


Qualities *of the Good* Leadership



God could live
anywhere in the world
but he chose to live
within your
heart.

The Holy Seed Church



QUALITIES OF A GOOD LEADERS

Introduction

Reliability is one of the most important elements of test quality. It has to do with the consistency, or reproducibility, of an examinee's performance on the test. For example, if you were to administer a test with high reliability to an examinee on two occasions, you would be very likely to reach the same conclusions about the examinee's performance both times. A test with poor reliability, on the other hand, might result in very different scores for the examinee across the two test administrations. If a test yields inconsistent scores, it may be unethical to take any substantive actions on the basis of the test. There are several methods for computing test reliability including test-retest reliability, parallel forms reliability, decision consistency, internal consistency, and interrater reliability. For many criterion-referenced tests decision consistency is often an appropriate choice.

Types of Reliability

1. Test-Retest Reliability

To estimate test-retest reliability, you must administer a test form to a single group of examinees on two separate occasions. Typically, the two separate administrations are only a few days or a few weeks apart; the time should be short enough so that the examinees' skills in the area being assessed have not changed through additional learning. The relationship between the examinees' scores from the two different administrations is estimated, through statistical correlation, to determine how similar the scores are. This type of reliability demonstrates the extent to which a test is able to produce stable, consistent scores across time.

2. Parallel Forms Reliability

Many exam programs develop multiple, parallel forms of an exam to help provide test security. These parallel forms are all constructed to match the test blueprint, and the parallel test forms are constructed to be similar in average item difficulty. Parallel forms reliability is estimated by administering both forms of the exam to the same group of examinees. While the time between the two test administrations should be short, it does need to be long enough so that examinees' scores are not affected by fatigue. The examinees' scores on the two test forms are correlated in order to determine how similarly the two test forms function. This reliability estimate is a measure of how consistent examinees' scores can be expected to be across test forms.

3. Decision Consistency

In the descriptions of test-retest and parallel forms reliability given above, the consistency or dependability of the *test scores* was emphasized. For many criterion referenced tests (CRTs) a more useful way to think about reliability may be in terms of examinees' *classifications*. For example, a typical CRT will result in an examinee being classified as either a master or non-master; the examinee will either pass or fail the test. It is the reliability of this classification decision that is estimated in decision consistency reliability. If an examinee is classified as a master on both test administrations, or as a non-master on both occasions, the test is producing consistent decisions. This approach can be used either with parallel forms or with a single form administered twice in test-retest fashion.

4. Internal Consistency

The internal consistency measure of reliability is frequently used for norm referenced tests (NRTs). This method has the advantage of being able to be conducted using a single

form given at a single administration. The internal consistency method estimates how well the set of items on a test correlate with one another; that is, how similar the items on

a test form are to one another. Many test analysis software programs produce this reliability estimate automatically. However, two common differences between NRTs and CRTs make this method of reliability estimation less useful for CRTs. First, because CRTs

are typically designed to have a much narrower range of item difficulty, and examinee scores, the value of the reliability estimate will tend to be lower. Additionally, CRTs are often designed to measure a broader range of content; this results in a set of items that are not necessarily closely related to each other. This aspect of CRT test design will also

produce a lower reliability estimate than would be seen on a typical NRT.

Interrater Reliability

All of the methods for estimating reliability discussed thus far are intended to be used for

objective tests. When a test includes performance tasks, or other items that need to be scored by human raters, then the reliability of those raters must be estimated. This reliability method asks the question, "If multiple raters scored a single examinee's performance, would the examinee receive the same score. Interrater reliability provides a

measure of the dependability or consistency of scores that might be expected across raters.

Summary

Test reliability is the aspect of test quality concerned with whether or not a test produces consistent results. While there are several methods for estimating test reliability, for objective CRTs the most useful types are probably test-retest reliability, parallel forms reliability, and decision consistency. A type of reliability that is more useful for NRTs is internal consistency. For performance-based tests, and other tests that use human raters, interrater reliability is likely to be the most appropriate method.

Responsibility and Accountability

Thomas Bivins

"The Buck Stops Here"

Sign on President Harry S. Truman's desk

Human beings seek accountability. People want to know who is responsible for certain actions and who is accountable for the consequences of those actions. Harry Truman referred to his famous desk sign on more than one occasion to point out that responsibility, in the end, must be taken by someone—some identifiable person must be held to account. Truman was willing to accept that accountability.

Increasingly today, people are more likely to ask, "Where exactly does the buck stop, or does it ever stop?" In the wake of a multitude of recent corporate scandals, commentary has been rife with questions of responsibility and accountability; however, much of that discussion has been carried on without clear knowledge of the definitional differences between the two terms and the significance of those differences. Of public relations in particular it might be asked, "Why weren't you standing guard?" which is a simplified way of asking, "What is public relations

responsible for, and for what is it accountable?" Unfortunately, there is no common perception—at least among business leaders, public relations professionals, and scholars—as to exactly what constitutes both responsibility and accountability, and therein lies the rub.

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Responsibility versus Accountability

The roles taken on by public relations practitioners imply a responsibility to perform certain functions associated with those roles. Business historian Vincent E. Barry has defined the term responsibility, when used in business affairs, as referring to "a sphere of duty or obligation assigned to a person by the nature of that person's position, function, or work."¹ Responsibility could thus be viewed as a bundle of obligations associated with a job or function. Narrowly defined, role refers to a job description, which, in turn, encompasses, but is not limited to, function. For instance, a practitioner's role may be that of media relations. Function would refer to the specifics of the job, including press release writing and dissemination, as well as the maintenance of good media relations. In this sense, responsibility refers to more than just the primary function of a role; it refers to the multiple facets of that function—both processes and outcomes (and the consequences of the acts performed as part of that bundle of obligations). A responsible actor may be seen as one whose job involves a predetermined set of obligations that must be met in order for the job to be accomplished. For example, the primary functional obligation of someone involved in media relations is the same as cited in the foregoing sentence: to maintain a good working relationship with the media in order to respond to queries and to successfully work with them to "get out the message." In many cases, simply discharging this primary obligation (the function associated with the role) may be sufficient unto itself; however, responsibility can also include moral obligations that are in addition and usually related to the functional obligations of the role.

Thus, responsibility assumes that the For example, the moral obligations of the role of a media relations specialist might include such admonitions as "don't lie to the media" and "use language responsibly, free from intentional obfuscation." These moral obligations are naturally joined to the parallel functional obligations associated with the role. Responsibility, then, is composed of a duty to discharge not only the functional obligations of role, but also the moral obligations. In addition, teleological (consequential) considerations tend to demand a level of accountability commensurate with the level of responsibility. In other words, if it is the job of a media relations specialist to carry out the primary functions outlined above, shouldn't that person be held accountable for mismanaged information, bad publicity, lack of credibility, or other troubles associated with the functional obligations? If responsibility is defined as a bundle of obligations, functional and moral, associated with a role, then accountability might be defined as "blaming or crediting someone for an action"—normally an action associated with a recognized responsibility.³ A problem arises, however, in that while responsibility and accountability are often conflated, and admittedly importantly linked, they are not identical by definition or moral implication.

According to ethics activist Geoff Hunt, accountability is the readiness or preparedness to give an explanation or justification to relevant others (stakeholders) for one's judgments, intentions, acts and omissions when appropriately called upon to do so. It is [also] a readiness to have one's actions judged by others and, where appropriate, accept responsibility for errors,

misjudgments and negligence and recognition for competence, conscientiousness, excellence and wisdom. It is a preparedness to change in the light of improved understanding gained from others.⁴

The simplest formula is that a person can be held accountable if (1) the person is functionally and/or morally responsible for an action, (2) some harm occurred due to that action, and (3) the responsible person had no legitimate excuse for the action. Ideally, the assumption would then be to hold a person who is responsible for an action also accountable for the results of that action. That, however, may not always be the case.

This position assumes that the responsible person is relatively autonomous, or free to make decisions associated with his or her job without outside pressure or influence. And, under normal circumstances, one would hope that public relations practitioners would have that autonomy. However, Bivins—2102-Fitzpatrick.qxd 1/27/2006 8:11 PM the nature of autonomy often changes with the environment in which a public relations person works, and is certainly affected by the role and the functions associated with that role.

