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Chapter 5

Employee's Ethics: What's the Right Job for Me?

Chapter Overview

Chapter 5 "Employee's Ethics: What's the Right Job for Me?" examines some ethical decisions facing employees. It considers the values that underlie and guide choices about the kind of work you choose to pursue.

5.1 Finding Jobs to Want

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Delineate ethical dilemmas and considerations in job seeking.
2. Discuss how values guide the search for a job.
3. Define job sequencing.

What Kind of Work Is Out There?

A question posed on a web discussion board: *What Is Your Nightmare Job?* Here are some answers:

- Lung gunner (in a poultry processing plant: ram a nozzle down the chopped neck of a chicken and suck out the lungs)
- Roofer (Miami, summertime)
- Urinalysis monitor (watch guys pee for eight hours, making sure no one's switching their own for some friend's who hasn't been using drugs)
- Toll booth operator (apparently evil drivers heat quarters with cigarette lighters and drop them into the hands of unsuspecting operators) Michael Fromkin, "What Is Your Nightmare Job?," Discourse.net, July 19, 2007, accessed May 16, 2011, http://www.discourse.net/archives/2007/07/what_is_your_nightmare_job.html.

That last part about hot coins may be urban legend, but no matter what, there are jobs on the list that are going to make you cringe.

The *Wall Street Journal* has a similar list, but theirs includes both a top and bottom twenty—the best and worst jobs you can try to get or struggle to avoid. Sarah E. Needleman, "Doing the Math to Find the Good Jobs," *Wall Street Journal*, January 6, 2009, accessed May 16, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123119236117055127.html>. Here are a few from one group:

- Child-care worker
- Lumberjack
- Butcher

- Seaman
- Nuclear decontamination tech
- Nurse
- Firefighter

And a few from the other group:

- Actuary
- Parole officer
- Accountant
- Medical laboratory technician
- Paralegal assistant
- Meteorologist
- Historian

Can you tell which jobs belong in the twenty best and which are among the twenty worst? You might have a fix on the answer, but probably there's one or two on each list that don't seem to fit. That's because once you get away from the extremes—the horribly bad and enviously good jobs—it's difficult to define exactly what counts as good work.

Let's take a look at two jobs: child-care worker and actuary. It's probably true that no one really likes changing diapers at the day care center, and certainly it's smellier and dirtier than being an actuary, which is a statistical job. Actuaries take a calculator and reams of data and try to figure out how old people are likely to be when they die. This is important information for companies selling life insurance since they've got to make sure their clients live long enough—and *pay* long enough—to more than cover the lump sum that gets doled out at the end. Now there's a fair amount of money at stake here, and that's why good actuaries get paid big money. The money is one reason being an actuary gets ranked as one of the best jobs by the *Wall Street Journal*. So the actuary advantages are the money, it's not stinky work, and also it's worth noting that there's not much stress since no one will know for sure whether your calculations are right or wrong for decades. Add it all up and you've got a potentially desirable job and career path, the kind you may want to put at the center of your working life.

Still, is it *really* better than a bottom-twenty job as a day care worker? If you do go the day care route, it's true that you've got to wash your hands constantly, but the rest of the day, being with excited children, helping them take their first steps, recite the alphabet, and learn how to play with one another, that must be worth *something*; there must be a human, emotional reward in it. Undeniably, when you punch out from the day care center on Friday night you won't have as much money

to spend as your friend who's charting future death rates, but it's also true that when you come back on Monday you'll be engaged with young lives instead of death. You'll be human for the day instead of a calculator.

On the other hand, no one likes poop under the fingernails. It's hard to get away from that.

Finally, what's really curious about that first list taken from the Internet discussion board is that for almost all of them, there's some lone voice speaking up in favor in the comments part of the web page. A toll booth operator, for example, wrote in to say that he likes his job because there's no boss staring over his shoulder. And roads don't go out of business, so he doesn't have to worry too much about corporate downsizing or economic recessions. Nearly every job, it seems, looks OK to *someone*. Even in the worlds of lung gunners and urinalysis monitors, there are people who are decently happy with what they're doing.

Why Is a Career Decision Ethical Instead of Just a Personal Decision about Jobs?

Normally we think of ethics as providing guidelines for how to treat other people—don't steal, don't lie. But ethics is also about how we treat ourselves and the responsibilities we have to ourselves. One of the deepest of the responsibilities is making thoughtful and independent decisions about what's worth doing and what isn't. Narrowing this to economic reality, the most tangible choice you're going to have to make is *where am I going to go to work when I wake up in the morning?* This decision—choosing a job and a career path—is about *value*. Every time the alarm goes off, you affirm what definitely matters in your life and what's really not so important.

These value judgments are rehearsed in comparing the so-called bottom-twenty job in the day care center with the so-called top-twenty job of an actuary. There are big advantages to being an actuary: money and relatively fixed hours (no parents get stuck in traffic and leave you with a screeching three-year-old until 8:00 p.m.). But day care also has advantages: you work in a life-affirming profession while reaping the human reward of helping children learn.

It's true that on paper being an actuary probably looks better. But life doesn't happen on paper. That's why, every day, people make the decision to go work at the day care center, despite everything. Or to be a teacher at an inner-city junior high school. Or to be a lumberjack because the opportunity to work outdoors outweighs the sore muscles. The possibilities are nearly endless.

In the end, you're the only one who can decide what to do when the alarm goes off, and you have an ethical responsibility to yourself to make the best decision you can.

Seven Values for Ranking Jobs

To start thinking about jobs in terms of the values they respond to, these questions are pivotal. For me, how important is it that my work

1. is meaningful,
2. allows leisure time,
3. accumulates money,
4. bestows power,
5. radiates prestige,
6. is comfortable,
7. provides security?

The question about **meaningful work**¹ is the hardest to cleanly answer. Even defining exactly what counts as "meaningful" isn't easy. Definitely, it's work that holds significance for you or the larger community apart from how much you're paid, how big your office is, how long your vacations stretch. Still, it's difficult to pin down exactly what counts as a meaningful job. Unlike money, which you can just add up, meaning is more like a color: hard to describe, changes a bit depending on the light, and people tend to have their own palettes of good and bad.

On her blog, Kendra Kinnison writes that she "believes her purpose in life is to use her ability to discover connections and present them in an innovative way to support the creation and building of healthy businesses and to inspire others to accept Jesus Christ and to discover and utilize their gifts." About Kendra, accessed May 16, 2011, http://businessethicsworkshop.com/Chapter_5/Kinnison_bio.html.

She's got it down. There's nothing about salary or how many employees she has working underneath her. She *does* want to be in business; it's not like her religion has led her off to be a missionary. But at the same time she wants to work on her terms and within her priorities. Probably, there are career slots where she wouldn't fit too well (imagine her trying to help others and spread her faith while working at a used car dealership), but maybe starting up a local day care center would suit her ideals. True, the *Wall Street Journal* tells us that's a bad job, but it doesn't sound like it would be a bad one for her.

1. Work holding significance apart from the nine-to-five life and distinct from paying the bills.

Look at the Greenpeace recruitment page: <http://greenpeace.org/international/about/jobs>. Their job openings read like anti-ads, like they're trying to *discourage*

your application. There are some uplifting parts about “challenging work,” but nothing about the potential for huge, year-end bonuses, or rapid advancement, or generous health insurance, or comfortable working conditions. In all those terms, working for Greenpeace sounds pretty bleak. Which is part of the reason it's so clear that this is a job for people who want meaning in their professional lives, a purpose separate from their own comfort, and one involving the environment.

Not all meaningful work has to be based on faith or tied to internationally known advocacy organizations. Chances are there's a woman not too far from where you live who's in the music business at the grassroots level: she offers piano lessons. Knock on her door and ask why she does it year after year; she may say she believes in music, its beauty, and its contribution to what she considers a full life. Your college athletic director might say something similar about sports. Or go to the nearest farmer's market—you won't find a lot of money changing hands; it's definitely not big business, but you'll probably run into someone eager to discuss the virtues of organic food in terms that sound more like a crusade than a menu choice.

