The Moral Compass, the Ethical Journey, the Map and the Territory: Examining Personal and Professional Values, Morals and Ethics in Educational Leadership

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What does it mean to behave in an "ethical" or "moral" way? How does your belief impact you as a future administrator?

To behave ethically is different than to act morally. Anyone who lived through the 1980s can explain the era of the Moral Majority – a group of conservative politicians bent on making their code of morals a governance of the collective conscience. The collective conscience rebelled. That is the problem with morality – it cannot be governed; it cannot govern.

Morals

Morals are a set of guiding principles that a person holds as their code of conduct either because of their upbringing, religious or spiritual beliefs, or situational wisdom. Morals guide decision-making, life choices, and personal involvement. Morality is an emotion-fueled label. Abortion is immoral until a story of a young mother pregnant with her second, so-loved child falls on ears that learn she had made no amniotic fluid, the child, Evan, had no skin, his lungs were exposed, and when he was born, his life would be five minutes of unbearable, horrific pain. She tells this story with tears streaming down her face as she describes leaving for the airport at 5 a.m., arriving in Washington, D.C., being met by a car, taken to a clinic, having a shot to terminate the pregnancy, being taken back to airport, landing in Kansas City, and going to the hospital to deliver her dead child. I am morally opposed to abortion, as a follower of Jesus Christ, that is a moral based on spiritual belief. But I do not believe that this mother is a murderer. The problem with morality is that instead of applying grace, which should be the platform that bolsters and supports morality, we use judgment. Morality as a wall, morality as a weapon, morality as a means of enforcing cruelty, and imposing judgment were never the societal intent.

Ethics

Ethics are the clinical version of morality. Ethics are often more scholarly and less emotional when used together by politicians and other professional persuaders. People love their moral compass and their code of ethics. In journalism, students are taught that the law is the minimum implementation of ethical jurisdiction. What is legal may not be ethical, and what is ethical may not be moral. What is moral may not be legal. A vicious circle of hard lines drawn in the sand, humanity takes a collective breath, and the sands shift. Ethics, though more clinical, is also more abstract than morals. What exactly is the ethical treatment of animals? Giving them food, shelter, and water – the same components of the ethical treatment of humans. Yet more is implied, and the circle comes around to the abstraction of what defines "more."

How will ethics and morals impact you as a future administrator?

As a future administrator, morals and ethics and what I believe must be put aside as I will adopt a separate code of ethics and moral compass that will put the well-being of the students, the best interests of the parents, and the overall climate and culture of the school before asking myself what I would do, personally. Is this possible? It must be. Imposing my morals and ethics on a school or community is unethical in and of itself. A persona that I wear at school must exist – more than likely, and it will be more liberal than my own set of morals and ethics. However, I believe I can be guided professionally by the core of my personal beliefs: a servant's heart is more significant than a scholar's mind.

Personal Values

1. You become a survivor when you stand to your feet and leave the victim on the floor.

   There have been a million reasons for me to be less. Some days, it is a daily battle. But I

will leave a legacy of victory, personal victory. I tell my story with pride because I know how to fall and rise, and those are the things I want to inspire others.

2. Rudeness is the weak person's version of strength. Kindness is strength. *Don't take it personally because then you become tied to that person. Recognize what you are dealing with; anger, negativity, and rudeness come from a burgeoning fear that rules that person at the base of who they are.*
3. The world deserves the best version of you every day. *Sometimes, it gets it, sometimes it doesn't, but I try to talk myself into where I see and understand my worth every day. I share this dialogue with my students and love seeing them own the best versions of themselves.*
4. Fight. Harder. *Life is pain. Anyone who says differently is either selling something or trying to get your vote. It doesn't matter. Those small, flittering moments of joy are worth all of the skirmishes. Pick up the sword and go forth, but remember, that sword isn't for starting battles but for self-defense.*

Professional Values

1. Everybody hurts. Don't be the reason. *I have been under the feet of some poor leaders in my lifetime. It took me a long time to learn that they would become disinterested if I stayed still and played dead. I realized that I wasn't playing dead; I was allowing parts of myself to die. With time and distance, I could forgive myself for being weak. I was able to forgive them for being even more fragile.*
2. Do everything you can with everything you have on every single day of your life. *I want to be an encourager. I want to be kind to my coworkers and good to my students. I want the climate and culture in my building to be so desirable that people line up to work*

there. I want to go the extra mile so people understand that I am genuinely invested in what they are giving to our culture.