Responsibility and Autonomy

Most professions stress autonomy among their members. Being able to perform work free from interference (especially from those with less expertise) is vital to being a successful professional. After all, most professionals are hired exactly because their expertise is needed. As philosopher John Christman notes, to be autonomous, by most accounts, is to be oneself, to be directed by considerations, desires, conditions, and characteristics that are not simply imposed externally upon one, but are part of what can somehow be considered one's authentic self. Autonomy in this sense seems an irrefutable value, especially since its opposite—being guided by forces external to the self and which one cannot authentically embrace—seems to mark the height of oppression.

There are several ways to look at autonomy as it relates to responsibility and accountability. Philosopher and ethicist Mitchell Haney suggests that the moral community is composed of two kinds of actors: responsible actors and accountable actors. Responsibility is viewed within this model as having a higher level of autonomy by nature in that it implies the actor is able to "self-oversee, self-regulate, and self-motivate responsive adjustments to maintain adherence with appropriate moral standards of action."⁶ "Responsible actors need not depend on external or mediated motivational pressure for responsive adjustment. [They are] expected to be motivated to correct harms and reduce future risk of harms without external or mediated pressure to do so."⁷

Under this formulation, the actor (moral agent) has the capacity to impose moral law on herself, thus achieving a level of "moral autonomy" we would hope to associate normally with professional status. This somewhat Kantian model supposes that we understand ourselves as free, reasoning individuals—invoking a mandate of both self-respect and respect for others (but not control by others).

Freedom means lacking barriers to our action that are in any way external to our will, though it also requires that we use a law to guide our decisions, a law that can come to us only by an act of our own will. This selfimposition of the moral law is

autonomy.⁸ According to business ethicist Norman Bowie, if a person is a responsible, autonomous adult, that person can be viewed as a moral agent, directly.

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accountable for his or her actions. "A responsible being is a being who can make choices according to his or her own insights. He or she is not under the control of others."⁹

On the other hand, the accountable actor is "held to external oversight, regulation, and mechanisms of punishment aimed to externally motivate responsive adjustment in order to maintain adherence with appropriate moral standards of action." This responsible-/accountable-actor model assumes a dichotomy in which responsible actors, because of moral maturity, are capable of self-motivation in their responsive adjustments for actions they have performed, while accountable actors must rely on external pressure (blame or credit) for this adjustment. This is similar to the "consequentialist" versus "merit" positions on moral responsibility. The consequentialist view holds that the actions of moral agents can be influenced by outward expressions of praise or blame in order to affect certain behaviors (accountable actors), while the merit view assumes moral agents can and do recognize their choices and make their own decisions (responsible actors).

The theory of the accountable actor uses what might be termed a behaviorist approach, which seems to suggest that people are motivated and shaped by forces external to themselves. Certainly people are motivated, at least in part, by rewards and punishments; however, even those considered accountable rather than responsible actors generally have a developed moral sense and a fair idea of social conventions and moral principles. The problem arises when people are affected by forces beyond their control, forces that may even affect the level at which they reason. As philosopher and ethicist Kevin Gibson points out, "Indeed, in the presence of some external factors, individuals may not actively reason at all, but work according to habit or obedience without a thought."

So, in addition to responsible actors being imbued with the ability and the freedom to make self-regulating decisions, they are also able to motivate (free of outside pressure) their own responsive adjustments to situations in which their decisions have had an impact. This is what separates them from accountable actors, who must rely on external oversight for motivation to respond and adjust. However, while this scenario may be appealing in theory, the ability to respond based entirely on self-motivation (or autonomy) is also limited by role and environment.

Environment, Role, and Autonomy

Responsibility can be, and often is, determined by role; however, the environment in which the public relations professional works and the degree of autonomy allowed by that environment have a great deal to do with accountability. Chief among the commonly recognized environments in which public Bivins—23 02-Fitzpatrick.qxd 1/27/2006 8:11 PM relations practitioners work are agencies (or firms) or they might be employed as full-time staff within an organization or corporation, or as independent counselors. Most public relations practitioners, and many researchers, agree that

the independent public relations counsel enjoys the greatest degree of autonomy.¹³ Of all the roles in public relations, this is the only one not subsumed within a larger, bureaucratic system—either corporate or agency. Clients hiring such “independent” counselors usually do so out of need for autonomous, professional advice, and by so doing accept the professional recommendations of that person as, at the very least, sound opinion. Independent public relations counsel might be said to be the most autonomous of the roles within the practice, if for no other reason than the lack of bureaucratic entanglements. Because of the level of autonomy normally associated with this role, it may also be the most professional of the roles within public relations. And, as Hunt points out.

Accountability in the professional context is about answering to clients, professional colleagues and other relevant professionals. The demand to give an account of one’s judgments, acts and omissions arises from the nature of the professional-client and the professional-professional relationships.¹⁴

However, public relations is not just a counseling profession; it can also be said to be an advocacy-oriented practice. To advocate is to take up the cause of another and to work on that other’s behalf to promote that cause. One of the key differences between the roles of advocate and counselor is the degree of autonomy allowed to each by the nature of the role. Remember, the general assumption is that autonomy is a highly valued component of professionalism; however, for the advocate, autonomy is not particularly valued or desired. In fact, for the advocate, a more desirable trait might be loyalty.

Most businesspeople would argue that loyalty is indeed one of the chief duties of an employee, and, in fact, being a “team player” is highly regarded in the business world. As a team player, the public relations practitioner is generally expected to follow the directions of the team leader without argument. Thus, advocates are expected to be subjective—that is the nature of advocacy. Subjectivity brings with it an implicit understanding that one’s first allegiance is to the client, or employer. To advocates fall the job of bringing skills of persuasion to bear through methods and on issues often predetermined by management. Since they had no hand in arriving at either the focus or the nature of their advocacy, can they be expected to consider the broader implications of their actions? And, to what degree are they accountable for unjust or immoral acts in which they may have been used as instruments?

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Part of the assumption of advocacy is that the advocate takes up the client’s cause fully, without any value judgment toward the client himself. Advocates use their

expertise to advance a client's cause. Thus, advocacy often fits well into what is known as the "agency" model of the professional client relationship.

Agency and Advocacy

Under the agency model, a professional acts most often under the direction of the client. Public relations firms, for instance, may put together elaborate campaigns to serve their client's interests; however, the client picks the agency, determines what exactly will be "marketed," and decides whether or not to use the ideas generated by the agency. The agency model most clearly exemplifies what legal scholar W. H. Simon calls the "ideology of advocacy."

This ideology assumes two principles of conduct: (1) that a professional is neutral or detached from the client's purposes, and (2) that the professional is an aggressive partisan of the client working to advance the client's ends.¹⁶ The argument is that advocacy is ideologically "blinded" to ethical considerations outside those of the client.¹⁷ Such a construct thus allows professionals to absolve themselves of moral responsibility for the client's ethical shortcomings, thus shifting accountability from the professional to the client. In addition, responsibility under this model is mostly functional and links the professional to the client by an obligation to perform to the best of her or his ability on the client's behalf.

To cite a moral responsibility here would generally serve no practical purpose. Attorneys, for example, are bound only to observe the restraints of law as they "zealously" advocate on their client's behalf. Obviously, this ideology would work well for professions such as the law, in which even unpopular causes would sometimes need to be defended. Without such an ideology, these causes might go unrepresented. But what about other professions such as public relations?

There are several reasons why the agency model is not suitable for most professions, including public relations. First, public relations professionals are variously obligated morally. These obligations cannot be discharged properly if all decisions are left to the client. Despite the commonly voiced belief that the primary loyalty of public relations practitioners is to the client, we know that significant moral concerns can arise from ignoring third parties. Second, the agency model seriously decreases professional autonomy. Most professionals would object strenuously to abdicating their decision-making authority. Finally, professionals may accept or reject clients.

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who do not meet their moral standards. According to ethicist Michael Bayles, "Professionals must be ethically free and responsible persons."¹⁸ The author Dorothy Emmet has described a profession as that which "carries with it the notion of a standard of performance, it is not only a way of making a living, but one in which the practitioners have a fiduciary trust to maintain certain standards." Aside from the expectations that a professional will possess a certain technical ability, "professional competence has to be joined with professional integrity." In other words, "the more professional a job, the greater the responsibilities that go with

it.”¹⁹ Again, the definition of a professional has to carry with it the freedom of autonomy.