Actually, organic food *is* big business. Beyond seeds in the fields and the scattered crates of the farmers' market, there's a growing, and growingly profitable business in the massification of the organic. Anyone walking through the local Whole Foods will see a lot of the color green. What won't be seen—but what's definitely up above—is an impressive corporate structure with big-salary managers making million-dollar stocking decisions every day. As far as money goes, they're doing well for themselves—like any multibillion-dollar corporation, Whole Foods pays its leading executives big money. Hannah Clark, “Whole Foods: Spinning CEO Pay,” accessed May 16, 2011, http://www.forbes.com/2006/04/20/john-mackey-pay_cx_hc_06ceo_0420wholefoods.html. But hunched over a desk and tapping on a keypad, hasn't their work been bleached of the meaning and devotion that abides with the vegan wearing dirty overalls and trying to sell strawberries in an empty parking lot Saturday mornings? Maybe. Or maybe not. Meaningful work doesn't *require* that the only jobs you'll accept are low paying.

More jobs and kinds of work could be added here, but whatever you believe in, you should be able to find some employment that lets you approach it. As for how close you can get to truly meaningful work, that will probably depend to some extent on trade-offs, on how much you're willing to give up in terms of leisure time, job security, and other comforts. Regardless, the real key is that meaningful work sets a specific purpose *before* everything else. With respect to lining up a career path, you don't start with a list of jobs and then find one that suits your interests; it's the opposite: you start with your deep interest and then find a job that lets you pursue it.

Finally, two cautionary points: While it's true that people devoted to meaningful work frequently sacrifice money, leisure time, and job security, the logic doesn't work the other way. Most of the time, low pay, short vacations, and a constant threat of unemployment don't mean you've chosen a noble career; they just mean you've got a crappy job.

And on the other side, there *are* the holy grails out there. Probably, some higher-ups at Whole Foods got into the line of work because they find the promotion of organic food meaningful, and they ended up with enviable salaries as well (in other words, they're in it for the organic cause more than the money, but they're happy to get the money). In a different direction, Michael Jordan loved basketball and also ended up getting paid handsomely to play. The photographer Annie Leibovitz loves and is dedicated to photography, but she's not making many sacrifices to do it: traveling to exotic places, living well, meeting interesting people. Former vice president Al Gore believes in saving the planet as much as any sweating deckhand on the Greenpeace boat; the difference is he wrote a book about it that sold millions of copies and made him millions of dollars.

Conclusion about meaningful work: dedicating your professional life to a cause or activity that you believe in doesn't mean low wages and long hours. A lot of times it does, but that's not the point.

Another question shaping job seeking is **leisure time**². How important is it? In a sense, this is the mirror image of meaningful work. If you believe in something like promoting organic food, playing basketball, taking pictures, saving the planet, or even watching game shows on TV, it's perfectly reasonable to find a job in some other field that provides the income you need in the fewest hours possible and then lets you get out and do what you really want with the rest of your time. More or less, what you say here is I'm just going to X out that part of my life where I'm working. In the extreme case, the attitude is, "I don't care how bad it is, I just want to get through it."

The Discovery Channel series *The Deadliest Catch* about crab fishing in the Arctic shows how cold, smelly, and ugly work can be; but a few months of it and you get a year's worth of wages and the free time to spend it. One important concept here is **instrumentalism**³, which means that work becomes an instrument—a tool allowing you to get or do something else.

The third question about jobs and values involves **money**⁴. Like sacrificing hours of work to get leisure, punching the clock to accumulate cash makes your job an instrument. Money is also the easiest way to organize your professional life. You can count it; if one job pays more than another, it's better.

2. Time separated from work and its concerns.
3. Treating a job as valueless in itself, and as an instrument to do or attain something else.
4. As a tool for evaluating jobs, adding the salary and monetary benefits to assign a desirability to specific jobs.

But this easiness can also be a trap. For anyone just out of college and facing a hazy and unclear world where all the decisions seem so difficult, it's easy to get tempted by the smoothest route: just check the possibilities out there and go for whatever pays the most. At least that way you know you're not messing things up completely. So there's something to be said for going that safe route, but this also needs to get underlined. From the perspective of your responsibilities to yourself, the better-paying job is only the better job *if you've already made the decision* to value career options in terms of how much they pay.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with that decision. Of course the Hollywood movies and the Habitat for Humanity volunteers hanging around campus looking for recruits are all going to tell you that you've got to follow your heart, do meaningful work, contribute to society. And if you face them up and flat out say you're just in it for the money, there are always going to be whispers about greed and accusations like being a sellout.

In defense of money, though, dedicating your career to getting it makes a lot of sense, and it can do a lot of good, too:

- If you've got student loans, it's good to be able to pay them back, as it's the fulfillment of a duty to fidelity.
- If you do feel a need to support causes like protecting the planet, most advocacy organizations will be happy to receive a cash donation. The truth is, they'd probably rather have the money than a few volunteer hours.
- Making money means participating in an economy that's getting richer, and doesn't that end up making life better for everyone? Faced with Habitat for Humanity volunteers who ask you to join them in building shelter for the needy, couldn't you even make the case that contributing to an economy that functions well actually helps people more—at least in the long run—by producing jobs so they can purchase their own home instead of relying on volunteers to build one?
- You may have children. Clothes are expensive. Summer camp is expensive. The holidays are expensive. True, little ones might still be a long way off, but when they come, a new set of responsibilities arrive, too, and just about the only way you can begin preparing for them now is by making sure that, on the money side at least, the house is in order.

There's more to this list, but when it comes to choosing a job with an eye on the salary factor, it's important to spend some time with this question: *Why is it, exactly, that money has value for me?*

If you're looking for **power**⁵, you could do a lot worse than being a judge. True, you spend your days listening to lame excuses for shoplifting and the bogus assurances of repentance from drug dealers, but with the pound of a (little wooden) hammer, you get a police officer to rumble over and haul people off to jail. In court, even someone mouthing off is enough to slap them with contempt and assign them to a few hours of lockup.

The military, politics, policing: all these fields will appeal to anyone who sets the possession of power as one of the most valuable aspects of a job. Less directly, people in the news media can decide which issues center popular attention by mentioning them on the radio broadcast, the TV news show, or the current affairs blog. That's serious influence, shaping what people are thinking and talking about in our shared world.

Obviously, bosses in most fields of work have power. Usually they like to say that they have "responsibilities," but frequently part of holding the responsibility to carry out a project is having the ability to hire and fire the people participating. Advertising is also about power. It's not as explicit as the ability to get someone hauled off to jail or sent to the unemployment line, but masters of the craft can get people to believe that they really *need* some electronic device that they didn't even know existed thirty seconds ago. There's power in schools, too. If you're in this class as a distribution requirement, that means someone has decided for you what you're supposed to know.

The bottom line is that power—and the various jobs that grant it—exists in many places, and some are more transparent holders of force than others. So one of the keys to understanding power as a career option is being sensitive to the different ways it works. Commanding a platoon of soldiers fits the bill, but so does sending out an army of TV commercials.

Even more than money, power is vilified as a career goal. If you tell your friends that all you care about is money, they might think you're greedy, but they'll probably keep in touch over the years, figuring you could invite them to your Hamptons beach house for a great weekend. If you tell everyone that all you care about is power, though, they'll probably think you're weird and drop you off their Facebook friends list.

The image we get from popular culture of a power-hungry careerist is a drooling madman with clenched fists, too much caffeine, and maybe a copy of Machiavelli's *The Prince* on the nightstand. And it's not just the movies. Deborah Gruenfeld, a professor in the Stanford Graduate School of Business and expert in the psychology of power in the workplace believes: "Those in positions of power can be observed to

5. As part of a job, the ability to directly control or significantly influence others.

act in a manner that is peculiar and that often has no connection to reality." Psychology of Power, accessed May 16, 2011, http://businessethicsworkshop.com/Chapter_5/Power_in_business.html.

Ouch.

There must be *something* there, though. If power were really so bad, we wouldn't have to worry about it since no one would want it. But people *do* want it; it's just that hardly anyone wants to admit it.

In a sense, **prestige**⁶ is the opposite of power. Almost everyone says they'd love a job granting prestige, but not many are willing to give up much for it. Going all the way back to the *Wall Street Journal* article, "historian" is on the top-twenty list of desirable jobs, and "philosopher" is there, too, on the longer, uncut version of the story. Salary isn't the reason they're included among the twenty best, and there's not much direct power to those jobs either. (Despite what you think, professors don't get any rush out of failing people. Only rarely, anyway.) There is job security if you're a tenured university professor, but the main benefit of a prestigious job is the "wow" factor:

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a historian."

