

Doing Case Studies—The Value of Sticking With It

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Doing Ethics in Media: Theories and Practical Applications, is a new Routledge textbook organized around six decision-making questions that are referred to as the “5W’s and H” of media ethics. The questions encourage students to articulate the issues; apply codes, policy statements or legal decisions; consider the needs of various stakeholders; sift and sort through conflicting values; integrate philosophic principles; and pose a “test of publicity.” Specifically, the questions ask:

- What’s your problem?
- Why not follow the rules?
- Who wins, who loses?
- What’s it worth?
- Who’s whispering in your ear?
- How’s your decision going to look?

Authors of the 160,000 word text, Jay Black and Chris Roberts, have tried to present the course material in an integrated fashion that encourages students to build upon each unit and set of theories as they gain confidence when “doing ethics.” Several dozen case studies, and a similar number of practical exercises, aid the students on their systematic journey.

Rather than introducing an interesting case and then dropping it in favor of an even more engaging one, the textbook and ancillary package ask students to sink their teeth into a pair of complicated dilemmas at the outset of the course, and to return to those cases on several occasions by applying different theoretical insights. Those new insights, of course, are also applied to the dozens of new and different cases, but a philosophic trend line is more evident when materials are applied to a familiar case... a lesson we learned from Karen Lebacqz’ marvelous little book, *Professional Ethics: Power and Paradox* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

For instance, on the opening day of class—even before the syllabus is handed out—students are asked to jump right into a case, a task they tend to undertake with moralizing exuberance. As much heat as light is likely to be shed during that first few get-acquainted minutes of the semester. The instructor’s primary job during these teachable moments is to encourage students to open up and begin the exploration.

Then, as weeks go by, students will naturally re-think their individual and collective decision-making processes evidenced on that

first day. They will probably start to reason through such matters as whether laws and institutional codes of ethics are applicable, and if not, why not; what kinds of responses seem to emerge from different stages of moral development and notions of empathy; how loyalty and diversity play out; which moral and non-moral values sift to the top, or are possibly compromised, en route to making a justifiable decision; which philosopher or school of philosophy is most likely to be “whispering in their ear”; and how their final decision stands up to the test of publicity.

Instructors might find it helpful to return to the opening case study (or studies) on the final examination or in the student’s late-semester media ethics journals.

As an example of the process, and the range of approaches students have taken when doing this exercise, consider the following case and commentaries. The case—one of two appearing early in Chapter One of *Doing Ethics in Media*—might be familiar to veteran media ethics instructors: An early version appeared in the very first issue of the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*; later versions showed up in Phillip Patterson and Lee Wilkins’ popular text. Black and Roberts like this case because it speaks to the students, who get personally and professionally challenged; students are expected to articulate and choose among conflicting values and loyalties, and to be transparent and accountable. (That’s a lot to expect on opening night of class, but not too much to ask after several weeks of study.)

CASE 1-B A Dilemma About Loyalty and Promise Keeping

You are the public affairs (public relations) officer in Freedonia for the city’s largest employer, the National Paper Corporation (NPC). Your middle-management position gives you access to the company’s immediate and long-range plans. You are at the meeting where top managers decide that economic conditions have made it necessary to permanently close NPC’s Freedonia plant and cut 3,000 jobs. Factors include a glut of inexpensive, imported paper products, which is diminishing the market for NPC’s products, plus the government’s insistence that the Freedonia plant’s sixty-year-old production processes pose environmental hazards that will cost too much to remedy.

Freedonia is in a sensitive economic position. There are few job possibilities for Freedonia’s unemployed, who probably would have to sell their houses and move.

The region was primarily agricultural before World War II, with only a moderate amount of manufacturing. After the war, the NPC plant's growth changed the economic balance. The children of farmers developed skills in fields related to the plant, and numerous family farms were consolidated into several larger farms, offering far fewer employment possibilities. The plant has paid decent wages, and most of its workers own their own homes in or around Freedonia.

You are a single parent of two high school children. You own your own home and have been saving money to send your children to college. Your sister, Elizabeth, is a real estate agent. Elizabeth is very excited about having five "hot" prospects for house sales in town; the deals should go through in about three weeks. Elizabeth's husband, Frank, has been worked at NPC for fifteen years and now has a good-paying job as a shift foreman. Elizabeth and Frank have been very close to you, especially since your spouse died a decade ago in an industrial accident at the NPC plant.