The German ethicist and philosopher Immanuel Kant stated as a categorical imperative that all humans should be treated as ends and never merely as means. Broadly speaking, this can be construed to mean that obligations arising out of agreements between professionals can be assumed to have been the result of negotiations between responsible, autonomous adults. Bivins argued that public relations practitioners operating as advocates may indeed be “ethically free and responsible persons,” and suggested that advocacy may be an ethically responsible activity if practiced from within what Bayles calls the “fiduciary” model of the professional-client relationship.²⁰ In fact, Bayles suggests that the fiduciary model of service best fits the true role of the professional.²¹ In this model, a client’s consent and judgment are required and he or she participates in the decision-making process.

The key to the model is the nature of the decision-making process in which the client consents to proposals rather than decides. For the process to work, the client must trust the professional to accurately analyze the problem, canvass the feasible alternatives, know as well as one can their likely consequences, fully convey this information to the client, perhaps make a recommendation, and work honestly and loyally for the client to effectuate the chosen alternatives.²² This model allows clients as much freedom to determine how their lives are affected as is reasonably warranted on the basis of their ability to make decisions. To the degree that the client is incapable of making an informed decision, it is incumbent upon the professional to educate them to a point at which they are capable of decision making on their own behalf. In this sense, the relationship between the professional and the client might be said to be symmetric, requiring both mutual understanding and cooperation.

Clearly, this model must be based on a trust relationship, thus further obligating the professional morally as well as functionally. Under this model, it could be fairly stated that both the functional and moral responsibilities of the public relations professional toward the client are discharged in consort with the client. But what about the functional and moral responsibilities toward affected third parties? Practically all.

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professions recognize third-party obligations, and if advocacy is to be considered a legitimate function of public relations, then there must be a way to recognize those moral responsibilities.

The function of advocacy, as it pertains to public relations, can remain a professional role responsible to client interests, professional interests, and third-party interests only if the professional includes a preliminary stage in the process of accepting a client’s issue. Under the fiduciary model described above, the public relations professional as potential advocate may be hired, for example, because of her or his expertise in the field of audience analysis, knowledge of the most efficacious persuasive techniques, and the proper methods of dissemination. It is generally accepted that the first job of public relations professionals is to establish a thorough understanding of the issue that they may be addressing on behalf of the potential client. Without that assessment, no professional should ethically proceed

to undertake the role of advocate and the moral responsibility that role implies. Thus, a proper ordering of priorities would place a thorough understanding of the issue at the top of the list preceding any attempt at campaign development or even audience analysis.

The role of autonomous professional assumes a certain level of objectivity in the sense of an ability, in the Kantian implication of the term, to use reason to determine action. As Australian philosopher Will Barrett points out, The sources of moral responsibility—the grounds on which moral responsibilities can be ascribed to agents—include our past actions, our roles, and our developed moral agency. The last of these—being capable of recognising [sic] the force of moral reasons, and of responding to them—is a pre-requisite for the other two sources of moral responsibility, and so of accountability [emphasis added].²³ By contrast, the role of advocate assumes a certain amount of subjectivity in the sense of one-sidedness of purpose and lack of consideration for third-party interests.

However, objectivity and subjectivity, although often at odds, are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and the public relations professional may, in fact, be both objective and subjective. The key is the order of approach. Objectivity, or the capability and freedom to be objective, is certainly one of the benefits of autonomy, and should be brought to bear in the early stages of counseling the client—the period in which a thorough understanding of the issue is obtained. It is during this stage that the public relations professional will determine the ramifications of the proposed actions and their effect on all parties.

Agency and Advocacy

During this stage, the public relations professional may apply any of several applicable ethical theories to the proposed act in order to determine if the act itself (means) and the outcome (ends) are morally responsible. Deontologically (dealing with the means), several standards may be applied, including a determination of the legality of the act (whether it violates existing laws or applicable regulations), company procedures and policies or organizational codes, and any codes or standards existing for the profession—in this case, the Public Relations Society of America's Code of Ethics. Although this procedure will merely provide professionals with guidelines, assuming that all that is legally or professionally permissible may not be ethically permissible, these will at least allow them to advance to succeeding evaluative stages. Teleologically (dealing with the consequences, or ends), public relations professionals may apply standard cost-benefit analysis to the issue, determining the potential financial consequences of the act to the client and the affected third parties. Beyond these monetary considerations, they may attempt to determine societal effects. If, after such applications, professionals determine that the act itself, the intent of the act, and the potential consequences of the act are morally acceptable, then they may proceed with a clear conscience to the succeeding "subjective" stages of advocacy. From this point on, the objective, professional public relations counselor may become the subjective, professional public relations advocate.

Thus, the requirements of subjective advocacy may be honorably met only after the ethical requirements of objective counseling are met. To insinuate that advocacy may take place without a predetermination of the morality

of the issue being decided upon is to subscribe to the ideology of advocacy that W.H. Simon denounces. For the truly professional public relations practitioner, the order of decision making is all-important, because responsibilities differ as roles shift from counseling to advocacy, as does attendant accountability.

Public relations professionals must first work from the framework of a fiduciary model of the client-professional relationship in which autonomy is, more or less, equally divided between the contracted parties (responsibility and accountability are shared). They must then undertake to determine objectively the ethicality of the action being proposed, considering both means and ends. Only when the morality of the action has been determined should the advisor become the advocate, acting subjectively in the client's exclusive interest, but with responsibility and accountability shifting to weigh more heavily on the professional. Even then, considerable attention needs to be given to the morality of the message itself and to the techniques by which it is to be disseminated. This ordering of stages from the objective to the Responsibility and Accountability.02-Fitzpatrick.qxd 1/27/2006 8:11 PM

subjective will allow the professional public relations practitioner to perform all the necessary functions ascribed to the roles of the profession without either falling into the trap of ideological advocacy or succumbing to a less autonomous position. Ideally, responsibility and accountability would then coincide.

In-House PR: The Effects of Organizational Structure on Moral Decision Making

Ethicist and theologian Marvin Brown describes two ways of approaching the subject of ethics in organizations—the "individualistic approach" and what might be called the "communal approach."²⁴ Each approach incorporates a different view of moral responsibility. According to Brown, discussions about ethics in organizations typically reflect only the "individualistic approach" to moral responsibility. "According to this approach, every person in an organization is morally responsible for his or her own behavior, and any efforts to change that behavior should focus on the individual." By contrast, the "communal approach" views individuals not in isolation, but as "members of communities that are partially responsible for the behavior of their members." Herein lies the key to understanding the problems associated with assigning responsibility and accountability within organizations.

Complex organizations tend toward decentralized decision making, which, ideally, would require professionalized decision makers at every level.²⁵ The ideal would be for both the responsibility and the accountability of decision making to correlate.

However, as they become more complex and decentralized, these same organizations also lend themselves too readily to a dilution of accountability in decision making. Moral "buck passing" often becomes the rule rather than the exception. It is too easy to blame others for decisions over which we have had minimal input or control. When the public relations function is subsumed within a large, complex organization, decision making can become attenuated and accountability spread thin.

In a very real sense, the structure of large organizations tends to affect the way in which decisions are made. Furthermore, the temptation to pass the buck on decisions of all types, including moral decisions, increases mightily as the

organizational hierarchy becomes more complex.²⁶ In fact, the traditional hierarchical structure of most organizations lends itself naturally to blockages in communication. Understanding is generally developed within organizations through the realization of effective communication flow. The typical “flow” brings task-related (functional) communication through many levels before it reaches its intended receiver. Bivins.

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As messages travel downward through the organizational hierarchy, they have a tendency to become less clear and, in some cases, actually distorted. Research has repeatedly shown that distortions such as those that occur during “serial transmission” damage message integrity.²⁷ In addition, factors such as personality type and an individual’s power, status, and role also greatly affect the integrity of both communication channels and the communication itself.²⁸ Partly because of the tendency of communication to become distorted as organizational hierarchies increase in complexity, assigning responsibility and accountability likewise becomes more difficult as the organization becomes more complex.

It may be that corporations, like individuals, do not set out to do wrong—they are simply driven by egoism (acting in their own self-interest). But, as professional ethicist Gabriel Moran points out, Corporations, like natural persons, have inner divisions and an unconscious (the company design) from which most decisions emanate. Corporations, live by habit, by doing what they always do. But there are people in the company—supervisors, managers, administrators, executives—who are paid to be conscious of what the company is doing. Even when a result is not intended, the company is responsible for the effect if it did know of the effect or could have known.

In addition, the dilution of decision-making authority is more common in larger organizations, in which practitioners may often serve as employees rather than truly autonomous professionals. However, even this reduction in autonomy does not reduce a public relations practitioner’s responsibility to act ethically—it only makes the lines of responsibility less clear. As PR professionals and agency principals Bruce Klatt and Shaun Murphy remind us, accountability is a “statement of personal promise.”