"Wow."

After a few minutes in which everyone in the conversation acknowledges that this is very interesting, the talk switches back to more normal topics. Later on, people quietly wonder why anyone would choose to spend more or less his or her entire life in school. That doesn't detract from the prestige of the career path, though.

Being a doctor is prestigious, and (even if we hate to admit it) being a lawyer is, too, although it's also true that part of the prestige accrues from the fact that you know people who have these jobs probably have some money too.

The Paul Teutuls (father and son), along with Mikey Teutul, hold prestige jobs at Orange County Choppers, and they were prestigious even before the TV show.

6. As a job-related value, the admiration others feel for you because of the work you do.

One of the thorny parts of prestige as a career goal is the difficulty in finding jobs that straight-out specialize in that. Frequently, what makes this kind of job attractive isn't *purely* prestige, usually there's something else mixed in. Being a judge is prestigious, but partially because you know there's some real power there. Being a struggling rock musician is pretty good in terms of prestige, but only if there's some sober hope that one day you'll convert into a legitimate star and not just end up with no money and damaged eardrums. On the other end of the musical spectrum, a jazz musician who tells people that's what he does for a living can usually count on getting a few people to say "that's cool" or "that's so interesting," but again, part of the reason is the mixing of the music with the sense that this person has found *meaningful* work, something they'd probably be doing for free if no one was paying.

Finally, the signature difference between prestige and meaningful work is that prestigious jobs by definition demand an audience. People dedicated to a meaningful cause like protecting the welfare of animals can labor in obscurity all their lives doing simple things that virtually no one notices, like running a kennel for out-of-town dog owners where the pets get treated with extraordinary levels of respect. But for this work to cross from meaningful into prestige, someone at some point has to look and say, "Wow."

Comfort⁷ on the job comes in all forms, spanning from the size of your desk, to how often you need to travel in cramped airplanes, to the clothes you need to wear while on the clock. The *Wall Street Journal* article grades jobs to some extent on comfort, though they call the category "Environment." Here are some components of an (un)comfortable workday:

- Physical demands (crawling, stooping, bending, etc.)
- Work conditions (toxic fumes, noise, etc.)
- Physical environment extremes
- Stamina required
- Degree of confinement

This is a good list of factors that move the needle on the comfort scale, but there's something very important missing from it. On the comfort scale, Arctic fishermen aren't going to score highly in terms of physical working conditions; they're cold and wet and living in a cramped space. The food's bad. On the other hand, it takes a certain type of person to sign up for a job like that—a very, very specific kind of person. And if you're seriously thinking about it, there's a decent chance you're going to hit it off with—you're going to feel comfortable with—the *other* people who are doing it. The boat, consequently, will be uncomfortable, but the company of people you're with may be comforting.

7. The physical and the emotional ease of a job.

Looking not just at the physical characteristics of the job but the other characters who'll be there doing it with you is important for the obvious reason: you spend a lot of time at work. ("I spend more time with you guys than with my husband/wife" is a constant refrain in some offices.) So if your sense of humor works well with a bunch of people you happen to know, and it turns out that many of them are nurses, that tells you something about how you're going to feel about seeing them bright and early every morning, Monday through Friday.

In his book *Vital Friends: The People You Can't Afford to Live Without*, Tom Rath organizes data from Gallup polls and studies to show that employees who have good friends in the office tend to stay longer in a job. It's difficult to *prove* things about happiness, of course. It's even hard to know exactly what happiness is, but it seems fair to suspect that there might be a connection between duration in a job and happiness with the job. And if there is, then feeling comfortable with the people you work with—laughing when they laugh, watching the same TV shows, whatever—should be a job consideration.

Pushing the importance of workmates in a different direction, in a blog post, a woman calling herself Penelope (she doesn't give a last name) makes a point about flourishing at work: "You'll learn the most on a job by having a great mentor looking after you." "How to Pick the People You Work With," *Penelope Trunk* (blog), May 6, 2009, accessed May 16, 2011, <http://blog.penelopetrunk.com/2009/05/06/how-to-pick-the-people-you-work-with>. If that's true, then if you choose to work in a profession that's full of the kind of people you respect, admire, understand, and get along with, you're likely to do better for yourself than working with the kind of people you don't take seriously (or who don't take you seriously).

Fitting in, the point is, with the people at work isn't just a fringe benefit; it's a critical value to factor into the selection of one or another career line.

For the young, job **security**⁸ seems like a distant virtue, a fuddy-duddy aspiration for the over-the-hill crowd. In fact, even for the not-so-young it's fuddy-duddy. It's also one of the most volatile of the values you can assign to your job search, one of the most prone to surges and retreats.

When you wake up at 3 a.m. and then can't get back to sleep because there's a recession and you know cutbacks are coming, all of a sudden holding a position that maybe isn't too glamorous but is certainly necessary—like being a day care worker—doesn't seem so bad.

8. The degree to which a job guarantees continuity and stability of employment.

The day you learn your family will be growing by one is another of those moments when security's importance blows up. And the day your husband loses his job, that'll be another security surge.

Then there's age. It's a delicate subject—for legal reasons no employer wants to go on record saying they won't hire people older than fifty—but there comes a point when years become a disadvantage for job seekers, which explains why an entire subfield of the résumé-writing business has now sprung up to manage the problem. Jeanne Knight, a certified career coach and résumé expert, says, "What candidates can do to make themselves look younger in a résumé is only list ten to fifteen years of work experience. Also, drop graduation dates and make sure you list any seminars or workshops that focus on new technology." Ric Romero, "Get the Job' Pt. 4: De-Aging Resumes," *ABC7*, September 3, 2008, accessed May 16, 2011, http://abclocal.go.com/kabc/story?section=news/7_on_your_side&id=6369394.

So you can figure that if older people are going that far to camouflage their overabundant experience, it must be hard to get hired after fifty. And if that's true, you better have good job security at forty-nine.

Finally, the easiest way to define job security is just the confidence that you won't be fired next week, but the discussion broadens very naturally. For example, demographic trends tell us that the American population is aging, so if you're deciding between studying to be an athletic trainer or a nurse, you may well figure that over the next twenty years it's probably going to be easier to find work in the nursing home than the gymnasium, and that holds regardless of how secure any single job may appear right now. Or again, computer technologies keep entering our lives faster and from more directions, and that's a good clue about future job prospects.

In any case, if you're reading this, it's possible that you're what marketers are calling a millennial, meaning someone born between 1980 and 1995, more or less. If you fit the category, the TV show *60 Minutes* believes you think this: "We have options. We can keep hopping jobs. No longer is it bad to have four jobs on your résumé in a year. Whereas for our parents or even generation X, that was terrible. But that's the new reality for us. And we're going to keep adapting and switching and trying new things until we figure out what it is." "The Millennials Are Coming," *60 Minutes*, CBS News.com, May 23, 2008, accessed May 16, 2011, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/08/60minutes/main3475200.shtml>.

Probably, the value of job security arrives along with the realization that companies can say the same thing about employees. A lot of them do.

Balancing the Values

One factor can be chosen to weigh more heavily than everything else combined when sorting out the values for initiating a job search. The imbalance would go a long way toward efficiently filtering career possibilities. For many, however, the priorities won't sort out so easily: it'll be necessary to balance competing values, to trade one against another when considering specific jobs and career paths. Someone may, for example, value both money and comfort, but that doesn't help answer the question about whether a job on an Alaskan crabbing ship is more or less attractive than a summer on the beach in the lifeguard stand. In the longer term, holding the two values won't help to decide between the career of an undersea welder or an office worker.

How can individuals get a grip on what their own priorities are, and how much each weighs? In his essay "Strategic Planning—For the Good Life," Robert Solomon offers a provocative question: "Looking back over your life from a rocking chair, what would you like to remember—and how would you like to be remembered?" Joanne B. Ciulla, Clancy Martin, and Robert Solomon, eds., "Strategic Planning—for the Good Life," in *Honest Work: A Business Ethics Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 106–7.