At the meeting where the company decides to close the plant, arguments are made that a great deal of harm would come to the company—damage to its reputation, an inability to fill a final set of orders for one last major contract, and the response of the stock market to the corporation—if word leaked about the impending closure. Everyone at the meeting is asked to promise not to say anything to anyone about the closure, nor to do anything that would set off rumors or a panic.

NPC managers told you they would make every effort to find a similar job for you at another division of the parent corporation, in an out-of-state location. Your boss reminds you of how well the company treated you after your spouse died: You had quickly jumped from secretary to executive secretary to public relations assistant to public relations officer.

What's the Basic Problem Here?

Has management placed you in an untenable position, or is this a routine PR dilemma that requires a routine PR solution? At what point, in what way, and to whom could/should you speak out? What should you tell the Freedonia newspaper's business reporter, who is certain to be calling within twenty-four hours? Are you being asked to deceive others? Are you a powerless "decision taker" or an empowered "decision maker"? The case study doesn't say whether you are male or female; would your gender make any difference in how you address the problem? To whom should you remain most loyal? Why? Do your professional loyalties trump your personal loyalties? Why, or why not?

Samples of late semester responses from several undergraduate students, none of whom had had any previous studies in philosophy or ethics.

Late semester response from student A. A.:

Welcome back to Freedonia. I now have to make my decision. I'm about to go home to my family, and I have to decide, fully, what I'm going to do. Do I tell? Do I shut my mouth and be a good little soldier?

1. **What's my problem?** Do I talk to others, tell them what's going on, or do I stay quiet, reserved, and keep a secret? My problem, simply defined, is to whom am I most loyal? To the community? Or to those in power above me?
2. **Why not follow the rules?**
 - a. It depends on the rules. The PR code of Ethics states that I'm supposed to disclose only information important to make full, informed decisions. So the question that is brought up here is, do the townspeople need to know that the plant in Freedonia is closing in order to make informed decisions about their lives? The answer is Yes.
 - b. I am also told to protect the free flow of accurate and truthful information, and be truthful and accurate in all communications. By doing this, I need to be honest and accurate in all ways- talking to my family, the media, etc.
3. **Who wins, who loses?**
 - a. The stakeholders here are a bit complex, because there are many stakeholders, not all of whom will be immediately affected or are specifically related to the factory.
 - b. I don't believe the bosses win or lose in a huge way no matter my decision to tell. They may be chastised, but I believe the greatest *harm* that will come to them is a demotion. There is a slight chance that if I tell the public, one of them will be fired, but I feel it is slight. If I don't tell, and remain silent, those in power above me will go on to a new town and potentially be in the same position, losing little, if anything.
 - c. If I tell the public what is happening, my family will lose. They will lose possibly the education they have at this moment, because the teachers will be trying to get out of town, or the education system may deplete. They will lose some of the comforts that they are used to, since I am the primary caregiver, my income will most likely be immediately depleted or stopped. If I don't tell, and remain silent, they will be forced to (if we can get out) move to another place, but will be able to meet new people. They may lose their trust in me, that I've suddenly uprooted them, and taken them away from the rest of their family, and their friends. My extended family will most likely be angry with me, even if only for a short time whether I tell

or not. If I tell, they may be angry if there is a loss of a job, income, etc. If I don't tell, they will definitely be angry that I kept such vital information from them.

- d. The other factory workers will either lose out on money from another job, or will lose their false idea that everything is going well. I believe it is the factory workers who lose the most. Since either way my decision goes, the members of the factory *will* lose their jobs, the question is which is the most ethical- lose it sooner, or lose it later?
- e. The rest of the community will inevitably lose either way as well, but creating the least harm is tricky. If I tell, the real-estate agents who have people looking at houses in our town will lose that interest, and the income from those sales. The people who are even more on the outskirts, those who work in the packaging plant, or who work in the grocery store, may lose more if I don't tell, there may end up being rotting food in the store, or such.
- f. I lose either way. I lose my job, the potential for growth in my job, and the ability to quickly get out of Freedonia, or maybe *ever* get out if I tell. But if I keep quiet, I lose my family's, community's and personal respect for myself. But at least I'm in the same bucket as everyone else.