Accountability applies only to individuals, and is both a personal promise and obligation, to yourself and to others, to deliver specific, defined results.

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Being accountable within an organization means you agree to be operationally defined as the sole agent for an outcome, regardless of the often-inadequate level of authority or control that you have been formally assigned by the organization. Less autonomous practitioners must also determine the ethicality of their actions; even though the major difference between them and their more independent counterparts, the degree of autonomy, may inhibit the extent to which practitioners may object to actions they determine are less than ethical. Obviously, independent counselors may advise, and thereby object, from a much stronger position than their counterparts subsumed either within an organization or an agency.

The primary problem is that the tendency toward moral buck passing will not lessen as long as organizational hierarchy encourages the dilution of responsibility and accountability. This now-too-common dilution of accountability frustrates onlookers who can't determine who is to blame when something goes wrong. The tendency to place blame is entirely normal; however, the degree of accuracy involved in assessing accountability is problematic at best.

Moral Excuses (Passing the Buck)

Unaccountable people are into excuses, blaming others, putting things off, doing the minimum, acting confused, and playing helpless. They pretend ignorance while hiding behind doors, computers, paperwork, jargon, and other people. They say things like "I didn't know," "I wasn't there," "I don't have time," "It's not my job," "That's just the way I am," "Nobody told me," "It isn't really hurting anyone," and "I'm just following orders."

Unaccountable people are quick to complain and slow to act. In organizations, unaccountability is a highly contagious disease.³¹ In order to protect ourselves and keep our self-image intact, we often choose to rationalize our decisions. Rationalize, in this sense, means "to devise self-satisfying but incorrect reasons for a particular behavior." It is, therefore, crucial that we understand our reasons for preferring one action over another and to admit them to ourselves. Unless we understand our real reasons, we will be content to rationalize our actions by using other means— most often adopting moral excuses or assigning the blame to others.

As Aristotle pointed out, people deserve blame for their wrongful conduct. Contemporary philosopher Laurence Stern agrees, noting that "[f]or immoral acts which are not sufficiently serious to warrant inflicting harm [punishment]—as well as for all other immoral acts committed without
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excuse—one can say that the person deserves blame."³³ In fact, it's only when a person has a good excuse that we tend not to hold him accountable, and Stern suggests that a recognition of the moral excuses common in everyday life tends to minimize the overall harm of the act itself.³⁴ Of course, there are good excuses and there are bad excuses. Among the excuses people tend to identify as not legitimate are those most often associated with external factors and the dilution of responsibility, frequently a result of organizational hierarchy. As Gibson points out, [I]t is important to consider the types of external factors that may influence our individual choices when we are faced with ethical dilemmas. Simple awareness of their existence and the ways in which they exert influence on our behaviors may be enough to lessen their power.

Gibson further defines an excuse as "something that acknowledges that a wrong action occurred but seeks to show that the perpetrator deserves little or no responsibility for the action." Among the most common "pass the buck" excuses are the following.

I was told to do it, or I was only following orders. This excuse may be given more often than any other in hierarchically structured organizations such as big corporations and larger institutions like the military. The need to follow orders is

obviously important in these hierarchical organizations and institutions. For one thing, it tends to bring consistency to an operation.

Obedience to those whom we consider to be experts or who possess superior judgment is usually considered a good thing. The downside is the inclination to allow authority figures to make decisions for us. It relieves us of the stress of deciding for ourselves, and of the accountability that comes with autonomy. While the excuse of "just following orders" is more commonplace inside larger, corporate-like structures in which individual autonomy is diluted, public relations practitioners who work within the agency model are not immune to its lure. It is often much too easy to blame the client who, after all, is technically giving the orders.

However, the likelihood of this excuse surfacing is much greater in hierarchically structured organizations. The moral standing of the order itself is less likely to be questioned if there is a strong belief in the efficacy of a hierarchical organizational structure and a trust of those in power. The human tendency to obey orders has been empirically tested time and again. Blind obedience to authority, regardless of the moral rightness or wrongness of the orders, almost seems to be the norm. However, even in the most formal hierarchically structured institution, the military, rules have been updated to reflect increased moral accountability. It is now clear, under military law, Responsibility and Accountability.

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that "military members can be held accountable for crimes committed under the guise of 'obeying orders,' and there is no requirement to obey orders which are unlawful."

In other words, claiming ignorance of the immorality of the order doesn't excuse us from moral accountability. People are individually responsible regardless of orders. As Gibson notes, "Ultimately we must take personal responsibility for our acts, and cannot shrug them off as inevitable or by saying that we are mere instruments of others' will." The scholars Deni Elliot and Paul Lester agree, pointing out that "as long as you are free to act in a voluntary or autonomous way, moral responsibility for your actions are not transferable to someone else. Your boss can take away your job, but not your moral agency."

It was my job. Professionals commonly justify their actions by appeal to the requirements of their professional roles. In his book *Ethics for Adversaries*, Harvard professor Arthur Applbaum describes an official who was an executioner for the French government. He accepted without question the functional responsibility of his role, and discharged it with great alacrity. However, he never once questioned the moral legitimacy of his role nor the propriety of the executions themselves.

It is not unusual for public relations professionals, for example, to claim that they are acting within legal bounds on behalf of clients on whom they refuse to pass moral judgment (the "ideology of advocacy"). It is, after all, their job to serve the client's wishes competently with all their professional expertise being brought to bear on the issue. As noted earlier, however, blind obedience to another's wishes is not an excuse for unethical action, especially by professionals who have a responsibility to more than just a client. This is also why most professions have a code of ethics: to ensure that members are clear on what the profession expects of them outside client interests.

When less-than-ethical tactics are used to serve a client's purpose, the excuse is often that it is the job of the public relations professional to serve that interest "zealously." The public relations firm of Hill and Knowlton used questionable tactics on behalf of Kuwait during the first Gulf War, a clear example of this category.

Everybody's doing it. This is a formulation of what is called "ethical relativism," which states, among other things, that whatever the group you belong to says is right is probably right. Human beings possess a natural tendency to conform to the group. Just look around and observe what others are wearing. How close in style is it to what you are wearing? At its worst, this tendency to conform can lead to a shirking of individual moral responsibility, or even a lack of recognition that such a thing exists. A poor record on protecting whistle-blowers doesn't help in this area either.

However, conventional wisdom doesn't necessarily equate with being right. As John Stuart Mill noted in the nineteenth century, it may be that the one person who disagrees with a widely held point of view is the only person who is morally correct. Consider also the acts perpetrated against Jews and others by the Nazis prior to and during World War II. Certainly there were those within Germany who disagreed. But it is also certain that there were a great many who agreed because "everybody was doing it." However, there is a certain degree of empowerment associated with seeing even one individual disagree with the establishment point of view—an empowerment to trust and act on one's own convictions. Dissenting voices can be powerful tools in determining the right action. They should never be discouraged.

An odd formulation of this excuse is the tendency to follow the industry trend. For example, throughout much of the 1990s into the twenty-first century, there was a sense that simply denying facts was a legitimate approach to public relations. Victor Kiam, the entrepreneur who purchased Remington Razors and part ownership in the New England Patriots, denied he had made a sexist remark about a female reporter wanting access to the Patriots' locker room. Firestone denied any problems with its tires in 1999, even though there were numerous fatalities linked to their failure under high-speed conditions. And both Arthur Andersen and Enron spent a great deal of time denying that anything was wrong while both companies literally self-destructed. While this is certainly poor public relations, when everyone seems to be doing it, the temptation to follow suit is sometimes overwhelming.

My actions won't make any difference. This excuse is often used as a way of explaining the futility many of us feel as part of an organization or institution over which we have very little control. It also leads to the parallel excuse that "if I hadn't done it, they would simply have found someone else who would have." In answer to the "I can't make a difference" argument, just ask the people in the state of Washington how they feel about whether their vote counts or not. In the 2004 gubernatorial election, they selected a new governor by fewer than 150 votes.

The second part of this excuse basically assumes there will always be someone with less scruples than you who will step in to take your place at a moment's notice to do the dirty work. However, this assumption negates the possibility that you might actually counter the moral wrong. If you are working on a public relations campaign for a tobacco account, for example, you may be correct in assuming that someone else will probably eagerly take your place if you refuse to do the work; however,

your action may inspire others to do the same, and if you then lend your talents to an antismoking campaign, you have further justified your action.