Of course, the idea isn't to lock yourself into a life plan based on how things might look in the distant future. You have no way of knowing how things will be, and if you're a millennial, we know you don't like life plans anyway. Instead, the idea is to try to get a revealing angle on the question of what values in work really matter for you. The aim is to step away from everything and get a different perspective, a fresh look at the problem.

That's important because real life, moving along fast as it does, can narrow your perspective, get you caught seeing things more or less the way everyone around you does. Faced with a career center job board filled with interview schedules of visiting corporate recruiters, isn't it easiest just to sign up for the ones your friends are signing up for? If everyone in your sorority is talking about going to work at one agency or another, or if half the people you know are getting teaching degrees, the temptation's there to just follow along.

When looking at things from extreme or unusual angles, those herding forces recede. At least for a bit you can make yourself turn away from what everyone else is doing, leaving you no choice but to arrange your own priorities for determining the kind of work you want to get involved with. Importantly, the idea isn't to eliminate other people from consideration but to eliminate consideration that just imitates what other people are thinking. Here's the beginning of a list of questions

aiming to do that, aiming to shake up thinking about the career choice and force some sorting of the basic values determining which way the choice is going to go:

- Of the seven discussed values—meaning, leisure time, money, power, prestige, comfort, security—can you rank them, or at least group them, from the most to least important for you? Can you take some of the jobs or careers you've been considering and loosely rank them in terms of how well they fit with your list of values?
- To make the list of values more manageable, can you cut it down by just eliminating some concerns that you really don't share?
- Are there any values you think should be added to the list?
- Can you make a short list of *other people* whose opinions are important to you, and then loosely imagine how they would rank the seven values for evaluating jobs? If you can, is their ranking similar to yours or different? If it's similar, are you sure you're thinking for yourself? If it's different, are you sure your values for work align with the kind of life that you respect?
- What would you like to tell your parents you've decided to do for a living?
- Career day at the elementary school. You're standing in front of your own child's class talking about your work. What kinds of things would you like to report and be proud to say? Looking back at your original list of values for jobs, does it correspond with the classroom scene?
- You've got six months to live: what do you do? Is it something that might be related to work or is it a pure leisure activity? (Can you imagine any job that would allow you to do that activity, whatever it is, throughout your career?)
- You'll live 600 years—and have to work during 550 of them—does that change your work priorities? Should it?
- You'll live 600 years—and have to work during 55 of them—does that change your work priorities? Should it?
- For you, is the term *couch potato* a slur or just the name of a comfortable lifestyle? Are there anti-couch potato and pro-couch potato career tracks?
- Your rich uncle dies and leaves you a sum of money and private instructions to use it to put poor children through school in Mexico. It's also enough to pay your college and leave a good amount left over for whatever. No one's watching—no one will ever know. What do you do? What does this tell you about the place money has in your life?
- Madonna and Mick Jagger are among the world's two richest rock stars. Imagine you could have all their money, but be a complete unknown and have no sense of rhythm. Would you prefer that or would you trade all the money to have their success, voice, and rhythm

for one year on a world tour? Does the decision correspond with your original ranking of the seven values?

- For you, which would be better: spending big money or having people know you've got big money to spend? If it's the second, is there a way to command respect from others that's easier to achieve than wealth?
- Friday night, you're with a new group of people who know little about you. Would you rather tell them you've been invited to a dinner at the White House for notable citizens or you'll be having dinner tomorrow at your own expansive beach house?
- You sign up for a blind dating service, hoping to meet someone to marry. The only thing you get to choose about the man or woman you'll be paired with is his or her job. What job would you choose to match you? Next, imagine that you're not ready for marriage, still exploring, and you go to the same service. What's the job this time? If the two jobs are really different, does that reflect anything about where you're at with respect to the kind of work you want for yourself?
- Do you like being in charge, no one is telling you what to do, even telling other people what to do? Be honest, no one's listening. By the way, would your answer change if people *were* listening?
- A brutally long Friday at work comes to an end at 9 p.m. On the elevator ride down with some people in the office, there's a power outage. No one's around to fix the machinery or let you out. What kind of people would you like to have in the elevator with you? Is it possible to match these people up with the kind of people frequently involved in one or another profession? (Alternatively, what kind of people would lead you to investigate how your keys or the pen in your pocket could be used as a suicide implement?)
- If you could wear anything you wanted to work every day, nose rings included, what would it be? Is there really an office anywhere where people do dress that way? What would you be willing to give up to work there, and what does that tell you about the importance of environment (or comfort in the broad sense) for your work?
- At the end of every month, your boss gives you a choice. You can have your \$4,000 check or you can spin a lottery wheel with a range of numbers from \$1 to \$8,000. Would you take the \$4,000 check or spin? Does this tell you anything about the importance of job security?
- If you've had time to read through this entire list of questions, do the answers you gave more or less correspond with the ranking of the seven values—meaning, leisure time, money, power, prestige, comfort, security—that you set up at the beginning?

Whose Job Is It, Anyway?

No one can decide for you what line of work to start down; it's a decision only you can make and that you have to make for yourself. This doesn't mean, however, that your life is the only one involved in the decision. Here's a blog post: "I think people need to find the right job for them, the one that will make them happy. My parents are always telling me to get a successful and well paying job, however the job that I really want to do probably isn't the best paying job, but it would make me happy if I fulfill my dream. I think people need to go out and do what they want and they will be successful in different ways." Karen Sternheimer, "How Great Is Being a Sociologist?," *Everyday Sociology* (blog), January 24, 2009, accessed May 16, 2011, <http://nortonbooks.typepad.com/everydaysociology/2009/01/how-great-is-being-a-sociologist.html>.

Sounds good, but is it right? If you've adopted egoism (morality = self-interest) as your ethical compass, then it is. Egoism makes the job search *relatively* easy; just find the one that will make you most happy.

On the other hand, if you think of yourself as more of a utilitarian—someone guided by the conviction that the morally recommendable act is the one bringing the greatest good to the greatest number—then it's not clear whether this is the right way to go or not. On one side, it's true that pursuing your dream of professional satisfaction is good, but your parents' satisfaction—*everyone's* satisfaction—has to be factored in too. It could be that your parents' wishes—and the happiness they enjoy if you follow their advice—outweigh the happiness and welfare you take from a career they recommend against.

Staying with the parents, and taking their side, what kind of ethical arguments can they launch against your career choice? One of the strongest is going to be *obligation* in the sense of *gratitude*, in the sense that we have a duty to repay those who've given to us. Most of us sense this as the courtesy of returning favors. Sometimes we feel it in an inverted form as the desire to decline a gift that seems so great we won't be able to pay it back. The case could be made that this sense of obligation and gratitude is a virtue, the result of a proper upbringing. Or it may be more like a duty, a sense of fairness inherent in the idea of ethics in the first place. Regardless, it's too late to go back now for you and your parents. All you can do is add up everything they've done for you and everything you've done for them. It's doubtful that there's any kind of balance.

In Portuguese, the word commonly used to say "thank you" is *obrigado*, meaning I'm obligated, and there aren't many instances where the word is more apt than the

parental relation with children. Faced with the obligation, these are possible responses:

- I accept my obligation and will follow the career path my parents desire.
- I accept my obligation, but I'll pay it off by bringing up my own children and letting them off the hook when they hit adulthood (or through some other mechanism of repayment).
- I accept my obligation, but I won't respect it.

Of course people are always free to pursue that last course, to say the obligation is there and I don't care. But if you want to continue acting ethically, that shifts the burden onto you to build a structure for *justifying* walking away.

Moving from parents to others, what kind of ethical responsibilities do you hold to your spouse if you're married and to children if they arrive? There's nothing wrong with being, say, a starving actor working for that one break on the way to fame. But it's a different thing entirely when you're asking *someone else* to starve too so that you can go on trying to be the next Johnny Depp.

Do you owe anything to that math teacher who saw that you had exceptional ability with numbers and used her own time after class to patiently tutor you on the subject? She probably wouldn't have bothered if she knew you were going to end up working at something that doesn't involve math-related skills. She did bother, though, so does that create a responsibility—even if it's only a small one—to use that ability in your professional life, to find a job that exploits your skill with numbers that she helped you acquire?

Finally, at the broadest level, what obligations do you have to the impersonal community around you, to all those people you barely know or have never met—the woman behind the counter at the gas station, the plant worker in Germany who helped assemble your car, some taxi driver in Thailand whose life will never touch yours in any way? Do you owe anything to *them* when thinking about your long, eight-hour days?