4. What's it worth?

- a. My values, as I found on the values inventory by Rokeach, are weighed to independence and community. My top five values are: being independent, broadminded, honest, courageous, and ambitious. If I am independent in my decision making, then does that mean I make my decisions based only on my views? I would rather inquire about the whys and hows before I make a decision, even if I make it independently. I value self respect, and I always think about whether or not I will be able to look myself in the face if I do things.
- b. If ambition were higher on the list, I would keep quiet, probably because of the ability to move up in my career. However, since I value my community, and I value being independent and honest, I will tell the community. It is for the larger good of the community, and there is the possibility of keeping the last job, using that to build extra money, and then use that for the next while.
- c. I will act independently, doing what I believe is best for all, because of the values it's worth. This is not really a question of diversity, so the values that I will operate on are those that I regularly use, because they haven't strayed me too far wrong so far.

- d. I am not willing to put my family at risk, but I'm less willing to give up equality, my self-respect, or true friendship. I am willing to sacrifice ambition, the ability to get ahead in my job, and such.

5. Who's whispering in my ear?

I draw meaning from many areas of philosophy, including virtue, a bit on care, utilitarianism, and some deontology.

- a. VIRTUE: I believe that I am a pretty decent human. I believe that my own moral compass is more or less north, and that I can make good decisions. I use my own experiences, and what I believe in to make decisions. In this case, virtue says to be honest, fair, and open. It is virtuous to be honest. I have been taught that since I was a kid—in the stories from the *Book of Virtues*, in fables, everything says to be honest. I was also taught to be fair, although I was taught a more “tit-for-tat” theory, in that you can be fair in giving more than you receive. And being open means listening to other people's ideas, and giving them fair consideration.
- b. CARE: Gilligan says that relationships are important. Am I willing to give up good relationships that I've worked to foster to get ahead in my career and take care of my own?
- c. UTILITARIANISM: The greatest aggregate good, while at the same time, the least aggregate harm. In this case, harm will come to all those involved. Mill states that there are people who *deserve* to be harmed- or deserve to be protected. In this case, the factory workers and town deserve as much protection as I can give them, because the bosses have the power.
- d. DEONTOLOGY: I have many duties, *prima facie* and actual duties. My *prima facie* duties tell me to not purposefully cause harm, to keep my promises, and to be good to those who have been good to me. But in this case, that need is lowered in my mind, and my duty to not purposefully cause harm, but really to do the least harm. So non-maleficence becomes my *prima facie* duty.

6. How's it going to look?

I am being transparent by telling the truth about what is going on. I am being accountable for my actions, by holding myself to the standard I would hold everyone to, and I've known the results the whole time. I am keeping my credibility with the community, even if not with my employers, but in this case it's necessary.

Late semester response from student J. B.

1. What's your problem?

As the PR representative for the Freedonia NPC plant, I've been told in confidence that the plant will be closing after a last large order

is completed, and along with everyone else in the meeting, I've been asked to promise not to divulge this information, because it "would cause harm to the company." The plant closure will also do severe harm to the community, and to some immediate family members, plus present an immediate and personal challenge to me and my own family as we are forced to relocate. The company implies that they will "do what they can" to transfer me to another location, but even with that shred of a promise, there is no doubt that the lives of my two high school-age daughters will be drastically affected. As the plant closure seems inevitable and that ship has sailed, the question remains as to whether I should keep this secret as requested and benefit the company that pays my salary, or share the information and minimize harm to the other stakeholders. My problem in making an "ethical" decision is in reconciling my loyalties to the company/my employer, vs. those of my family, friends, the other workers, and the community. With the job comes a commitment to my employer to be loyal to them and serve their purposes, but as a PR professional, I also have a responsibility to the public, and as the company representative, I should be avoiding deception, not contributing to a cover-up. And on a third hand, as a parent, a sister, a community member, I have a responsibility to minimize harm to those people, and also to myself. I have conflicting loyalties, and am questioning which of my values take precedence, and to whom I really owe something in this situation. Although initially thinking I'd stick by my loyalty to the company, I'm now leaning toward a compromise—taking whatever steps are necessary to protect my own family first, the other stakeholders second, and the company third. Although I would love for it to turn out well for everyone, I must also take steps to prevent myself and my daughters from harm. It's inevitable that we will have to move. Then there is my sister, who has several real estate deals in the works, and her husband who works at the plant. I have determined that these are the stakeholders to whom I have the most responsibility in the long run.