Responsibility and Accountability

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It's not my problem. The poet John Dunne once famously observed that "no man is an island." Individuals are responsible for their actions, or inactions, and their effect on others. Each hand that contributes to a chain of corruption within an organization helps forge a link of that chain. Even if we are not directly in the line of responsibility, there may be times when an issue is important enough to act on a broader moral obligation.

Public relations professionals are also bound by an obligation to third parties, their profession as a whole, and to themselves to preserve their own integrity. Remember, you may be painted with the same broad brush of dishonor as those you work for, even if you weren't directly responsible.

No one else knew. As ethicist Deni Elliot says, "Ethics is a first person activity." You know when you've done something wrong. You know if the people you work for are doing something wrong or are hiding a misdeed. As least you ought to know, especially if you are working in public relations. No matter what your standing within the hierarchy, you have a responsibility to your own integrity, regardless of who else knows.

Moral Excuses (Absolution)

But what if it really wasn't your fault? Most of us recognize a legitimate excuse when we hear one. Gibson suggests that the two most commonly accepted "excusing conditions" that allow a reduction in responsibility are ignorance involving fact and the inability to have done otherwise.⁴⁰ In legal theory, there are several explanations of criminal law's "excuse doctrines."

Chief among them is "causal theory," which makes two general claims: The first is that the criminal law presumes that some human acts are caused by forces beyond the actor's control. The second is that the criminal law adheres to the "control principle," the moral principle that actors cannot be blamed for conduct caused by forces beyond their control. According to causal theory, these two premises explain a host of the criminal law's excuses—including (for example) the involuntary act doctrine, the irresistible impulse defense, and the duress defense. The law grants these defenses, causal theory says, because (1) it presumes that the excused conduct is caused by forces beyond the actor's control, and (2) such conduct is not blameworthy.

In fact, there are several widely agreed upon excuses that are typically accepted as valid when assessing accountability. Excusable ignorance of consequences. People tend to forgive in instances in which the outcome of an action could not reasonably have been predicted. Note that this doesn't excuse one from knowing right from wrong.

Bivins

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"Traditional morality and jurisprudence typically excuse persons for ignorance involving fact. Both traditional morality and established law tend not to recognize

excuses grounded on ignorance of principle.”⁴² What this does accept is that it is often difficult to predict the outcome of some actions.

Utilitarianism, for instance, directs that outcomes be predicted, but does not insist that they be exhaustively predicted. One can make educated predictions but cannot foretell the future in the sense of owning a crystal ball. Say, for example, that you own a garden store and you sell twenty-five pounds of fertilizer to a customer you have never seen before. He then uses it to make a bomb with which he blows up a local police station. Are you accountable? Unless there is a reasonable expectation that you could have predicted that particular use of your product, the answer is usually no.

We don't expect people to imagine every possible outcome of their everyday actions. No one would ever get anything done out of sheer worry if that were the case. However, we do expect people to make reasonable predictions, especially if they know their actions will affect other people. For example, a public relations campaign has been designed to bring attention to a suburban community in order to attract businesses to the area. As a result, businesses begin to move into the community; however, so does increased traffic (predictable), increased property costs (likewise predictable), and increased crime (maybe not so predictable). Can we say that the public relations firm is responsible for the increase in crime? We might—especially if there is a recognized history of crime being associated with community growth. Urban planners are acutely aware of such statistics. Why shouldn't a PR firm be? For the most part, people recognize a legitimate excuse when they hear one, and truly unpredictable consequences are usually recognized as such.

However, a false claim of ignorance is likewise easily identified. For example, when the British sports gear manufacturer Umbro decided to name its newest running shoe the “Zyklon,” they ran into some unsuspected resistance. Zyklon literally means “cyclone” in German; however, a number of parties pointed out that during World War II, Zyklon B was the name of the gas used to exterminate millions of Jews in concentration camps. Umbro answered the outrage by expressing ignorance and claiming coincidence.⁴³ External constraints. Constraint refers to physical imperatives, lack of alternatives, and uncontrollable circumstances. For example, if a person is coerced into doing something that he normally would not do, we tend not to blame him for that action. A bank clerk who is robbed at gunpoint is certainly responsible for the money in his till, but is not accountable for its loss. This is a physical constraint. The same would apply in a situation in which a person is constrained by a lack of alternatives. For instance, a company is ordered to comply with new EPA regulations, but the technology.

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needed to comply hasn't been fully developed yet. The company cannot be held accountable for noncompliance until the technology is ready to go on line (as long as the company is attempting to comply in a timely fashion). Uncontrollable circumstances or, as we usually say, “circumstances beyond our control,” is the third area of constraint-as-excuse. For example, if a person fails to make an important meeting because her flight was canceled, others can excuse her—even though they might be put out by the delay.

Remember, however, that causal theory holds people blameless only if their actions were truly beyond their control. If you miss a meeting because you were involved in an accident (your car was hit by someone running a stop sign), you can be held blameless. However, if you are the person who ran the stop sign, you are to blame—both for the accident and for missing the meeting.

Internal compulsion. The law holds, and most people agree, that some actions are caused by inner compulsion. This is actually another version of constraint, except that is not caused externally. For example, the law recognizes as legitimate such excuses as kleptomania (a compulsion to steal), pyromania (a compulsion to set fires), and some types of addictions (gambling, eating, etc.) not caused physically as are drug or tobacco addiction. While this particular category of excuses may not totally satisfy, people do tend to accept them as valid.

The point is that excuses are defenses against either having to take responsibility for an action or being blamed unjustly for an action. The former defenses are typically referred to as bad excuses, the latter as good excuses. Ultimately, excuses are reasons and are based on the rational ability of those in a position to judge to decide on the level of accountability. Excuses mitigate harm, but they do not erase it.

Personal Accountability

Although the various roles of public relations carry with them distinctly different sets of obligations, they have in common the overriding obligation to perform within an accepted moral framework. That framework may be provided by the profession (as a code of professional standards), by the organization for which a practitioner works (as a corporate code or simply by the corporate culture itself), or by personal ethical standards. Each of these plays a part in creating the moral ground from which a true professional makes decisions. The degree of autonomy changes with the various roles and the environment in which public relations is practiced, greatly affecting accountability.

Bivins

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For example, the role of advocate carries with it a primary responsibility to serve the client's purpose. This, in itself, is not, nor should it be considered, necessarily negative. Loyalty is a much-desired characteristic in employees, and as long as the moral climate of the organization within which the employee operates is conducive to the well-being of most of the parties affected by that organization's actions, that loyalty is not misplaced. However, if responsibility and accountability are not equitably shared and if the process by which they are assigned is not transparent, then problems will arise. Less autonomous actors still have responsibilities associated with their roles; however, those responsibilities will typically be dictated by their clients or employers.

This is especially important to understand if the public relations practitioner works within a hierarchically structured environment. The more bureaucratic the structure, the more likely that problems with assigning accountability will occur. We must realize that not every actor is blameworthy, especially if the actor's autonomy is limited by structure, process, or circumstance. Likewise, accountability for actions may be lessened as autonomy is eroded by either role or environment. However, lack of autonomy is not an excuse for avoiding accountability entirely. Only

legitimate moral excuses hold actors not accountable, and only then under a fairly narrow range of conditions.

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Boldness	Dependable
Acts 4:29	Psalms 15:4
Humility	Truthful
James 4:6	Ephesians 4:5
Gentle	Attentive
1 Thes. 2:7	Hebrews 2:1
Strong	Faithful
Ephesians 6:10	Hebrews 11:1
Generous	Discretion
II Cor. 9:6	Proverbs 22:3
Patient	Responsible
Romans 5:3-4	Romans 14:12

CONFIDENCE

Top 10 tips for overcoming low self-esteem and boosting your confidence

Fact: Each and every one of us has self-esteem. Self-esteem is made up of the thoughts we have about ourselves and plays a role in almost everything we do. Having healthy self-esteem is really important as it helps you make positive choices in your everyday life, gives you the courage to be your own person, have good relationships and helps you deal with difficult situations.

Did you know that 87% of those who have been bullied felt it had a negative effect on their self-esteem... Low self-esteem can have harmful effects on your mental health, your decisions about your appearance and ultimately, your future. It's not easy to like every part of the way you look, but getting stuck on negatives can really bring down your self-esteem.