This Is the *Perfect* Job for Me...Right Now

One way of dividing up the responsibility felt to yourself and to the others who share your world is **career sequencing**⁹—that is, defining zones of life and evaluating each separately in terms of work priorities and aspirations. Meaningful labor—signing up for a rugged, low-paying trip on the Greenpeace ship—may fit

9. Defining zones of your life and evaluating each separately in terms of work priorities, aspirations, and values.

with your values right out of school. The trip allows a broad ethical vision of work, one seeking to incorporate the welfare of others at a good time for you, while your own needs are limited. Later on, lucrative work—signing up for a desk job administering a tourist cruise ship where the hours are fewer and the pay higher—might prove the better fit.

Making the move from meaningful work to a more salary-centered vision of the workplace may simply correspond to the realization that walking around in ripped jeans and a t-shirt doesn't work with a receding hairline. Or it may be that the others you hope to benefit with your time have come closer to home: it's not that you want to make the world a better place anymore so much as make the world better for your family.

The Tuck School of Business has published a report on sequencing in today's world. Tuck Executive Education, *Changing the Career Ladder: Paving Flexible Pathways for Today's Talent* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth, 2011), accessed May 16, 2011, <http://worklifefit.com/pdf/TuckSurveysummary.pdf>. Among the findings: employees, led by women especially, are *professionalizing* the movement in and out of the workplace. Exiting the daily grind to have a child is no longer understood so universally as *leaving* work so much as a planned interruption to pursue personal goals. The difference between leaving and interrupting is that many women now step off the career track fully intending to return in the not-so-distant future and to resume the professional trajectory already established. It's not putting on the brakes so much as taking a detour.

Men, the study finds, are following suit. Some are taking paternity leaves, more or less along the lines pioneered by women, but the study also finds workers interested in professional detouring for the following reasons:

- An avocation outside of work
- Stress and burnout
- Entrepreneurship

In all three cases, space along the career's way is being pried open for different values to enter and at least temporarily redefine the relation with work.

Why *don't* people sequence? What keeps them in jobs they'd like to get away from, at least temporarily? Fear that they won't be able to get their jobs back leads the list. The study also shows, though, that many employees in essence think that sequencing is wimpy, and it'll mark them as unreliable and, therefore, unpromotable. That perception may not be right, though. The study is a snapshot of

a changing situation, so it's difficult to draw too many conclusions, but the authors do sense that that the direction of evolution is *toward* sequencing, not away. More and more higher-level managers are willing to accommodate employees who want to take detours; they're willing to make space for them to come and go (as long as the coming and going isn't constant).

To the extent that's right, the ethical relation with job selection transforms. It's no longer the formation of values for choosing a career track leading into the indefinite future; instead it's a *process*. The ethical question about your work, "What's the right kind of job for me?," is now a lingering concern, and answering is a constant responsibility.

Do I Have to Decide?

Some millennials are big on job hopping, on experimenting with work first and *then* deciding on a path instead of doing all the ethical considering up front. This is an attractive option.

There's a risk here, though: it's the trivialization of professional life. If you're just going to take whatever job comes along and see how it works out, then why bother even thinking about it at all? In fact, why bother switching? If you're not going to do the work beforehand to get a grip on the kind of employment, on the general direction of professional interest that supports the values you've decided to live by, then how are you going to know the right job when you find it? Why switch jobs, in other words, when you don't know what you're looking for?

This was one of Saint Augustine's (AD 400) durable pieces of wisdom. It's very simple: if you don't know what you're seeking before you start looking, then how are you going to know when you've found it? Trial and error, in other words, when you're looking for the right kind of job (or the right romantic partner, or the right beer, or whatever) *only* works if you already know what's going to count as an error and what counts as success.

Of course no one's going to get everything down perfectly at the beginning. Ethically, there's a kind of bind here paralleling the first job and experience catch (you can't get your first job without experience, and you can't get experience without your first job). Similarly, you can't know exactly what kind of work fits your values and outlook until you've learned how things really are out there in the nine-to-five world, but that's not a convincing reason to fall off the other extreme and just spin the wheel, take whatever comes your way, and switch jobs without thinking.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Pursuing a specific job is an economic and also an ethical decision.
- Specific values shape the ethics of the job search.
- Job seekers hold ethical responsibilities both to themselves and to others.
- Job sequencing allows workers to manage shifting ethical responsibilities as their lives evolve.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the differences between a job that provides meaningful work, and one that provides prestige?
2. Can leisure time—maximizing it—be pursued on its own as a value in the job search, or does it need to be combined with other values? If it needs to be combined, which values might work best?
3. If money is selected as the prime value a job seeker decides to pursue, what other values may become easier to reach because of the money, and which values may be pushed further away?
4. What's the difference between power and prestige? Can you think of a job that grants power but little prestige and one that grants prestige but little power?
5. For you, what are the components of comfort—do they include flexible hours, working in an office instead of outside, something else? Can you rank the components as more and less important?
6. What responsibilities to others may a job seeker consider when looking for a job?
7. What is career sequencing? What are some reasons a person may choose to sequence, and what are some reasons a person may choose not to be a sequencer?

5.2 Working for Ethically Complicated Organizations

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define reasons why an organization's work may be viewed as unethical.
2. Consider how working for ethically troubling organizations can be managed.

The Psilocybin Project

The Harvard Psilocybin Project began in 1960 and included some of the university's leading and most innovative professors, especially from the psychology and related departments. One of their projects—the Concord Prison Experiment—used the newly developed drug psilocybin on inmates. Professors wanted to discover whether the medication could reduce antisocial behavior and recidivism. Another project, this one carried out in tandem with the Harvard Divinity School, used the same drug to experiment with the bond felt between young theology students and their chosen profession. In both cases, significant, even mind-blowing success was initially reported.

The experiments didn't last. Other Harvard professors raised questions about the ethics of using this drug on humans. An intense conflict erupted in the university. The ethical propriety of the entire Psilocybin Project, the decision came down, was, in fact doubtful. That quickly led to the project's shuttering and then to the dismissal of several well-known professors who protested too loudly in favor of their work and its value, both scientific and moral.

Not all of those fired professors just went away. Outside the university some continued defending their work with principled stands and meticulous arguments. One of those defenders, Dr. Leary, achieved such broad public recognition that he ended up being mentioned in a song by The Who.

Not only did Timothy Leary defend the Psilocybin Project from outside university walls, he also continued with his avid experimentation. Pretty soon the experiments weren't only outside the university, they were also outside the law because psilocybin, like its close relative LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), was categorized as an illegal substance.

Is it immoral to experiment on people—especially on prisoners who may feel pressured to participate—with psychedelic drugs, concretely with magic mushrooms (the organic source of psilocybin)? Assume just for the sake of argument that it is wrong and the experiments were immoral. Now *who* should feel guilty? The leaders of the Psilocybin Project seem like good candidates since they knew exactly what was going on, and they were the ones handing the doses over. What about the graduate students who followed their professor's lead and joined in the distribution and application of the drugs? Or the administrators at the university who financed the project but maybe didn't know exactly what the experiments involved? What about the undergrads whose tuition money paid for all this? What about the chemists who derived the substance from mushrooms? Or the lab techs who actually made the stuff? What about the secretary who happened to be assigned to work in the psych department and processed some of the paperwork? Where do we draw the line?

One of the most difficult constellations of questions facing conscientious job seekers is: what kind of organization is it OK to work for? Specifically, to what extent am *I* personally responsible for the things my company does? There are the two questions here:

1. What makes a company's work—or a university's, or a nonprofit organization's—unethical?
2. I've got an attractive job offer from an unethical organization: can I work there anyway?

What Makes an Organization's Work Unethical?

In a world spattered with poverty and desperation, **exploitation of workers**¹⁰ is one of the most frequently cited areas of corporate abuse. Advocacy organizations peopled by volunteers who enjoy traveling have proven very effective at locating and drawing attention to overseas sweatshops. The Nike company pays athletes millions to break a sweat for a few hours so they can get some good action video for commercials selling athletic shoes, but they pay sewers in Asia only a few dollars to sweat all day long making those shoes. And what about the cameraman hired to shoot the commercial? He's earning a lot more than the sewer, but his wages are still closer to the sweatshop level than the NBA star level.

