly format. Thus, the jargon often found in traditional ethics books is kept to a minimum here. In addition, there are copious diagrams to assist understanding the more challenging ideas. This should be an inviting format for readers. Hopefully, it will give the book a comfort element that stays clear of the long and the laborious.
Part of the book will ask the reader to examine ethical dilemmas outside the realm of addiction issues (e.g., death penalty and abortion, among others). The reason or premise is that if one can clearly engage such heady issues thoughtfully, then surely one can engage addiction ethics.

After conducting advanced ethics for addiction counselors workshops for years, and writing this book, I realized that much of this journey had an element of self-discovery. As an illustration, I was not sure of the ethical foundations I often relied on to make my judgments. I noted that many people in my audience had the same problem. But now readers have an opportunity to find what ethical stance they really favor and rely on for many of the ethical judgments that need to be made. We rarely engage at this level of moral self-exploration. It seems exciting that you have the potential by the end of the book to discover the ethical foundations to which you most gravitate. This should prove interesting especially in those cases where readers might have never felt they had an ethical position in the first place.

While I don’t have a formal education in philosophy, over the years I have read a multitude of books in the area, and I still continually read philosophy and critical thinking material. After reading all those books I have observed that while the insights gained from philosophy are interesting, they continue to be nebulous, and often difficult. Many philosophy books, in particular, have a bad habit of spinning off into esoteric corners of thought. A big problem with such books is that they are written by philosophers who are talking to their specialized peers. The result is that they resort to esoteric language to explain something like ethics, and end up using language that is not translatable to the common person (including me). Being in the addiction field as long as I have, I know this level of reading is not going to attract or encourage addiction counselors to engage complex ethical questions.

What you get in this book is a view of ethics from someone who is at heart an addiction counselor but has read a ton of philosophy. The intent is to make difficult thought more palatable and down-to-earth without needing a philosophy degree. Thus, philosophers will have difficulty with this book. Hopefully, my colleagues who work in the trenches every day won’t.

I should make clear that this not a comparative ethics book. That is not the intention. Yet the intent is to sting readers to think for themselves (Woodhouse, 1994). Hopefully this book will encourage a quest or journey to find answers. However, quests usually come with a price—you
have to do a little work. And as I state in my advanced ethics workshops, I frankly want to piss off the reader to some extent. Why? People who are a little angry are more prone to investigate, even read, with the hope they can formulate better responses to some of the issues that come up.

I would hope there is a hint of originality to this book. Unlike most addiction ethics books, this one has a guiding theme, one that hopefully forces you to self-examine your moral and ethical positions. Not your personal ethics, mind you, but the positions by which you judge those and other’s ethics. In other words, the book is meant to push the reader a little deeper in the understanding of addiction-oriented ethics if not forward in professional development. It attempts to teach ethics without indoctrination (Paul, 1993). By comparison, consider that we insist our clients self-examine in order to better understand themselves. Hence, a moral/ethical self-examination on your part may lobby you to better understand who you are. That effort may force you to treat your clients with all the ethical and moral skill you can muster. If that doesn’t float your boat, consider this book a journey where you enter as you are now and come out the other end different. Better, but different. A quest.

For those budding critics looking for an all-encompassing tome, this is not that book. There are a number of such existing books on the market. They sport an abundant number of case examples, lists of ethical codes, and banks of study questions. I encourage the eager reader to seek them out.

**Judging**

This book encourages you to judge. No! That’s not quite right, it **insists** you judge. Granted, this isn’t a very popular idea in these highly tolerant and so-called politically correct days. Yet the push behind this drive comes from several observations that worry me. One involves watching addiction professionals unable to make clear statements on the complex ethical situation and dilemmas they face. When presented with such ethical problems, some addiction professionals shrug their shoulders in bewilderment and continue their professional lives as if the ethical situations in questions have no bearing or relevance to them. More troubling are the pithy responses often made to complex addiction ethical problems, or worse, responses made with flawed thought or dogma. Sadly, whether the pompous response is made from the left or right, it is often made without much extra thought.
The second troubling observation is of addiction professionals who opt out of judging altogether because they think that to judge is somehow bad. What often sometimes drives an “I don’t judge others” position is the rush to be overly tolerant. Many in our field are trying to be inclusive and open-minded, and that is a worthy ideal. And while it would be difficult to argue against tolerance, it is easy to argue against excessive tolerance (Shermer, 2004). Essentially, anything taken to extremes is generally not a healthy position. Such is the case for excessive tolerance. For our purposes, that is a position that allows an anything goes attitude. Moreover, these nonjudgers claim no one has the right to make a judgment about anything, because all people are entitled to their opinions, and to run their lives as they please. Translated, it essentially says all moral positions are valid. This has a number of problems—big problems. For one, such a position prohibits one from ever making a judgment about any moral or ethical issue, including addiction ethics. Think about it: our clients, colleagues, and administrators would have free reign to morally do as they please under the guise of being excessively tolerant, because whatever position they took to come to such a position would be tolerated. The other major problem with this stance is that one cannot have a moral standard with excessive tolerance. Anything goes means anything goes. Pardon my judgment, but anything goes leaves open some pretty ugly things to pass by that need thought and judgment. Anything goes is not morality.