2. Why not follow the rules?

Yes, the release of news of the plant closure will do harm to the company. Yes, they are my employer; I have a contracted relationship with them. But there are other stakeholders to consider. There are other targets of potential harm. Closest to me: my daughters and my sister. I do not want this to be a shocking surprise to them, something they are unprepared for and comes at them out of the blue – when I have the means to cushion the blow with the knowledge I am holding. My sister and her husband stand to suffer substantial loss. A warning to them could make a dramatic difference in their lives and it's in my power to do that. A reason to not follow the rules in this case would be that preventing harm to the company has less long term impact and personal impact than preventing harm to my family. All stakeholders are not created equally in this scenario. Yes, I have a responsibility to the public, to "seek truth and report it," and to not

deceive. By sounding the alarm to the entire community, I may come off as noble and “doing the right thing,” but being considered noble and praiseworthy is not my ultimate goal, and does not have the value of a decision that is more about taking care of who I need to be taking care of: Aristotle’s principle of applying decisions based on the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner – the median being the best course and a mark of virtue. It would be great if the company would compromise, soften their mandate to not disclose shutdown plans, so that harm could be minimized for more than just the company – but short of that, it’s within my power to make choices that would serve a greater good, without causing more harm to my own tight circle of concern. I would be true to myself, serving my own brand of moral ethics if I would rationalize breaking the rules, and advocating for a compromise that is more in the middle of the two extremes.

3. Who wins, who loses?

The text section on the expansion of empathy directs us to “be sensitive to the presence, interests and needs of others.” In doing this, I acknowledge that it would not be ideal for the public to find out early that the plant is closing, because it could affect the production and the delivery of that last order, and the last profitability they could expect from that plant. Stocks could drop, the customer could get cold feet and pull the order. The company would be in a losing situation in that case. But looking at the plant workers as stakeholders too, an early warning could get them prepared early, allow them to look for other work, get some applications submitted and maybe even get a jump start on selling their homes, or at the very least, prevent them from launching into expenditures now that they would not have had they been warned. The company executives all know the news already; they were in the meeting too, and it’s reasonable to assume that they are already taking steps toward an equitable departure. The other stakeholders do not have that luxury – they will be left to pick up the pieces when the plant is abandoned. By not telling, I could also be a winner, or at least more of a winner than had I not known in advance. Whether I tell anyone else or not, I can personally take steps to explore my options. If I sit by and act as if I have no power, I am contributing to my own victimization, plus contributing to the harm of others. I like this anonymous quote from the book: “When an organization wants you to do right, it asks for your integrity; when it wants you to do wrong, it demands your loyalty.” By instructing us all to not tell, the company is using the workers as an end to a means. There is only one winner in that scenario: the company. Kant advocates that the stakeholders not be treated as a means, but as an end themselves. Again, with a compromise, an informed and respected pool of workers may contribute to a healthy and positive closing experience, celebrate that last order and

grieve together, but move on together too, each seeking their own positive path to the future, whatever that may hold.