In *An Economic Analysis of a Drug-Selling Gang's Finances*, authors Steve Levitt and Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh report on a drug gang studied over the course of several years. It turned out that the street dealers weren't even getting minimum wage for their dangerous efforts: about \$200 a month for dealing. Above them, however, the gang leader made between \$4,000 and \$11,000 a month. It's unclear whether he paid

10. Taking advantage of workers' economic or social conditions to acquire their labor at a low cost.

taxes. Steven D. Levitt and Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, "An Economic Analysis of a Drug-Selling Gang's Finances," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115 (August 3, 2000): 755–89.

Questions about wages and sweatshops will be pursued more fully in later chapters, but here it's enough to note that vast discrepancies in wages throughout a company raise concerns that the organization is exploiting employees. That may lead job seekers to think twice before signing on, even if they're not the ones being exploited.

Exploitation of consumers¹¹ is another murky direction. It's true that many immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere received interest-only home loans in the early 2000s with repayment schedules beginning low but later ballooning to monstrous levels. It's also true that no one forced them to sign the contract; they hold responsibility for their acts, no doubt. However, considering their imperfect English and little knowledge of the American world, is it fair for the mortgage company to even offer these kinds of loans, which seem more predatory than cooperative?

Tobacco companies selling addiction sticks, which sometimes become cancer sticks, aren't clearly removed from charges of exploiting their own buyers.

Breakfast cereals aimed at children frequently boast on the box that the nuggets or the puffs contain 100 percent of the recommended daily allowance of various vitamins and minerals. They don't say anything about sugar highs and crashes. In all these cases, questions about whether consumers are being respected may lead potential employees to question whether they want to get involved in the operation.

Environmental exploitation¹² is frequently invisible in the sense that few people suffer direct consequences of pollution, deforestation, and poisoned water and soil. There are orange alert days in many cities now when children are told not to play outside. But for the most part, companies that pollute may carry on without being held directly responsible for harmful consequences. Of course there are extreme cases like the Love Canal, the neighborhood constructed on a landfill covering thousands of rusting steel barrels of industrial waste. Families living there reported acid slicks running down the street during rains, puddles of rancid chemicals forming in their yards, and birth defects at astronomical levels. Whether, finally, an organization exploits the environment in obvious or not-so-obvious ways, workers may ask if ethical obstacles stand between them and continued employment.

11. Taking advantage of consumers' conditions or knowledge to market products that fail to serve the consumers' interests.

12. Organizations damaging the environment with their operations while avoiding paying cleanup costs.

Ethically dubious missions and connections¹³ is another category of corporate irresponsibility. The case of Harvard experimenting with acid fits here. So too the drug gang studied by Levitt and Venkatesh. Questions could also be directed toward organizations specializing in reuniting families across borders (people smuggling).

Almost any social hot-button issue is going to double as a source of ethically challenged industries; there'll be people for it and others against it, but either way the questions are there. Circles of controversy surround

- abortion doctors,
- judges sending inmates to death row,
- advocates of assisted suicide.

One thing all these people, professions, and institutions have in common (besides inciting ethical debates) is that they need to hire workers—telephone operators, assistants and administrators, marketers and finance people—just like any other business. You can work for them.

You could also work for a specific kind of lawyering outfit, the one specializing in clients who are very wealthy and very guilty: there'll always be law firms—especially in the field of tax law—specializing in raising a reasonable doubt where there really isn't any.

Massage parlors need receptionists and janitors just like every other business. The horse racetrack hires a small army of diverse workers to keep taking bets. The state lottery contracts actors, directors, film editors, and media experts to make and run ads showing jubilant winners tossing money in the air; on the other hand, they don't spend much time hiring statisticians to explain to the public what the small print on the back of their ticket means: "Really, the chances you'll haul in the Super Magnum Jackpot are about zero."

Conclusion. Ethically conscientious individuals don't have to look too hard to find jobs that make them ask, am I participating in something that's wrong?

I've Got a Job Offer at an Unethical Company; Can I Work There Anyway?

Yes. The question is how.

13. Organizational activities directly or indirectly producing ethical concerns.

Ignore it all is one option, pretend like the ethical stain isn't there or at least that you don't see it. Here's an example of what that strategy can look like. Most cities have at least one free and local alternative culture publication, usually published on newspaper-grade paper; it comes out on Thursdays and is called *The Observer* or something like that. Their reporters hit the street to get the latest on the alternative music scene and idealistic political grassroots operations and government abuses and, above all, altruistic, principled causes. The *Dallas Observer* is the Dallas version. In the November 5, 2008, publication there's an article called "Pole Dancing—Good for the Body, But What About a Woman's Soul?" It comes with an honest and thoughtful objection to the caricature of femininity that was developed and mass produced with the express goal of turning on a male audience. Megan Feldman, "Pole Dancing—Good for the Body, but What about a Woman's Soul?," *Dallas Observer*, November 6, 2008, accessed May 16, 2011, <http://www.dallasobserver.com/2008-11-06/news/pole-dancing-classes-mdash-good-for-the-body-but-what-about-a-woman-s-soul>.

A few pages after the author finishes making a strong moral case against the exploitation of this caricature, the full-page spread devoted to Debbie comes. She's looking tight in her white bikini. She wants to talk to you, and her phone number's right there on the page. In little print it says it costs \$1.49 per minute. On the next page there's Robert. He's wearing even less. The phone call costs the same.

It's not anybody's fault that Debbie and Robert (or whatever their real names are) figure so prominently on the advertising pages of a newspaper that's so set against stereotypes like Debbie and Robert. It's only a fact that *that's* where the money comes from to keep the otherwise idealistic and ethically elevated paper in business. So what can the reporters do? They can object to the ads; but without them and their revenue, there won't be any publication left to print their articles decrying these kinds of ads. It's a tough spot. There's no clear way out, which is why it's understandable to go forward pretending you don't see the contradiction.

There are pacifists working for Boeing, the same company that makes warplanes. Somewhere there must be a volunteer at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals who holds down a day job at L'Oreal, a company vilified on Internet petitions for its animal testing. Cherry Marrone, "Stop L'Oreal's Animal Testing," Care 2 Petition Site, accessed May 16, 2011, <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/stop-loreals-animal-testing>. There are parents working at General Mills who'd die before giving their kids Cocoa Puffs. There are strict Catholics working for the pharmaceutical company that manufactures birth control pills. The list will never end because it's always possible to pretend you don't see the conflict between your own moral convictions on one side and the actions of the company you work for on the other.

But the decision to remain blind is difficult because pretending you don't see essentially means you're lying—lying to yourself. The question raised here is this: can that lying be justified ethically?

If you're a strict believer in the standard duties, which normally include the duty to honesty, you're going to have problems. You can, however, argue that you have a still *more compelling duty* to provide for your family and loved ones. So if the job you have is the best one you can get, then you can make the case that your responsibility to them is greater than your responsibility to be honest with yourself. Making a similar argument but from a slightly different direction, a utilitarian can point out the benefits a paycheck brings—not just for the worker but also for the family and the economy generally—and from there say that lying to yourself is good because it produces a greater general good.

Of course there are arguments that could be raised against these justifications and so the debate rolls on. What's important is that pretending an ethical conflict between your convictions and your company simply isn't there may be justifiable.

Explicitly Accepting Employment at an Ethically Difficult Workplace

Another option for accepting a job offer in an organization you consider to be morally stained is to explicitly accept that I work at an ethically difficult company and go on to justify the decision. There are two directions for consideration here:

1. How seriously wrong do I believe the company's actions are?
2. How close is my work to those actions I believe wrong?

There's a difference between working for a firm that experiments on animals (L'Oreal) and working for one that experiments on humans (the Harvard psychedelic drug project). Most ethically challenged jobs are more like the former than the latter. That's not a license to simply discount the reality that the work may participate in a larger and objectionable process, but it does open the way to a move from *an absolute to a balanced ethical stance*: it's not that "something's going on there that's wrong and therefore I can't be involved at all"; instead "something's going on there that's wrong, but things could be a lot worse, plus, the right and good things I can achieve by taking this job are pretty significant." So start with the idea that even if you think experimenting on animals is wrong, it's not as bad as experimenting on humans. Then add the good things that could come from working for an animal-abusing company. Here are two possibilities:

1. The post allows me to maximize the use of my personal strengths. Ethics isn't only about duties to others; there are also duties to you. Maximizing your own potential is one of them.
2. The post allows me to better equip myself to get an improved job further down the line. If you *really* want to avoid touching unethical work, then your best option may be to do whatever's necessary to build the strongest résumé possible. Once you've done that, your options for working will increase and correspondingly the possibilities for ethically satisfying employment.