Finally, what often happens with the no-judge position is that people take advantage of it. The no-judge position also serves as a safety zone or cushion where people appear to be tolerant but wish not to upset anyone or any position and hence stand for very little (Shermer, 2004). And even a notable ethicist such as MacKinnon (2004) notes that judgment needs moral courage. Consider moral courage to be a willingness to face and assess moral ideas and beliefs fairly regardless of our strong reaction to them (Paul, 1993).

On the other hand, according to Shermer, some folks would oppose judgment based on the teachings of sacred books—for example, the biblical maxim “judge not lest you be judged.” A closer examination of this oft-used statement against judging is not, however, to be considered a statement against all moral judgments. It is not advocating giving a blank check to all moral acts. A close reading of Matthew 7:1–5 warns instead not to become self-righteous in your judgment or rush to judgment. It warns against becoming smug or becoming a hypocrite in judging others when the judge is lacking in virtue him or herself. That is the same
warning here. Don’t rush to judgment. But, when you do judge, when you need to judge, judge well, which happens to be the really big theme of this book.

Finally, I find myself upset, as is Brown (1996), with those who switch from passionate certainty to radical doubt without as much as a blink of an eye, or without considering how they make such oscillations of thought without accounting for them. All these listed problems are nonproductive routes to a critical examination of today’s multifaceted addiction ethics problems.

You are therefore encouraged to take a position on things, especially on addiction ethics issues. Take note that it is judging badly that may well be at the core of many problems and biases today. You are therefore asked to judge, but to do it well.

**Example: Judge an Evolving Ethical Situation**

*Instructions*

You are to judge (yes, judge) each bulleted statement separately. Then as the story evolves, judge each subsequent statement. Observe if your judgments change. If they do, ask yourself why, and then proceed to the end bullet.

- You find out that a colleague (Willy) had a boundary crossing relationship with his client (Rhonda). Rhonda was paid to clean Willy’s house.

*Now Stop and Judge*

- Now, you find out the money helped Rhonda, who really needed the funds.

*Stop and Judge*

- The alleged event took place several months ago.

*Stop and Judge*

- Willy’s supervisor finds out what happened, and Willy faces disciplinary action.
Stop and Judge

■ Following the reprimand, Willy expresses guilt and regret.

Stop and Judge

■ Willy tells you that the reprimand will be two days without pay. He tells you this will be a hardship in terms of paying bills and providing for his family.

Stop and Judge

■ You note that Willy is always on time, gets his work done, and is well liked by his clients.

Stop and Judge

■ Following the reprimand, Willy discloses that two similar events took place with Rhonda.

Stop and Judge

■ Willy then discloses that he did all this because his sibling who is exactly the same age has similar problems as Rhonda but hasn’t responded to treatment. Willy has been feeling helpless, and wanted to go above and beyond with his client.

Now that you know all the parameters of this situation, ethically what would you do? You could go for the pithy responses of “I think I will punt on this one,” “I’ll just trust my gut,” or “Just keep it simple,” among others. Those do not seem adequate to the task placed before us. Small questions might guide you to needed resources, and that would be a start. Big questions would press you to sift out what was right and wrong in each of the bullets listed. To really answer this ethical situation fully, you and I need the assistance of extraordinary thinking processes, which is what this book is all about. But let’s first get to the type of questions just posed.

Big and Small Questions

Turnbull (1998) points out that there are two kinds of questions—big and small. Granted, that doesn’t sound very scientific, but it is appropriate
for our purposes. The small questions, or conventional kinds of questions, typically generate commonsense answers. What will I have for breakfast? What is that best way to get to a critical thinking workshop? Or even: What might be a good video to show to a group of incarcerated inmates with addiction problems?