3. Work is what you do, not what you are. *When people ask, "What do you do?" I often find myself answering using teaching as an identifier: "I'm a teacher." My whole identity was in turmoil when going through particularly challenging times and situations at work. That was when I learned to separate myself from my profession. I am a teacher, but I am also a writer, a mother, a friend, a student, a singer, a lover of laughter, and many other things. I teach and love what I do, but to maintain a personal level of sanity, I had to learn that I am NOT what I do.*
4. Serve those who deserve it, but most importantly, serve those who don't. *This does not mean subservience or allowing yourself to be belittled. This is a mindset that you look beyond people's actions and try to find the good in everyone. Sometimes, it takes binoculars, sometimes a microscope. Still, it is always there, and if you can see that goodness, you can temper the negative feelings and develop a working relationship.*

Why must the values of others (students, parents, patrons - be specific how each group is impacted) be considered in developing policies and making decisions?

We must never forget that, above all else, we are serving. We are living our mission through our passion. At the core of that mission are those that we serve.

Students

We are creating the future every single day. We must consider all those watching us to provide a moral compass and be good role models. We must consider students' values and be cautious with our personal values instead of creating a value-centered environment without consideration of others. Fairness, but not privilege, is equity that levels the playing field and

ultimately elevates each student to their best level of performance. We must consider that imposing personal values on students who bring their own values causes a rift that will disturb the educational process. As we set policies and develop procedures, it is essential to understand that we must address universality with an open specificity so that students feel comfortable and invested.

Parents

Parents' values are more likely to be those that become the breeding ground of conflict. The protection of their children is an obvious value that must be addressed. The concept of bullying and how we deal both with the victim and the perpetrator is just one example of where values often conflict. We are called to educate both the bully and the victim, and we cannot forget that both parents will expect justice.

We must seek common ground by listening to our students' parents, finding their values, and treating them with dignity. If a parent does not share or at least can understand the values of the educators teaching their child, that is a cause for concern. We must communicate our values and be open to communication from parents about their own value system to educate their students in a safe, nurturing environment where both students and parents are heard and appreciated.

Patrons

Without the community's support, the school might as well be an island, isolated and cut off. The values of a school should be the extension of the values of the community in an ideal world. We don't live in a perfect world, so educators must be willing and ready to communicate our system of values to our patrons. We risk losing their support if they do not support the school and its mission. Values become the communicative bridge between patrons and the school within

the community. Transparency, for example, must be a shared responsibility between the community and the school. *Is this a tax-free bond issue, or is this a bond issue that we don't pay for now but that our great-grandchildren will continue to pay for?* This is a situation that is happening now in the town where I live, and the community, despite the intentions of the school to use the money for necessary capital projects, has been burned by the district in the past. The transparency wasn't and isn't there, and it is doubtful the tax-free bond issue will pass.

Why must issues of diversity and equity in a democratic society be considered in developing a system of ethical decision-making?

The key word in this question is "democratic." We must seek a system of ethics that is of the people, by the people, and for the people. And that represents challenges when "the people" are from different schools of thought on what democracy looks like in the current societal construct.

Diversity

1. In a democratic society, diversity pushes us to think with a more extensive scope and a more empathetic mind. "The people" are no longer just people. They are representatives of cultures, traditions, and, unfortunately, stereotypes that have long been held as beliefs. Diversity in democracy pushes us to move to the center of a circle and look around instead of standing at one end of a line and craning our necks to see down the line. Diversity in democracy requires a holistic, birds-eye view.
2. Diversity teaches us to be better problem solvers. How do we organize value systems and communications that speak to all cultures our students represent? Democracy is easy; the majority rules. But what if fragments of other cultures make up the

majority? We can no longer look at the pie graph and say the majority is the most significant piece of solid color.

3. Diversity is quite literally the exact thing that democracy was created to protect. Most historic democratic movements concerning governance, not party, were born out of a diverse culture seeking freedom to remain diverse. There is a cycle to diversity and democracy – diversity leads to democracy, which in turn invites diversity, and it continues to move in that manner.

Equity

1. Equity is what we must do before democracy can be effective. We must create opportunities for understanding and knowledge that allow systems to function democratically. If you look at it from a mathematical point of view, it is not about averages. We are not seeking to take away from some to give to others – that is not equity. Equity is about reaching a mean, a place where, on paper, there is a higher frequency of the advantage and a lower frequency of the disadvantage.

2. Democracy without equity is an oligarchy from the top down. We can employ rules of democracy, but if we don't first address the issues that keep all involved in the process from having the same opportunity, that is innate favoritism and suppression. I think about this in terms of voting. You must be 18 and a citizen of the country to vote in a presidential election. There is nothing we can do to make a human being who is 15 become an 18-year-old. However, if that 18-year-old wants to become a citizen because of democracy, we have a way to make that happen. Granted, it may be an old system that needs to be overhauled, but there is still a system in place to work with.