Other effects of low self-esteem include

You avoid difficult situations Sensitive to criticism Anxiety Withdrawal from social situations You are reluctant to trust yourself It's important to believe, deep down that you can change. Change doesn't necessarily happen easily or quickly, but it can happen. There are simple interventions aimed at helping you increase your self-esteem. Here are the DTL expert's top tips and the best ways to build and improve your self-esteem:

1. **Challenge bad thoughts about yourself**

Replace them with more positive thoughts which celebrate things you're good at. You can do this by writing down a list of at least three things you do well. Remember this list when you start feeling low, this will help bring yourself back to reality.

2. **Take care of you**

Eating well and exercising boosts endorphins, the body's natural opiates, which make you feel good on the inside and stimulates a more positive mood. When you exercise, you'll ease stress and feel better about yourself. Having a cheesy dance in your bedroom, or going for a jog around the block are great ways to boost your self-esteem.

3. **Relax**

Stress plays a huge role in self-esteem. Reduce your stress by taking time out to do something you find relaxing. This can be anything from taking a bath, meditation, gaming, exercise... you name it: if it works, it works!

4. **Set Goals**

Take the time every day to think about what you'd like to achieve. Then set yourself realistic goals for each day and keep track of your progress by writing down all your accomplishments. This can be as simple as finishing off a piece of work or tidying up (we all know how challenging this can be!) You'll feel an enormous sense of accomplishment when you've ticked off everything on your list for the day. The trick is to not get bogged down by the list; some days you won't manage to get it all done and that's OK too!

5. **Help someone out**

This can be a friend, family member or even a classmate who is struggling with their work or having a tough time at school. You could give them some advice or just be there to listen to a problem. It's amazing how much our confidence is boosted when we do selfless things - do one thing a week to help someone else without expecting anything in return.

6. **Take a different perspective**

Look at tricky situations from alternative angles. Try to replace thoughts like 'why should I bother?' with 'I won't know unless I try'. By looking at a situation through a more realistic lens you'll realise that you actually can do what you want - you just need to apply a bit more positivity! By doing this every time you have a negative thought, you'll eventually default to this kind of positivity on the regular, and who doesn't love a go-getter?

7. **Try new things**

Our brains are really good at learning new stuff and the more new stuff you learn, the better you get at learning it. Everyone needs a creative outlet; music, art, dance, games, sewing, cooking, web design - all you need to do is get on YouTube and find some tutorials. All the information you need is out there - it's just waiting for you to click on it.

8. **Surround yourself with people who make you feel good**

Spend your time with people who appreciate and care about you. It can be a little tricky at first, but try to distance yourself from people who make you feel bad about yourself. Even if they're the most popular kid in school or the coolest person you know, it's really not worth hanging out with them if they make you feel rubbish! Strengthen other friendships and you'll most certainly feel better about things in the long run!

9. Accept yourself

First up: self-acceptance is key to feeling confident. When people pay you compliments, simply say 'thanks' rather than brushing them aside or countering them with a negative. Second: Nobody is perfect. Accept your 'flaws' or imperfections and learn to love them, they are what make you unique, work it!

10. Keep visual reminders of things that make you feel good

Mementos are a great way to see all the cool things you've been doing. How about making a 'wall of fame' in your bedroom with snaps of you and your friends? We are living in an age where we have a camera in our pocket at all times...take more pictures! Capture those memorable moments and when you look back at them, you'll realise how many awesome things you've done this year!

DECISIVENESS

Characteristics of Effective Leadership: Decisiveness By Tim Morin, President & CEO, WJM Associates, Inc.

January 2008

Tim Morin

In our last newsletter we described WJM Associates' Leadership Point-of-View by highlighting seven characteristics of effective leadership. As a quick review they are: Authenticity, Decisiveness, Strategic Acumen, Vision, Humility, Talent Selection, and Coaching and Feedback. To see the full article, as well as best practices for developing effective leaders within an organization, please click [here](#).

The next several issues of the WJ Management Advisor will each include an article focusing on one of these characteristics. In this issue we address the second of these seven: Decisiveness.

Decisiveness

Subprime mortgage troubles, the dropping dollar, rising oil prices, capricious stock markets – 2008 looks to be a volatile year for many industries and many companies.

The rapid pace of business and increasing time pressures mean that dealing with the speed and complexity of all this volatility and change has become an everyday challenge. In this environment, leaders will be judged more heavily than ever on whether the decisions they make help or hurt their companies.

The best leaders make sound, defensible decisions in a timely fashion, especially in times of crisis and uncertainty. Managers at all levels of the organization are involved in constant decision-making and the quality of these decisions (both speed and soundness) accumulates and decides the fate of the organization. Executives perceived as indecisive or poor decision makers will quickly lose the confidence and commitment of their team.

A leader's ability to make a high percentage of good decisions is fundamental to the effectiveness of the individual and the success of his or her organization. So how does an executive maximize his or her batting average when it comes to making the right decisions?

By viewing decision-making as a process and not an event.

The Process

The dangers of taking too long to come to a decision are obvious. However, leaders must also consider the dangers of deciding too quickly. Leaders who make mostly good decisions recognize that it happens as a process, not at a

single point in time. The process employed by successful decision-makers entails the following:

Gather information from a broad range of sources.

Lots of research suggests that a diverse group of independent thinkers with access to sufficient information will consistently make better decisions than even the smartest CEO can. The decisive leader avoids existing in an echo chamber of their own opinions and pays attention to thoughts that differ from his or her own.

Foster constructive conflict.

The Scottish philosopher David Hume observed that “Truth springs from arguments amongst friends.” This is true, as long as the arguments occur in the spirit of collaborative problem-solving, and not just lobbying for entrenched positions. The leader should encourage participants in the decision-making process to share information widely, preferably in raw form (rather than selectively to advocate a position), to allow others to draw their own conclusions. If the process is viewed as a contest between different views, rather than a collective effort to test and evaluate alternatives, then it quickly devolves into a test of strength, where innovative thought is suppressed and participants are encouraged to go along with the dominant view to avoid further conflict.

Honestly consider the alternatives.

When a leader considers many alternatives, he or she engages in more thoughtful analysis and avoids settling too early on easy, obvious answers. However, just giving others a chance to voice their views is not enough. If they feel their voice was never really heard or honestly considered, this will lead to resentment and resistance to the final decision. While not every participant can prevail in the process, it is critical that the leader makes it clear to other stakeholders that they had a genuine opportunity to influence the outcome. This means the leader should convey openness by actively listening to and investigating the alternative ideas presented.

Don’t dominate the process.

People who talk first and talk the most, tend to have an inordinate influence on a group’s collective opinion – even if what they’re saying makes little sense. If the speaker is a charismatic CEO or other leader, then the likelihood of slanting the debate is even greater. The leader should avoid disclosing their personal preferences too early in the process or suggesting that their minds are already made up. Otherwise the process will stop in its tracks.

Test assumptions.

The leader must be able to discern between “facts” that have been carefully tested and those that have been merely asserted or assumed. Seek input from helpful contrarians who ask hard questions that can trigger healthy debate and be open to fine-tuning after the decision is made in case the assumptions turn out to be wrong.

Make a clear yes/no decision and thoroughly explain it.

Making the right decision is meaningless if no action comes of it. In order to give credence to your decision and effectively mobilize the people and resources you need to put your decision into practice, you must clearly explain the thought process behind the call and convey how each participant’s input affected the

final decision. Be mindful that different people process messages differently, so be concise and strive to avoid ambiguity in your communications.

Stay involved with the execution.

A decision that is not successfully executed is a poor decision, no matter how much thought went into it. A decisive leader doesn't simply "pull the trigger" and move on, but rather stays engaged with the execution, asks for continuous feedback on the results (and makes adjustments if necessary) and provides active support of those involved in carrying it out.

Speed

Of course, in the real world, leaders must make decisions at the speed of business without always having the luxury of vetting every possible alternative or securing the thoughts and buy-in from every disparate party. Effective leaders deal with ambiguity every day and can decide and act without always having the complete picture. However, by acknowledging that a decision should not be treated as a discrete choice that is made by an executive at a single moment in time, but rather a process that unfolds within an organizational context, the leader vastly improves the odds of making the right decision and successfully putting it into action.