4. What's it worth?

I'm seeing that ethics may come down to applying judgments that relate to our personal values, choosing from different, competing priorities. Sometimes they are "right-versus-right" decisions, very tough choices. We have to take a hard look at what our values are before we can determine our loyalties. In this case, I really had to think it through. I am valuing my professional standing, I'm valuing my job (but now that is uncertain). I am valuing my family: my sister, her husband, and my daughters. But I also value this community and because of that I would like to minimize the harm that will come to them when the plant pulls out. But I don't want to harm myself in the process, getting fired or losing the opportunity to have a relocation package provided to me. The "tit for tat" of the company's promise to try and find me work in another city is linked to their request that I not divulge their plans to close the plant. It is an offer based on literal reciprocity, and also tugs at my duty to the company. If I continue to follow this contract with them and scratch their back, they will "attempt" to also take care of me. Not necessarily the best decision for all, but it puts the carrot out there, a glimmer of hope that they will take care of me and mine. No, it's not ideal, it's disregarding other stakeholders but minimizing harm to myself and my own immediate family. It's tempting. And even if it's an implied but not guaranteed promise, it's a shred of hope that I will not be unemployed. So there is that reason to take the deal. The deontological approach would justify that action: reinforce that it's wrong to break my contract with my employer. I should follow through on my promise to them as their paid agent. But what duty do I also have to the other stakeholders? As a press representative I should not lie. I should not deceive or intentionally mislead. Thinking along the lines of consequentialism, a decision that would bring about the best results for the most people, maximizing payoffs to the greater number, would be a more moral approach. What is that worth? The respect of my family and friends definitely has value. The thought of telling – sharing the company's plans regarding the future of the plant and therefore the community - also has merit, but could affect my own future negatively if I go against the company's directive. I need to be true to my professional codes of conduct to guide me in my work, the work that puts food on the table for my daughters, and causes the least harm to the other stakeholders too. It's a hard decision, but I am seeing the bigger picture now.

5. Who's whispering in your ear?

The company is not letting me forget that they helped me through a rough time when I lost my spouse, and also that my climb up the ladder from a secretarial position to the PR position I hold today is something for which I owe my gratitude, if not my loyalty. But my codes of ethics for

my trade are telling me that deception and cover-ups are not acceptable, and that I have a responsibility to the public to provide the truth, fair and unbiased. I am the representative that serves as the conduit of information between the company and the press/the public. If I am withholding information, am I not violating a primary code of ethics of my profession? How can I justify that, in light of my employer's request that I not disclose their big news. If I have any kind of religious upbringing, there is pressure to not lie. Is avoiding a disclosure of the truth in fact a lie? Does protecting the company justify a lie? These are the whisperings in my ear at this initial moment of consideration, and it becomes more than just two competing consciences sitting on my opposite shoulders. Hodges's justification model says that "the deception contemplated must not place innocent people at serious risk." I find myself asking how serious it would be for an entire town to receive a surprise announcement that the major plant in town will not open their doors the next day? What panic will ensue? A whisper in my ear is asking if it's really necessary that it happen that way. Would an early warning provide time for transition plans, causing less of a dramatic impact on many lives and families? John Stuart Mill is whispering in my ear, saying "ethical decisions should seek the greatest amount of happiness or benefit to the greatest number of people while at the same time they should seek to harm the least amount of people." He said decision makers cannot give themselves any special privileges, especially if they are stakeholders in the case at hand, which I am. Okay, that is pretty clear. But what if my telling results in the company being harmed as they say they will be? Mill says we need to ask whether someone who might get harmed actually deserves to be harmed. Does the company deserve what they get? The economic conditions and glut of inexpensive, imported paper products flooding the market was not NPC's fault. The fact that the 60-year old facility could not be retrofitted to meet current environmental standards was not their fault either. It just is a fact, a reason why sadly, they have had to make this decision, and are therefore whispering "don't tell... it can't be helped, and it's important that we finish this last order and we will take care of you for your loyalty." It is a reasonable request. But is it a moral one, considering all stakeholders? Are there other ways it could be handled? And do I really need to sacrifice my own good for the greater good? Media ethicist Kevin Stoker challenged journalists to also consider their duty to themselves, in addition to duties to the truth, to society, and to their organizations. The golden rule whispers in my ear, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I would want to know. I would want time to prepare, to adjust, to network with others and explore ideas and compromises. I'd want that opportunity. I think it's not in the best interests of the community, or even in my own best interests, to keep the plant closure a secret until the last minute. I would like the company to consider a compromise in their gag order, so all stakeholders can have a more even playing field upon which to make plans and move forward.

6. How's your decision going to look?

Will my decision withstand a test of publicity and transparency? After all, I have information that will impact an entire community. Now I am asking myself how my decision is going to look to the community, to my profession, to my family... and yes, to my company... these are all things that are heavy on my mind. If I decide to stay silent, or if I decide to share the information, either way I am accountable for that decision and before moving forward I need to consider that. If I spill the beans and release the announcement to the media and the public, I will be seen as disloyal to my company and have trouble getting other jobs in the field, labeled as whistleblower. Maybe I'll be seen as a hero for a short time by the public, but what will that buy me once the plant is gone and I've moved on too, and the community is left with the inevitable dilemma of rebuilding and regrouping. Will they erect a statue of me in the town square? Is that what I am looking for? If I am silent and just take the new job and abandon ship, I would be shirking my responsibility to the community, to the public, and be grouped among those "blameworthy" for the catastrophic results of the plant closure. That is not something I want. But surely the community (or the company for that matter) won't blame me for looking out for my own family first?? Oh, who am I kidding, of course they will! I need to be ready to defend and explain my choices, and feel good about them, moving forward.