3. Equity does not mean privilege; democracy must recognize this. I debated about whether to include this, but after speaking with some of my friends who are gay and lesbian, I felt I needed to. My dear friend, Kat, who has three boys in public school, answered the question that I posed to her as follows:

> "As a lesbian in a town of this size, I have fought to overcome so much prejudice and hate. I feared for my boys when they started school. I showed up for everything, not because I wanted to be the mother of the year, but because I wanted to protect them. We fought so long and so hard just to be able to exist in this society that I am now a lesbian who is not recognized as part of THIS community, but as part of this new organization of drag queens and seven-year-olds who want to identify as animals or trans middle-schoolers who want to change their names and identify as something else. All I ever wanted to identify as was myself. I don't want to deny anyone their inalienable rights, but we fought and hurt and cried for equality, and now I feel like this new generation is taking our fight and using it to obtain privilege."

Personal Code of Ethics

- I will ground myself in my relationship with God. *This does not mean I will force nor expect others to believe as I do. I will offer love, grace, encouragement, and love to others because I am loved and forgiven.*
- I will be resilient. *This does not mean that I will not fail. I will fail, but it will be a fertile failure instead of a futile failure.*
- I will serve others. *This does not mean that I will allow others to use me, but I will allow God to use me and ask for His wisdom in discernment.*
- I will honor my creativity. *I will make time to use the gifts I have been given and honor the opportunities when presented to use them to memorialize, honor, and entertain others.*
- I will accept that what is for me will not pass me. *I will trust the plan and the path and remember that the map is not the territory.*
- I will not seek revenge or to avenge others. *This does not mean that I will not seek justice for myself or others; I will not operate from a place of malice and malignment.*
- I will speak the truth in love. *I will say the things that need to be said, even what might be hurtful. I will never say these things and leave the person to suffer. I will be compassionate about the truth and honest about love, surpassing the actions of a moment.*
- I will embody joy, sharing, seeking, and choosing it.

How will this personal code of ethics impact me as an administrator?

Being guided by personal ethics in the professional world can be a slippery slope, so I developed this ethical code that embodies me at my best. Nothing in the personal code of ethics would preclude me from doing my job as an administrator. I do not have to hang a cross on the wall to be in good stead with God. I do not believe that being a writer or making a piece of jewelry will take away from my job performance.

A personal code of ethics is just that, personal. If you have to hang them on the wall of your office to remind you about them, this was just another assignment on the way to the diploma. For me, this is serious – I spent a whole week jotting things down when they came to me and revising. I feel my ethics will bolster my performance as an administrator because they are all centered in the make-up of my character.

Professional Code of Ethics

- I will create a positive climate and culture for teachers and students.
- I will hold transparency in high regard and strive always to achieve it as the law allows.
- I will not hinder teachers and other faculty and staff when performing their duties or seeking to better themselves.
- I will treat all people who cross my path with dignity.
- I will make a concerted effort not to favor one group or person over another.
- I will not allow a retaliatory or vengeful atmosphere to smother the authentic and organic work required of all who serve the community.
- I will seek to honor the best in all who encounter me.
- I will maintain positive relationships through honesty and service.
- I will listen, focusing only on what is being said and not formulating the following statement in my head.
- I will appreciate what everyone offers, but make no promises I cannot keep.
- I will protect those who are under my charge and my supervision.
- I will never stop learning.
- I will never stop teaching.
- Regardless of the situation, I will be humble and gracious in dealing with everyone.

How will this professional code of ethics impact me as an administrator?

Of all the assignments I have completed throughout this degree program, this one profoundly impacted where I stand and will stand as an educator. The reflection process for this was brutal; I went back through documentation and relived moments I had tucked away to forget to examine how upper admin treated me as the lesser of two parties in many instances. It was easier to explore what I did not want to become as an administrator than to project a hope of what I wanted to be.

I look at the timeline that stretches behind me, the 15 years of teaching, the bruises that still live under the skin, and I honestly wonder who would ever want me as an administrator. Then, I pieced together my code of professional ethics, and I realized that teachers might wish to have me as their administrator. Maybe some frustrated parents would want me to be their school's principal. Some students might benefit from what I have to offer. So, while I reflect on how these ethics will impact me as an administrator, I cannot help but think that if I am doing it right, they will affect my community in a positive way more than they impact me. They are my touchstones now, a legend to a map that will guide me to being a good leader. I think that is what professional ethics are supposed to do – be the invisible thread tied to the solidity that keeps us from getting lost in the dark.