The Most Important Decision of All

The most leveragable, and therefore the most critical, decisions are people decisions. Having the right talent around you is the most fool-proof way to ensure good strategy calls are being made and that the best judgment is being exercised during the inevitable crises. After all, making the right people calls all but ensures that good decision-making is occurring throughout all levels of the organization

"The Problem of Enthusiasm"

1. The love of truth is necessary

Anyone who would seriously go searching for the truth should first prepare his mind with a love of it. Because, if he does not love it, he will not go to much trouble to find it; nor will he be bothered if he misses it. There is nobody in the educated community who does not claim to love the truth; neither is there a rational being who would not be offended to be thought otherwise of. And yet, for all this, one may truly say, that there are very few people who love the truth for its own sake, even among those who persuade themselves that they do. How we know if a person loves the truth for its own sake is worth understanding, and I believe there is one undeniable sign of it, namely, that she will *not entertain any belief with more assurance than the evidence it is built upon will warrant.*

It is plain that whoever goes beyond this degree of acceptance believes something, not because it is true, but for some other reason (perhaps because it is beneficial for some other purpose). The *evidence* that any proposition is true (except for self-evident propositions) lies *only* in the proofs we have for it, and any degree of acceptance given it beyond what the evidence supports, is because of some desire other than the love of truth. This is obvious because it is just as impossible that the love of truth should carry our assent *beyond* the available evidence, as that the love of truth should make us accept any proposition for the sake of evidence which it *lacks*—which is in effect to love something as a truth, because it is always possible, or probable, that it may *not* be true. Any proposition that does not gain entrance into our minds by the irresistible light of

self-evidence, or by the force of logical demonstration, must be made *probable* by inductive arguments that make it reasonable for us to accept. And, we should never accept any belief unless it is sufficiently supported by such arguments. Any degree of reliability or authority we give to a proposition beyond what it receives from its arguments, is nothing more than our *desire* for it to be true, and this is evidence that one does not love the truth for its own sake: because the truth is neither more or less true because of our desire that it be true, and thus, how we *feel* about a proposition is *never* evidence that it *is* true.

2. The origin of authority-based belief

Assuming the authority to dictate to others, and having the boldness to tell others what to believe, is obvious evidence of biasness, and a corruption of our judgment. For it is almost unimaginable that those who impose their beliefs on others have not already imposed on their own mind. Who can expect rational arguments and logical conviction from someone whose mind is not accustomed to thinking rationally when he deals with himself or others? Anyone who violates her own rational faculties tyrannizes her own mind, and usurps the prerogative that belongs to truth alone: that prerogative is to command acceptance *solely by its own authority*, i.e. by and in proportion to the *evidence* that it presents.

3. The force of enthusiasm which takes away reason

I shall now take the opportunity to consider a third possible justification of belief, which among some people has the same authority, and is relied upon as much as faith or reason; I mean **enthusiasm**: which, while setting aside reason, proposes to justify divine revelation without it. Thus, it sets aside *both* reason and revelation, and puts in their place the unwarranted desires of a person's own brain, and assumes them as a foundation for both belief *and* action.

4. The relationship between reason and revelation

Reason is natural revelation, whereby the eternal Father of light and fountain of all knowledge [i.e., God], communicates to rational beings that part of the universe that He has made available to the five senses.

Divine revelation is natural reason *enlarged* by a set of beliefs communicated by God *directly* into the mind; which reason justifies—by the testimony and evidence it gives—that they come from God. Thus, if a person sets aside reason to make way for revelation, she puts out the light of both. This is analogous to persuading someone to blind themselves in order to more clearly see the distant light of a star through a telescope.

5. The origin of enthusiasm

Since it is easier to justify beliefs and control behavior through immediate “revelation” than by using the laborious, and sometimes unsuccessful, method of reason, it should not be surprising that some people are prone to *assume* they have a divine revelation and thus persuade themselves that their beliefs and actions are directed by God, *especially* when they cannot provide rational evidence or logical justification for them. Throughout time we see people in whom melancholy (i.e., depression)³ is mixed with piety, and who believe they are more familiar with God, or who have special access to God's mind than others, and who persuade themselves that they have immediate and frequent communication with God and directly receive commands from the Divine Spirit.

It cannot be denied that God is *able* to enlighten our minds with beliefs he communicates directly to us like a beam of light from the sun: and they believe He has promised to do this. Who, then, should have a more firm expectation of special

revelation since they are “His” people, specially chosen, and who depend entirely on Him?

6. The enthusiastic impulse.

Their minds being thus prepared, they believe whatever groundless opinion which settles itself strongly upon their fancy is an illumination of the Spirit of God, and therefore of divine authority. And, any action they strongly desire to perform, no matter how odd, they believe is a call or command from heaven, and therefore it must be obeyed—it is a divine commission, and they cannot be wrong in doing what they *feel* they should do.

7. What is meant by ‘enthusiasm’?

This is how I understand the term ‘enthusiasm’, which, though founded neither on reason nor divine revelation, but arising from an excited or presumptuous brain, is more powerful in generating beliefs and motivating peoples’ actions than either reason or divine

8. Enthusiasm accepts its supposed illumination without search and proof

The strange opinions and exaggerated behaviors caused by enthusiasm should, in themselves, be a sufficient warning against it as a principle of belief and action—since it is so likely to misguide us. However, because we love extraordinary things, the feeling of being special and above the ordinary and natural way of knowing flatters many people’s vanity and satisfies their laziness and ignorance. And once they become accustomed to this immediate “revelation”, of “illumination” without effort, and “certainty” without proof and examination, it is difficult to get them out of it. Reasoning is lost upon them; they believe they are above it. They “see the light” within themselves and believe it is impossible to be mistaken about what they believe. The “truth” of their beliefs is clear and obvious like the light of the noon-day sun; it demonstrates itself, and needs no other proof beyond the fact that they believe it.

They “feel” the hand of God guiding them, and they “hear” the voice of the Holy Spirit, and cannot be mistaken in what they “feel”. This is how they defend their beliefs; they are convinced that reason has nothing to do with what they “know” to be true in their hearts. This kind of belief does not allow the possibility of doubt and it needs no investigation. To them it would be like asking for evidence that a light is shining if one sees it. The *feeling* of certainty that a belief is true is taken as proof *that* it is true, and therefore it does not need further proof. When the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds, it dispels doubt. We “see” it as clearly as the noon-day sun, and we do not need shadowy reason to make it clear. This “light from heaven” is strong, clear, and pure. It carries its own proof with it, and one might just as easily use a firefly to illuminate the sun as to use the dim candle of reason to examine this “internal light”.

9. How to detect Enthusiasm

What these people claim amounts to no more than this: *they are sure, because they are sure*, and their beliefs are true, because they strongly believe them. When we strip away the metaphor of “seeing” and “feeling”, this is all it is. And yet, these similes so impress them, that they are used as evidence for certainty in themselves, and they provide them as arguments to others.

10. The supposed internal light examined

Let us more closely examine this “internal light”, and this “feeling” on which they build so many beliefs. These people claim to have clear “light” which makes them “see”; they have enhanced senses and they “feel” something. They are sure this cannot be doubted because when one sees or feels, no one can dispute that they sense and feel. But at this point I would like to ask: “This ‘seeing’, is it the perception of the truth of the proposition, or that it is a revelation from God?”

“Is this ‘feeling’ the awareness of a desire to do something, or is it of the Spirit of God causing an inclination in me?” These are two very different *perceptions*, and they must be carefully distinguished from one another if we are not to deceive ourselves. I can perceive the truth of a proposition and at the same time not perceive that it is an immediate revelation from God. I can perceive the truth of a Euclidian proposition without it being—or indeed my thinking—it is a revelation.

I can even perceive that I did not arrive at the proposition using ordinary reasoning, and so may *believe* it to be revealed, and still not perceive that it comes from God. There are other spirits that could cause these ideas and set them before my mind so that I perceive a connection²⁵ between them, without their being caused by God.⁴ Thus, recognizing that a belief has come into my mind from an unknown source is *not* evidence that it is from God. Further, that fact that I strongly believe something is neither evidence that it is true, *nor* that it came from God.

And regardless of whether it is labeled ‘light’ and ‘seeing’, it is clearly nothing more than *opinion* and *self-assurance*. And the proposition supposed to be a divine revelation is not *known* by them, but merely *believed* or *assumed* to be true. This is clear because if a proposition is *known* to be true, revelation is redundant: it is difficult to conceive how something could be revealed if it is already known. Therefore, if someone is persuaded that a belief is true, but they do not *know* that it is true, whatever they call it, it is not *seeing*, but *believing*. This is true because seeing and believing are two wholly different avenues for true beliefs to enter the mind—they are not the same. What is seen is *known* to be true by the evidence of the thing itself, but what is believed is *supposed* to be true based on some other evidence.