In resolving this case, I have gone through a series of mindsets and re-evaluations over these past several months. Initially I was all for keeping quiet, taking the job in another city, and leaving the community behind to pick up the pieces. It was after all about me and mine primarily, each man for himself. I think I even said in class "it's inevitable, there is nothing I can do to stop it, the town is doomed, I just need to look out for number one." There were going to be absolute winners and losers and I wanted to come out on top - on the winner's side. As I started to look at "who wins, who loses," and expanding my view with some empathy, I saw the impact this approach would have on other stakeholders. It started with my own close relations and expanded to include the community as a whole. The lines between duty vs. the greater good started to blur, and I wondered about a compromise, I started to consider breaking off from the duty side of things, consider the merit of breaking a few rules in order to promote a better solution for more than just myself and my employer. I realized that I too would be a loser if I compromised my own moral codes, selling out and abandoning my values. I want to set a good moral example for my daughters and social responsibility is part of that - it's an opportunity for a long lasting lesson and to perhaps minimize harm that the community would otherwise experience.

My resolution today is to graciously propose that the company gently and empathetically disclose their plans - not in a massive press release at first, but in small department-sized employee meetings, conducted with care and empathy - and explain their position just as they did with the core management team. It's no one's fault. It could not be helped. It is sad but true and we are all in this together. Employ the ethics of care. They could then call upon the workers to join with them in taking the steps toward the sad but inevitable rite of passage that will lead to the plant closure. Transitional plans could be made by all, counseling on continuing medical benefits could be provided, maybe even a job-seeking workshop offered, resume services provided. Recognition can be made for accomplishments of the workers over the years. Give credit where credit is due - it does not have to cost anything and the workers will feel valued, and more positive toward the company. Town meetings can be held, with an open atmosphere of acceptance and an agenda of problem solving, idea sharing - how to move on after NPC pulls out, what alternatives can be explored for the town's future outlook. The plant will still close, but there can be preparation for that. The stock will dip, but it will anyway, and this way there would be some good will to come from it, the company will come out looking better for their caring approach to the closure - and their humane treatment of the work force and the community upon their exit. And like the rest of the community, my daughters and I can move on, sad to see the plant close and the community change, but looking forward to a new start, not ashamed of how we left, proud of our actions and decisions.

Maybe I'll take the company up on their offer of a transfer, but maybe I will find something better elsewhere. Or maybe my loyalty to the company will be even stronger now, because of their responsible and ethical decisions in this case. It's sad that the plant has to close but it would be sadder if it turned into an "us vs. them" situation and I positioned myself on the side of the "winners" while my sister and the rest of the community were on the side of the losers. With this compromise and yes, telling about the plant closure - it's an "us" situation. The company and the workers (and the community) can move forward together. With my sister's skills in real estate, she can get busy helping people with their relocations, starting with my family and hers. Maybe there is a place for her husband at the plant location I'm considering and we can be close together. But for now there is work to do, a final order to get out, and there will be lots of press inquiries for me to answer. With this resolution there are some great opportunities to showcase the company's caring efforts and collaborative steps working with the community. There are recognition awards to publicize and worker's accomplishments to celebrate. Yes it's a sad situation, but it does not have to be an "us vs. them," or an "uncaring company abandons community" story. I can make a difference, I'm not a victim and I'm not powerless. I do have a choice, and with the right tools, I can make moral and ethical decisions that

consider all stakeholders, serving the public, my employer, my family and myself.

One Year Later...