But then we have the big questions. Appiah (2003) speaks of big questions as first-order moral questions because they ask about giant issues like what is right and wrong, what is good and bad. Because of their scale and scope, commonsense responses or pithy responses will just not do. Such big questions require a little extra thought and consideration. For example, how does one give a pithy answer to the complex ethical question of an evolving boundary crossing situation as illustrated previously?

**A FEW GROUND RULES**

The press to make judgments comes partly from years of research cited by the renowned neurobiologist Gazzaniga (2005). That research revealed that our brain evolved to make decisions. It is a decision-making device. Hence, if we are a decision-making species, all the more reason to make the best decisions possible when faced with complex ethical predicaments.

Now that we know that our brains are decision-making devices, we need to define a few things up front because there will always be those individuals who do not make good decisions. They will use bad decision-making processes or will draw on all kinds of bad thinking processes. They will jump to conclusions concerning addiction ethics decisions. They might even accuse this book of things it does not state. So this brings us to a few rules concerning ethical disagreements. One has to do with the lost art of argument or criticism versus the trendy jump to judge and condemn people and beliefs.

**Judging Versus Criticism and Condemnation**

True criticism is an honest, malice-free assessment of an idea or an action. In our case, you are encouraged to criticize your ethical judgments and those made by colleagues and even the so-called experts. If done well, the criticism will be thorough and reasonable. It will point out strengths and weaknesses. Done in the right spirit, it is a positive
undertaking that can produce greater understanding for the sake of wisdom and virtue. While it doesn’t feel good to get criticism, it is beneficial, and if taken gracefully, it allows us to improve and become better at this judging thing.

Condemnation and demonizing, on the other hand, go beyond criticism because they are never fair, always negative, and always judgmental. They refer mostly to weakness and are directed at a person, a person’s character, a community, or a culture. They are meant to do harm, period (Brown, 2001; Tannan, 1998). You are asked to avoid condemnation and especially avoid demonizing others.

**Discussion and Argument With an Agenda**

Right behind the ideas of criticism and condemnation are the issues of discussion and argument with an agenda attached. With discussion, we deliberate for the sake of coming to a truth. If there is to be confrontation (and often there is in addiction ethics), it is orderly with an added element of a willingness to learn. It involves the presentation of evidence and solid reasoning, with a goal of understanding.

Generally, argument as the philosophers discuss it is very close to the idea of discussion. However, an argument with an agenda is one where we abandon the pursuit of truth for that of triumph. The agenda presses you to fight for personal victory. An agenda-tainted argument comes with an element of bad faith, because we are not honestly pursuing truth together. Simply, those who do this type of arguing just want their position to be right and you to be wrong. Arguments with an agenda displace fruitful discussions and replace it with accusations and power manipulations (Brown, 2001). You are asked to avoid argument with an agenda.

**POSITIONS, STANDS, AND FOUNDATIONS**

What’s your position on using clients in your program to wash your personal car? If you favor such a position, on what set of premises do you make such a stand? That means, what reasons do you have to support and defend this argument? This type of argument is what we refer to as a position, stand, or foundation. Whether you know it or not, you and I have a ton of such positions in our heads. What we will attempt here is to make you more aware of your particular positions, stands, and foundations.
To press this point, consider the following questions seriously. For what would you be willing to give your life? What reasons would you give to make the ultimate sacrifice?

Notice that both questions require positions, stands, and foundations. “I would be willing to sacrifice my life for my children,” is a stand. “Why? Because I love them and am willing to do anything to see them happy and secure.” This belief is a central belief. As this has a core position within it (make them happy and secure), it is a foundation.

As stated, we all have these positions. You carry them around all the time, every day. Most of the time, these positions are invisible unless they are provoked. In a manner of speaking, you rest or sit on these positions. You probably sit on one or two main foundations and usually a set of lesser stances (see Figure 1.1). They, in a lot of ways, determine who you are, and how you think, and, yes, how you judge.

If it hasn’t already happened to you yet, one day you will have to defend one of your addiction ethics positions. Someone, somewhere is going to come after one of your cherished positions, stands, or foundational beliefs and challenge it. He or she is going to confront what you believe is ethical, and in what you have ethical faith. Obviously, the more stable, better your foundation, the better the chance to withstand the challenge.

Figure 1.1 Positions, stands, and foundations.
So one of the goals of this book is to assess how true or genuine your ethical positions, stands, and foundations really are. We will also delve a bit into the epistemology of the ethics realm (Curtler, 2004).