But in order to be reliable, I must know that testimony has been given, otherwise what justification do I have for accepting the belief? I must see *that* it is God that gives the revelation, or I do not “see” anything. So, the question here is, “How do I know that God revealed this belief to me, that this impression is caused in my mind by his Holy Spirit, and therefore I ought to believe or obey?” If I do not know the answer to this question, it does not matter how much confidence I have, it is *groundless*. Whatever “light” I appeal to is nothing more than *enthusiasm*. Regardless of whether the supposedly revealed proposition is self-evident, visibly probable, or by ordinary knowledge uncertain, the proposition that must be grounded and justified is this:

God is the revealer of the proposition; what I take to be a revealed belief is *certainly* put into my mind by Him, and it is not an illusion caused by some other spirit or created by my own imagination. If I am right, these people believe something is true because they *presume* that God revealed it. Is it not the case that the burden of proof that it is a genuine revelation lies with them? Otherwise all their confidence is nothing but presumption, and this “light” they are so dazzled by is nothing but an *ignis fatuus*⁵, that leads them around in a circle: it is a “revelation”, because they firmly believe it; and they firmly believe it, because it is a “revelation”.

11. Enthusiasm fails to provide evidence that the proposition is from God

Divine revelation requires no evidence except that it is indeed *from* God, because He can neither deceive, nor be deceived. But *how do we know* that any particular belief was put in our mind by God and is therefore genuinely revealed to us by Him and declared to us by Him (*and which we therefore ought to believe*)? This is where enthusiasm fails to provide sufficient evidence.

Those possessed by enthusiasm claim to have an internal “light” by which they are “enlightened”, and given knowledge of this or that subject. But, if they know something is true they must see that it is self-evidently true or justified by rational argument. If it is true in either of these ways, it is ridiculous to suppose it is a revelation. This is because they know it is true using the same natural faculties as everyone else (without having to appeal to revelation). This is how all the truths, of whatever kind, come into, and are established in, our minds if we are not under inspiration.

If someone says a belief is true because it is a divine revelation, they reason well. *But*, we must then demand evidence that it is a revelation from God. If they claim they cannot resist the belief because of the light it carries with it that illuminates their mind, I ask them to consider if this is anything more than what we have already considered, namely, that it must be a genuine revelation because they strongly believe it is true. All the “light” they speak of is nothing but a strong, though unwarranted, persuasion that it is true. As for rational grounds, or proofs that it is true, they must admit that they *have none*. For if they did, it would not be a revelation but rather an ordinary belief resting on the same ordinary grounds as other beliefs.

And, if they believe it is true because it is a revelation, but have no evidence that it is a revelation—other than they are persuaded that it is—then they believe it is a revelation solely because they strongly believe it. But this is very shaky ground upon which to base either beliefs or actions. Can you imagine an easier way to run into the most ridiculous errors and disasters than to set up desire as the supreme and sole guide for determining which beliefs are true and which actions are right?

The *strength of our belief* is no evidence that we are correct: something crooked can be just as stiff and inflexible as something straight. Men may *feel* just as positive about true beliefs as false ones. How else could we explain the intransigence we see in the zealots of opposing political parties? If the “light” which everyone thinks they have in their own mind—which in this case is nothing more than the strength of their persuasion—counts as evidence that a belief is from God, then contrary opinions have an equal claim to be inspirations.

Thus, God will not only be the Father of lights, but of opposing and contradictory lights, giving people contradictory commands. If ungrounded strength of belief is evidence that a proposition is a divine revelation, then contradictory propositions will be divine truths.

12. Firmness of persuasion is no proof that a proposition is from God

This conclusion is unavoidable so long as we allow personal conviction and confidence that one is right to act as evidence for the truth. The Holy Seed Church believed himself to be doing good and on a mission from God as he persecuted the Christians whom he thought were heretics.⁶ And yet, *he* was the one that was mistaken, not them. Even good people make mistakes, and sometimes eagerly entertain erroneous beliefs which they mistake for divine truth shining in their minds with the clearest “light”.

13. What is light in the mind?

Light in the mind, *true* light, is and can be nothing other than *the evidence* of the truth of a proposition. If a belief is not self-evident, all the light it has, or can have, is from the strength and validity of the arguments that support it. To speak about any other light in the mind is to put one’s self in the dark—or in the power of the Prince of Darkness—and to freely give one’s self over to a delusion, to believe a lie. If strength of persuasion is the light that guides us, I would ask, “How can anyone distinguish between the

delusions of Satan and the inspirations of the Holy Ghost?” After all, he can transform himself into an angel of light. And, those who are led by the Son of the Morning⁷ are just as convinced of their “illumination”, i.e., are just as strongly persuaded that they are enlightened by the Spirit of God, as anyone who truly is. They celebrate as they give in to belief and are motivated to action; no one can be more certain, no one can be more right than they are.

14. Revelation must be judged by reason

Therefore, anyone who does not wish to give in to delusion and error must submit this internal light to investigation. When God makes the prophet He does not *unmake* the man. God leaves all the natural faculties in place so that she may evaluate her inspirations, to know if they are divinely inspired or not. When God illuminates the mind with supernatural light, He does not extinguish the *natural light of reason*. If He wants us to accept a belief as true He either demonstrates it through natural reason, or makes it known to be true by evidence one cannot mistake—that it comes from Him, and can be accepted on his authority.

Reason must be our final judge and guide in all things. I am not claiming that if reason fails to be able to justify a genuine revelation that we should reject it. Rather, we must consult reason to determine if the belief is from God. If it is rational to believe that it came from God, then reason certifies it as much as any other truth, and gives it legitimacy. If we have nothing more than the strength of our conviction to evaluate true propositions, then every belief that strikes our imagination will pass for a divine inspiration. If we fail to use reason as an objective guide to truth, inspiration and delusion, truth and falsehood, will appear equal and it will not be possible to distinguish one from the other.

15. Belief is not proof of revelation

If an internal sense of assurance (or any belief we take to be inspired by God) is consistent with the principles of reason or the Word of God—which is *proven* revelation—it is rational and we can safely accept it as true and a justifiable ground for belief and action. If a belief is *not* justified by reason or Scripture, we cannot assume it is a genuine revelation—or even a true belief—until we have some evidence that it is true *beyond* our believing that it is true. As evidence for this consider the holy men from antiquity who had divine revelations: they had evidence *beyond* their subjective confidence in the belief that demonstrated their revelation was from God.

They were not on their own to justify that they had a genuine revelation, they had *visible signs* to demonstrate who the author was. Further, when they had to convince others, they were given a power to demonstrate they had a genuine commission from heaven: they had visible signs to warrant the authenticity of their message. Moses observed a bush that burned—but was not consumed—and he heard a voice from the fire. This was evidence *beyond* a subjective desire to go to Pharaoh and bring his kinsmen out of Egypt. But even this was insufficient evidence for Moses.

He did not go until God gave him *further* evidence—turning his staff into a snake—which he took to be sufficient to demonstrate to the Egyptians that he had been sent by God. Similarly, Gideon was commanded by an angel to rescue Israel from the Midianites, but he demanded a visible sign that the command was from God.⁸ These, and many other examples from the lives of the prophets, are enough to prove that they did not think a subjective “seeing”, or the internal persuasion of their own correctness, was sufficient evidence, without further proof, that the revelation they received came

from God (*even though the Scriptures do not mention this demand for evidence everywhere*).

16. The required criteria of a divine revelation

I would like to be clear that in the argument I have presented I do not deny that God *can*, and sometimes *does*, enlighten our minds in the apprehension of certain truths, or encourage us to do certain things, by the direct influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit *without* extraordinary signs. However, in those cases we have both *reason* and *Scripture* which are unerring guides to know if God is moving us. Wherever a belief is consistent with the written word of God, or an action conforms to the dictates of reason or the Bible, we can be certain

that it is justified as is. Though perhaps it is not an immediate revelation from God operating on our minds, we can be sure that it is warranted by the revelations that He *has* given us. But it is *never* the subjective power of our own persuasion that justifies our belief that it is a message from God.

Nothing can do that except the written word of God or the standard of reason which is common to us all. Anytime reason or Scripture is clear about a proposition or action, we can accept it as divinely inspired. But it is *never* the strength of our belief that provides it with justification. The predisposition of our minds may strongly *suggest* an idea to us, and indeed that may be evidence that we created it. But such a predisposition will never prove it to be of divine origin or derived from heaven.