The positive press about NPC's responsible and caring methods in closing the Freedonia plant has resulted in national attention, and several television news programs have featured the story and interviewed town people, government officials, plant workers, on talk shows and documentaries which focus on the loss of American manufacturing jobs to foreign competition and automation. Glenn Beck and Anderson Cooper both put their own spins on the topic, focusing on the erosion of American jobs and craftsmanship. The art department at Freedonia University has leased part of the plant for a summer program on artisan paper making and hired a handful of the former plant workers to teach paper-making processes. NPC leased the plant to the town for \$1 per year rather than sell it, as there were no takers at the time and it was cheaper than moving all the old equipment out at this time. A small crew of veteran plant workers is leasing the rest of the plant from the city, they have retrofitted the manufacturing lines to handle customization and smaller, individual orders. With my help, they launched a website, capitalizing on all the press about the plant closure, and they are fulfilling orders for personalized paper goods, selling to stores who want American made products, customized with their own colors, logo and designs. Their new line was featured on OWN, the new Oprah Winfrey network, and a limited edition line of "red" party goods was launched with the proceeds going to AIDS research. Bono visited the plant and I got a photo of him with my two daughters; they were thrilled. Last week the contract came through from Apple – to produce computer and ipad covers using recycled paper and plastic products, in a variety of designs and graphics from new trendy American artists. Diane Sawyer has been sent out to interview the team, and follow up on the town's progress, and orders are pouring in. My sister has stayed put – business has been good. There was a flurry of selling, and now a flurry of buying, as more artisan-based businesses and individuals become interested in being a part of the American artisan revolution that is occurring in Freedonia. My brother in law is a foreman at the plant, and his daughters are working in the new Starbucks that opened on Main Street, next to the Einstein's Bagels. My sister is the exclusive rep for the new condominium complex that is going up in lower downtown. Me? I commute between my job with NPC out of San Francisco, and my home in Freedonia. My daughters love the condo in San Francisco and stay there when they have time off from school. The oldest one has applied to Berkeley. They are offering scholarships to the children of former NPC employees. NPC was just notified that they have received an award for excellence in responsible business practices from the American Manufacturing Association. I need to get busy writing that press release...

Portion of an answer from student A. S.

4. What's it worth?

When it comes to answering what is it worth, I am forced to look at my values, whether personal or professional. One thing that I have always strived for in my life is to be honest in all my dealings. I have found that it is challenging, but it isn't impossible. One part of being honest is telling the truth and not deceiving others. Are my integrity and my goal to be an honest and truthful person worth relinquishing merely to protect the company that I work for? As discussed in Chapter 6, "Ethics is more than simply choosing right from wrong.... Often the choices are between—or among—equally compelling 'right-versus-right' options."

In the case study, both options would be right, but again, is it worth giving up my integrity? I would have to say that as I looked at Rokeach's list of values, I find that I my main goal is to be honest and trustworthy. This is an "instrumental" value, one that will help me reach all other desired goals in my life. After looking over the many different values that would be challenged by not saying anything, I would have to decide that it isn't worth it for me to give up my integrity.

5. Who's whispering in your ear?

To answer the question regarding who is whispering in my ear, I first decided that I tend to be a consequentialist. I am more focused on the moral status of the outcome than the way the outcome is reached. As I thought about the different philosophies and moral principles presented in chapter 10, I considered John Stewart Mill's expansion on Bentham's theory. Mill suggested:

- a. Some benefits are better than others; some harms worse than others.
- b. Some people need special protection
- c. We should seek higher-level pleasures.

Mill said that some benefits are better than others, and that it is best to seek the greatest good for the greatest amount of people while harming the least amount of people possible.

Mill is whispering in my ear telling me that my decision to tell my family and friends will do the greatest good for the greatest amount of people, while minimizing harm at the same time.

Portion of an answer from student A. S.

5. Who's whispering in your ear?

I see the transparent disclosure of the closing of the plant to be the most mature and ethical move that utilizes a consequential utilitarianism.

Everyone benefits most from the open flow of information. I see a professional, deontological obligation to tell the truth and support the information of the company that employs me. I also can justify a teleological caring approach that treats people as ‘ends’ instead of means to accomplish a selfish goal set by the management of NPC.