Moving to the next question—*how close is my work to those actions I believe are wrong?*—there's a difference between experimenting on animals and preparing the tax return for a company that experiments on animals. Making this point sharper, if you adamantly refused to participate in *any* company that has *anything* to do with animal testing, then you're not going to be able to participate in anything. You're not going to be able to buy paper from the company that sells paper to the animal testers. You're not going to be able to use Google because people at the animal testing company buy advertisements on Google search pages. The list is endless in an economy that's totally interlinked, and our economy is pretty close to totally interlinked.

Now, if that's right, then the relationship between you and the immorality that indisputably exists in the economic world—and probably in the company you work for in one way or another—isn't an issue of right and wrong so much as a question of *distance*. In other words, when you're contemplating a job, the question isn't whether something bad is happening there; it's “how close does the stink get to my office?”

More, it may even be that accepting a job at a company can be a route to changing that company's policy. Of course that's going to be more than difficult at a giant concern like L'Oreal, but if you're interested in the environment, you may end up at a small local firm that sells plastic (not biodegradable) bottles of water, and you can advocate the forming of a company recycling program. It's a small thing. Almost absurd. But it's no closer to absurd than the other choice, which is the big thing: simply refusing to work for any company that acts objectionably in the world in one way or another.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is a wide range of reasons why an organization's work may be viewed as unethical.
- There are multiple strategies for managing concerns about working for ethically troubling organizations.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are four reasons an organization's actions may be viewed as ethically troubling?
2. Ethically, how could you justify ignoring the fact that there's a conflict between your convictions and the actions of the company you work for?
3. Why might a potential employee of an ethically troubling organization ask how seriously wrong the organization's actions are?
4. Explain why working for almost any organization may be ethically troubling.
5. If someone were working for an organization involved in ethically troubling activities, what questions may they ask themselves as they consider whether they should continue working there?

5.3 Case Studies

The Ethics of Grunge Work



Source: Photo courtesy of ictsan,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/ictsan/3025080337/>.

Jason Everman (b. 1967), Kodiak, Alaska

In February 1989, Jason Everman joined a new act called Nirvana as a backup guitarist. A few months later the group's first record, a raw and noisy effort titled *Bleach*, was recorded and released by an obscure local distributor.

Everman played in the 1989 summer tour supporting *Bleach*, then was kicked out of the band: the rest of the guys found him too showbizzy on stage and too introverted off it. *Bleach* scored a minor success on the college radio circuit.

Nirvana's 1991 follow-up, *Nevermind*, is one of the more important and financially lucrative pieces of recorded music in history.

In 1990, Everman joined Soundgarden to play bass on their promotional tour for the EP *Loudest Love*. Not meshing with the other band members, he was sent packing after the tour's end.

Soundgarden's 1991 release *Badmotorfinger* scored a moderate success with the indie crowd. The 1994 follow-up, *Superunknown*, debuted at number one on the *Billboard 200* album chart. It stayed there.

In 1994, Everman joined the US Army Rangers and then a special forces unit. He toured in Afghanistan and Iraq. He was honorably discharged in 2006.

Fifteen minutes of fame came to Everman on November 10, 2008, when he was featured in a *New Yorker* piece titled "Theatre of War." While being interviewed to provide a veteran's perspective on war, a friend of Everman's breaks in to add that besides being a warrior, Everman had once been a musician. The article's author was skeptical. But, she writes, later investigation revealed that Everman had, in fact, been a small-time rock star.

During the interview Everman related that he's a devotee of the Renaissance intellectual Benvenuto Cellini, who believed that in order to live a full life, you must develop each of the soul's three parts: the artist, the warrior, and the philosopher. At the time of the interview, Everman—bearded and heavily tattooed—was studying philosophy at Columbia University in New York City.

Kurt Cobain (b. 1967), Aberdeen, Washington

Cobain was born into a broken home and eventually lived with a born-again Christian family. He adopted the religion. The faith didn't last; soon he was spray painting "God is Gay" onto random pickup trucks in the neighborhood.

In 1981, his uncle gave him a choice between a bike and a guitar for his birthday. He went for the guitar.

By March 1988, Cobain had formed a noisy outfit called Nirvana. They were playing dives around Seattle, doing bad covers, and making up some of their own songs. They decided to make a record. No one wanted to sponsor them. They decided to go ahead anyway and pay for it themselves. None of them had any money.

In 1989, another local musician, Jason Everman, agreed to pay the \$606.17 it cost to make the record if they'd let him join the group. They did. They recorded *Bleach*. Though he's named on the credits and pictured (hazily) on the cover, Everman didn't actually play on any of the tracks. Cobain said the credit was a symbolic thanks to Everman for paying the \$600 it cost to record the album. Everman never got his money back.

The group took the music on the road, and when they returned home, they kicked Everman out.

The group's next record, *Nevermind*, knocked Michael Jackson's disco sensation *Dangerous* off the top of the charts in January 1992.

In 1991, Cobain met Courtney Love. They did massive drugs, got married, and she got pregnant.

While revolving through detox programs and heroin binges, Cobain wrote music for the next album. *In Utero* debuted at number one in 1993.

In 1994, Cobain committed suicide with a shotgun. These are fragments of his note:

I haven't felt the excitement of creating music for too many years now. For example when we're backstage and the lights go out and the roar of the crowds begins, it doesn't affect me the way it used to. The fact is, I can't fool you, any one of you. It simply isn't fair to you or me. The worst crime I can think of would be to rip people off by faking it and pretending as if I'm having 100% fun. Sometimes I feel as if I should have a punch-in time clock before I walk out on stage.

I can't stand the thought of the self-destructive death rocker I've become. I don't have the passion anymore, and so remember, it's better to burn out than to fade away. Wikipedia, "Death of Kurt Cobain," accessed May 16, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Kurt_Cobain#Suicide_note.

QUESTIONS

1. Consider the seven values used for ethically defining jobs: meaningful work, leisure time, money, power, prestige, comfort, and security.
 - Just from what you've read about Everman and Cobain, which values do they share? Where do they diverge?
 - Are there any values not on the list that could be added to apply to the careers of either Everman or Cobain?
2. *Everman worked to live; Cobain lived to work.*
 - What does that mean?
 - Do you think it's true? Explain.
 - Does this split also divide up the seven values used for ethically defining jobs? If not, why not? If so, what's the split?
3. Everman is a sequencer; he wholeheartedly followed one career path, then a second, and a third. He's a different *kind* of sequencer than the more standard version: a man or woman following a single main career path interrupts it to do something else (have a child, start a small company, travel around the world) and then returns to the old job.
 - What's the difference between these two kinds of sequencing in terms of the value of work and what it can give you?
 - Would it be useful to have different names for these two types of sequencers, or would that be splitting hairs?
4. According to Everman, Cellini believed that in order to live a full life, you must develop each of the soul's three parts: the artist, the warrior, and the philosopher. Assuming this is true, must it *necessarily* involve one's work life? Is it possible to define a full life that doesn't include any reference to your gainful employment (in other words, is it possible to live fully without worrying about what your job is)? What values for work are implied by your response?
5. Cobain comes to believe that he's unethically exploiting consumers.

- In what sense is he unethically exploiting consumers?
 - What does Cobain's feeling reveal about the values he associates with his work life?
 - Was Cobain's response to his perceived failure justifiable? Explain.
6. Whose career would you rather have: Everman's or Cobain's? Why? What does that tell you about *your* values?
 7. In the career you've chosen for yourself (just pick one, if you haven't), what would it mean to burn out? What would it mean to fade away?
 8. Is it better to burn out or fade away? Justify in terms of the values that can be attached to working life.

Cop or Drug Dealer?



Source: Photo courtesy of Todd Huffman,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/oddwick/1954905403/>.

