

Making Ethical Decisions

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[This version revised November 2002]

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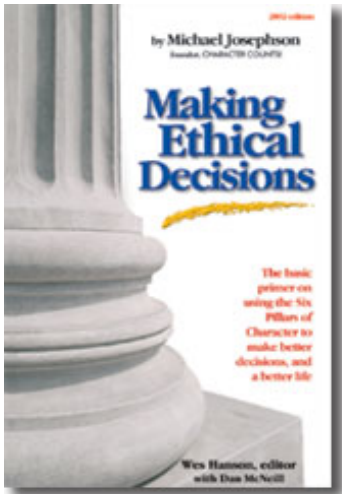
Say you are the widowed parent of three children. You have no immediate family or close friends. A severe recession has left you jobless for 18 months. Your skills are not in demand. Six months ago you started looking outside your field, increasingly willing to take anything. But even minimum wage positions were scarce and did not pay enough for one person to live on, much less four. You're deep in debt and have filed for bankruptcy. The stress has triggered your diabetes; you have no medical coverage. You are three months overdue on the rent and have been served with an eviction notice. You've been trying to keep a cheerful, hopeful attitude for your children, who so far don't know the extent of the family's woes.

Now a job you applied for 12 months ago has come up. The salary is higher than any you've ever received and the benefits package would cover your whole family. You are told the choice is between you and one other person, but you have to swear in writing that you have never taken illegal drugs. Trouble is, you have. You used to smoke marijuana, not a lot, but regularly. You have never taken any other illegal drug and you don't use marijuana anymore either — but that hasn't changed your opinion that it is absurd and hypocritical that marijuana is illegal while alcohol and nicotine — which every year kill millions and cost society billions — aren't.

So, do you lie on the application?

Few choices we face are so difficult, but you get the point: being ethical isn't always easy. Yet it is always important. For we live with a common truth: everything we say and do represents a choice, and how we decide determines the shape of our lives.

Making ethical decisions requires the ability to make distinctions



The Josephson Institute's popular primer, [MAKING](#)

[ETHICAL DECISIONS](#), available [for purchase here](#).

between competing choices. It requires training, in the home and beyond. That's where this booklet comes in. *Making Ethical Decisions* is a blueprint to help the reader arrive at sound decisions. For more than a dozen years, various versions of this publication have served as the basic primer of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, a nonprofit teaching, training and consulting organization based in Marina del Rey, California, and active nationwide. The Institute advocates principled decision-making based on six values that cut across time, culture, politics, religion, ethnicity and other human division. These values, called the "Six Pillars of Character," are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and good citizenship (responsible participation in society). The Six Pillars are the basis of ethically defensible decisions and the foundation of well-lived lives.

This edition of *Making Ethical Decisions* represents a substantial re-working of earlier editions, offering new examples and intensifying the focus on discernment, discipline and effectiveness as vital elements of ethical decision making.

Yet however much the material is reworked, the real work remains with you. No one can simply read about ethics and become ethical. It's not that easy. People have to make many decisions under economic, professional and social pressure. Rationalization and laziness are constant temptations. But making ethical decisions is worth it, if you want a better life and a better world. Keep in mind that whether for good or ill, change is always just a decision away.

— *Wes Hanson,*
editor

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1. MAKING SENSE OF ETHICS

- What Is Ethics?
- The Importance of Universality
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- From Values to Principles
- Ethics and Action
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 - Loyalty
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- Recognizing Important Decisions
- Good Decisions Are Both Ethical and Effective
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- Where Does Character Come From?
- On Happiness

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