Kohlberg’s post-conventional model of development asks for empathy ranging across an integrated and expansive body. It demands a thoughtful consideration of how your actions will be viewed and received by reasonable spectators, as well as an obligation to choose the moral decision, even if it is at a cost to yourself. Carol Gilligan expands the consequentialist view by asking how the decision would affect everyone—while considering the affects to your well being. Her focus is on resisting violence, which results in a lack of care. In this situation a lack of consideration for the residents of Freedonia, of which population personal relationships have developed, would mean a irresponsible ethical choice if you did not reveal the closing of the plant, and the reasons behind its closure.

W.D. Ross begins to give me more guidelines to work by, in the comparison of prima facie and actual duties. In the construct of acting to maintain trust, or repair it where needed, a mature reciprocity to both the company and the stakeholders who work for and are influenced by NPC plant would grant access of true information for the closing of the plant. The social contract presented by John Rawls makes the disclosure more relevant when you place the ‘veil of ignorance’ over your motivations to consider the most meager of stakeholders.

Withholding information will be viewed as lying to some stakeholders in my eyes, because critical steps could have been taken before the plant closed. Applying Sissela Bok’s test of whether to lie, her approach to finding alternatives to lying, or finding a moral justification for your decision still doesn’t fly when put up to the publicity test of reasonable persons.

The test presented by James Rest is where my decision to be transparent would be ultimately grounded. In the end, if I was not holding true to the ‘theories’ of care and utilitarianism, I would not be an established ethical decider. I don’t want to find myself moralizing and justifying my decisions *ad-* or *post-hoc*. I hold this standard as the final lens for making an ethical decision, a reflection back of ‘did I do the right thing?’

6. How’s your decision going to look?

I argue that as the public relations officer, you are accountable to both company and city of Freedonia, but in this instance, the weight of

withholding information is far more dangerous than your obligation to 'do as I'm told' by a company who does not value truth-telling. Considering both ends of the 'loyalty spectrum' between personal and professional, none of the facts presented can be entirely counted on. Your sister's "hot prospects" could all be cold as ice, and the arguments made that "harm to the company" will accompany an accounting of the future of the plant could be just as void. The ethical choice that I would make to 'go public' peels away the emotional connections to family or pressure from superiors at work. In the end, I wouldn't want to maintain loyalty to a company that compensated the loss of my spouse with a hollow advancement in the management. I also would rather maintain the relationships of the people in Freedonia over upper-management threats, because the deontological 'duties' of a public relations professional is to provide accurate information that will better the image of the profession. It becomes an actual duty to 'cry fire' before the city collapses. It will then be my responsibility to receive all the fury of Freedonia, and NPC paper corp. and its managerial staff.

Portion of an answer from student G. H.

5. Who's whispering in my ear?

There are many different and varied philosophers whispering in my ear. You could say I'm a philosophical schizophrenic. First of all, despite the previous question, in this instance I am definitely a consequentialist. The potential outcomes of the situation need to be weighed heavier than the deontological approach can offer. It's too complicated to be "deontologically cut and dried." In this situation I definitely take the utilitarian approach as well. So many people could be adversely affected by this decision. The "greater good" must prevail. But lastly, I mix in the ethics of care. The situation needs to be handled carefully and all sides need to be considered.

6. How's it going to look?

My conclusion: I will warn the paper company big wigs that not telling could really damage public perception and ask for three days to put together a PR plan. The first part of the plan, if there are no time restraints, is to secure the big contract, thus buying more time for everyone. Stage two is a press conference with the entire company and all news outlets invited. In this press conference the CEO of the company will be completely transparent about the reasons for the closing of the factory. After this is over a rally will be scheduled where a political grass-roots game plan will be outlined. The community will either push for an earmark to pay for the necessary adjustments to the smoke stacks or have a new plant built. At the same time the city will pursue options to bond a new plant. The paper company can keep their name on the building, but

since the city, who would shrivel up into a ghost town if the factory were to go under, would become equal partners of their local branch based on the financial risk they were taking. Meanwhile, I would be publicizing our city's battle to stay afloat through blogs, social media, and rallies which would lead to national media exposure. This pressure would either force the company to pony up, or would yield investors and sponsors for a new plant or would force the government's hand. Either way, at the end of the day, the paper company and I are transparent and accountable. The exposure brings greater business despite the cheaper paper being produced elsewhere and, even if it fails, the whole community gets closer together and they get a chance to save their city on their terms. I really feel this plan would pass Bok's publicity test. Everyone has a voice and everyone gets a chance.