**GAINING ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE**

We start this section by encouraging you to step as far back from ethics as you can get. The idea is to get what is called the *ethical perspective* or a distanced view (Curtler, 2004). People do not normally do this. They often stand too close to their ethical position to really know what the big ethical picture looks like. This causes a constricted or sometimes myopic view of things. By analogy, this would be like only seeing your home town and believing that other parts of the world live and work in the same way. However, recall your first airline flight and how you felt watching the earth from 35,000 feet or how you felt sitting on a high cliff overlooking the Grand Canyon or the Smoky Mountains. This grand view allows the big picture of our world to settle in. That kind of spacious view is encouraged here.

The point is to see the really big picture of ethics and then slowly move in for a close-up. Along the way, you hopefully will begin to see where your ethics seem to fit. Another reason for seeking this perspective is that you may see things you never saw before, which is a nice way of saying that you may find some of your biases and prejudices. And as much as you may think your favorite view of morality is a good one—and it may be—it may also blind you to other points of view. Hence, another reason to push for this perspective thing.

To get started on this little trip, let’s begin with, arguably, the three big ways to think about ethics (Law, 2007). This formulation is really helpful in terms of seeing ethics in an orderly way and taking the grand perspective mentioned previously. The three big views are:

- Practical ethics
- Normative ethics
- Metaethics

**Practical Ethics**

*Practical or descriptive ethics* are what most of us associate with ethics. For example, have you ever tried to make a point for or against a certain
behavior? Say, for instance, that a colleague has begun to spend more and more time using a work computer for personal purposes. This obviously takes time away from her work. Let’s add that some clients have begun to complain that they are not getting time to discuss recovery issues with this colleague. You approach this individual and state your case that all this personal computer time is robbing clients of therapy. You state an ethical claim, which happens to be that you feel your colleague’s behavior is wrong. Well, if you ever did something like this, you have engaged in practical ethics. And the examples of practical ethics seem to be limitless.

While there are some general guidelines to practical ethics such as Johnson and Ridley (2008), Pope and Vasquez (2007), and Kidder (2003), among others, most folks facing an ethical dilemma only have a hazy sense of consciously judging what’s right or wrong. More often than not, they have a particular, often strong, feeling about it. It is from those intangible judgment standards and feelings that we typically pronounce an action right or wrong.

Notice the term “intangible” was just used. Keep in mind you are now looking out over this grand landscape of ethics, which includes your personal ethics. Now, here is a significant question that directs your attention to a very important point. Is there any bias or favoritism in that intangible ethical stance of yours?

Keep the question and possible answer in the back of your mind as we proceed to the next big ethical stance.

**Normative Ethics**

It is at *normative ethics* that we begin to use a measure or ruler of some kind from which to gauge the rightness or wrongness of an action. Normative ethics tells you what you should do (Law, 2007). And it provides a set of rulers to do just that. Using the preceding example, an ethical judgment is made from an established ethical position, not from a hazy sense of right or wrong. For example, you might judge the colleague’s personal use of her work computer by stating, “The state code of ethics, or some dead philosopher, says you should not spend excess time on that computer because it is wrong.”

Now there are three big theories (and a number of minor theories to be touched on later) listed under normative ethics: utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics (Law, 2007). Each, in its own way, attempts to gauge which actions are right and which are wrong. We will take a closer
look at each of these in chapter 5. But for the time being, just know that they are specific methods under the broad heading of normative ethics (See Figure 1.2).

**Metaethics**

Finally, from the big three, let’s take a look at *metaethics*. This is the fun part, because you now get to reflect and critically evaluate your personal ethics, along with all those normative ethical stands that have come down through the ages. That is what metaethics is about, studying the very ideas of right and wrong (Law, 2007). *Meta* is a Greek term meaning above, beyond, or stretching across (Baggini & Fosl, 2007). This meta view is much like the grand ethical perspective noted previously.

Not that we are going to get deeply into metaethics, but some of the more contentious issues it dares to address are things like the following (Baggini & Fosl, 2007):

- Are there such things as moral facts?
- No moral truths can be known.
- Moral truths can be known, and they are either true or false.
- Moral judgments are essentially subjective.

Heady stuff. And while we will touch on some of this, the implications are way beyond the scope of this book. I just wanted to give you an idea of what metaethics is all about.

Summing up, Figure 1.3 gives you a broad picture of the ethical world.
THE LEAST YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Judge, but do it well.
- There are two types of ethical questions—small and big.
- The ground rules for ethical arguments: strive for criticism and discussion; avoid condemnation and arguing with an agenda.
- We all have moral and ethical positions, stands, and foundations.
- Gain ethical perspective.
- The three ethical perspectives include personal ethics, normative ethics, and metaethics.