Roberto Pulido, a ten-year veteran of the Boston Police Department, was arrested by the FBI and charged with protecting drug dealers, cocaine dealing, identity theft, obstruction of justice, robbery, assault and battery, and money laundering. David S. Bernstein, "Cop or Drug Dealer?," *Phoenix Boston*, November 9, 2006, accessed May 16, 2011, <http://the phoenix.com/Boston/News/26961-Cop-or-drug-dealer/?rel=inf>.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the advantages to being a policeman? What are some of the advantages to being a drug dealer? Presumably, Pulido started out being an honest cop, and over the course of ten years fell (or climbed) into the illegal drug business. Can you imagine how the seven values of his work might have shifted as this transformation developed?
 - Which values grew in importance?
 - Which might have fallen away?
 - Could any of the values have been maintained through the shift in professions?
2. Officer Pulido is a career sequencer, but it's a unique kind of sequencing because his two careers actually contradict each other. It's not that he took time off to follow some outside interest, and it's not that he pursued various jobs that all fit into a larger plan. He did one thing and then the opposite. Is there a sense in which he has canceled out his professional life? Explain.
3. Imagine that you are considering two career directions: joining the police academy or growing some pot in the basement and getting a start in the drug-dealing business.
 - Regardless of whether you'd ever actually do it, what ethical theory (duties, rights, utilitarianism, some other) could be employed to justify the decision to go the drug route?
 - What ethical theory (duties, rights, utilitarianism, some other) could you employ to justify the decision to go the police route?
4. Apply Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence to the cop/drug-dealer choice. You would have to choose one life and live it over and over forever. Which would you choose? Why? Does that tell you anything about what you should do with the one and only life you have?
5. Doctors and pharmacists deliver powerful, addictive drugs that send waves of tremendous pleasure through the users' bodies (and sometimes those meds result in abuse and death). So that makes three career directions that have something in common: doctor, pharmacist, street drug dealer. Now, in terms of the seven values of work, what do the jobs have in common, and where do they diverge?

6. From the newspaper report on the Pulido case, "Pulido bought a Hyde Park building where his wife began teaching dance to children—and where once a month for the next several years Pulido hosted and provided protection for drug-and-sex parties. Admittance ran from twenty to forty dollars, and narcotics were often in open use. Lap dances in the "boom-boom room" cost an additional twenty dollars. As many as one hundred people attended on a given night, including well-known felons, drug dealers, and law-enforcement officers—some in uniform."

Compare and contrast Pulido's wife's job and Pulido's. Which post is most desirable for the person valuing prestige?

7. How could Pulido's drug operation be characterized as unethical in terms of the exploitation of consumers?
8. In a sense, Pulido's wife worked for her husband. By running a dance school out of the building where Pulido operated, she provided cover for his operation.
 - How could the argument be made that she has an ethical responsibility to resign from her job by shutting down the dance classes so that her husband could no longer use the space to sell drugs?
 - In ethical terms, how could she justify pretending not to know what was going on in her building once a month?
 - In ethical terms, and assuming she explicitly recognizes and accepts that she's providing space and cover for her husband's activities, how could she justify continuing to work for his operation?
9. Assuming you were a drug dealer, who would you sell to, and *not* sell to? Why? Does this tell you anything about how willing you might be in the future to work for an ethically challenged corporation?

Investigative Fashion Journalism



Source: Photo courtesy of Dave Bleasdale,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sidelong/4110738292/>.

The blogger Dahlia (she doesn't provide her last name) wants to invent a new career. She calls it investigative fashion journalism. In condensed and slightly altered form, here's what she writes:

Investigative Fashion Journalism is a different kind of job. When people talk investigative journalism they think Watergate, Area 51, etc. Also, due to watching too many movies, there's the fear that the consequences of investigative journalism include losing your job, your family, your money, and on the very rare occasion—your life. (Though last I've heard, the fashion journalists that I've admired are still very much alive.) Part of the fun is being your own detective by trying to dig up evidence, to see what the big cover up is about. I mean, how many of you were actually aware that illegal immigrants working long hours in manufacturing jobs were happy being paid minimum wage in Europe?

We love scandals. And what better scandals can you uncover than the fashion industry? I mean I know celebrity gossip is hot right now, but exposing a multi-billion dollar industry gives me a bigger high, but that's just me. Also, by exposing the corruption like those working illegal immigrants, you can change how the industry works and perhaps enforce better practices for all current and new companies coming into the mix. If you lead by good example others will follow, right?

If local universities would offer such a program in journalism, I'd sign up for it in a heartbeat. Unfortunately, for now, I'm resolved to my fashion blog. Dahlia, "Investigative Fashion Journalism," *Dualité*, July 7, 2008, accessed May 16, 2011.

QUESTIONS

1. "Part of the fun," she writes, "is being your own detective by trying to dig up evidence, to see what the big cover up is about." Is there a connection between "fun" and meaningful work? Where does fun fit in the consideration of values to be weighed when considering a career track?
2. What career-related values do you suspect light up Dahlia and, more generally, the kinds of people who try to make up jobs for themselves?
3. Ethically troubling exploitation in the fashion industry.
 - Do you think *she* thinks there's exploitation in the fashion industry? Where?
 - If there is exploitation—if something ethically reproachable is going on—what's *her* relation to that blemish? Is she guilty too? Explain.

Octomom



Source: Photo courtesy of mangpages, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mangpages/3701097713/>.

In January 2009, the woman known as Octomom gave birth to octuplets. Her real name is Nadya Suleman; she's a single mother who'd split from her husband because they were unable to have children together. She was on welfare when she conceived the children via in-vitro fertilization. She already had six young ones at home.

All her children were implanted by Dr. Michael Kamrava.

The delivery required forty-six doctors, nurses, and attendants.

In 2009, she was offered \$1 million to star in a pornographic movie. She refused, but later that year she signed a contract for each of her children to earn \$250 a day to star in a reality show.

QUESTIONS

1. Make the ethical case that a nurse should not seek employment in the office of Dr. Michael Kamrava, even though he pays well.
2. Justify a nurse's decision to work in the office of Dr. Michael Kamrava, because he pays well.
3. What alignment of work-related values may have led Nadya Suleman to reject work as a porn star but accept the role of reality TV actress (along with her many children)?

Paralegal or Lawyer?



Source: Photo courtesy of Tami Vroma, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/32314864@N02/3253051215/>.

Sally Kane, an attorney and writer, drew up a list comparing the practical realities of two careers, paralegal and lawyer. Here's a summary:

Paralegal: A few months training.

Lawyer: A few years of school after college.

Paralegal: Low-cost education.

Lawyer: Law school is EXPENSIVE.

Paralegal: Earning limit under \$100,000 in most markets.

Lawyer: The sky.

Paralegal: A paralegal now is pretty much a paralegal forever.

Lawyer: Working as a lawyer opens doors to other careers.

Paralegal: One of the fastest-growing careers in United States.

Lawyer: Job outlook above average.

Paralegal: Limited responsibility and stress.

Lawyer: High responsibility and stress.

Paralegal: Overtime pay.

Lawyer: If there's work until 11 pm, you work to 11 pm.

Paralegal: Once you've got the job, no more school.

Lawyer: You need to keep updating your knowledge (every year, if you're a tax attorney).

Paralegal: Shorter learning curve, and your work is routine and mundane.

Lawyer: Long learning curve, and your work is intellectually challenging and varied.

Paralegal: Cubicle.

Lawyer: Private office. Sally Kane, "Should You Become a Paralegal or Lawyer?," *About.com*, accessed May 16, 2011, <http://legalcareers.about.com/od/legalcareerbasics/a/paralegallawyer.htm>.

QUESTIONS

1. This comparison is a list of facts. Can you go through the list and attach ethical *value* to the facts? In terms of what value(s) does each fact make a job more or less desirable?
 - Make the ethical case that it's better to go the paralegal route.
 - Make the ethical case that it's better to go the lawyer route.
2. If you've developed a short list of career options, can you go through and make up a sort of career decision spreadsheet that resembles the one just constructed for lawyers and paralegals? It would list the two or three jobs you're considering. Then one column would list the *factual* advantages and disadvantages of each one, things about vacation time, salary, working conditions, and so on. Finally, there'd be your unique part: the notation of which of those facts held value and importance in your life and with respect to the role you imagine work to have for you in the coming years.