

Developing Moral Intelligence

OLLI Spring 2017

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CALIBRATE YOUR COMPASS

SELF-AWARENESS

Moral intelligence requires one to attend to a 'moral compass' or the self-knowledge that empowers you to act with authenticity and integrity, true to your ideal self. To calibrate your compass, you align your values, goals and actions with over-arching ethical principles. The following descriptions and exercises will guide you through this process.

Last class we explored Jonathan Haidt's theory of moral foundations. To take Haidt's *Moral Foundations Questionnaire*, go here: <https://www.yourmorals.org>

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

According to Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel, authors of *Moral Intelligence 2.0*, "the most effective leaders hold to a common set of principles and consistently use those principles to guide their day-to-day actions. They don't make up their values as they go along; they listen carefully to the call of moral values that already lie within all of us. The principles business leaders follow are the same set of principles that all human societies throughout time have believed to be 'right.' These fundamental beliefs have been embedded in human society for so long that they are now widely recognized as universal" (Lennick and Kiel, 36). They assert that four principles are vital for sustained personal and organizational success: 1) Integrity, 2) Responsibility, 3) Compassion and 4) Forgiveness. How you express these principles through your chosen values and actions will be particular to your own culture, upbringing and individual preference. Lennick and Kiel assert:

Integrity is the hallmark of the morally intelligent person. When we act with integrity, we harmonize our behavior to conform to universal human principles. We do what we know is right; we act in line with our principles and beliefs. If we lack integrity, by definition, we lack moral intelligence. Only a person willing to take **responsibility** for her actions—and the consequences of those actions—can ensure that her actions conform to universal human principles (Lennick and Kiel, 21).

Compassion is vital because caring about others not only communicates our respect for others, but also creates a climate in which others will be compassionate toward us when we need it most. **Forgiveness** is a crucial principle, because without a tolerance for mistakes and the knowledge of our own imperfection, we are likely to be rigid, inflexible, and unable to engage with others in ways that promote our mutual good. Compassion and forgiveness operate on two levels: first in how we relate to ourselves and second in how we relate to others. Because we have yet to meet a person with *perfect* moral intelligence, putting principles into action requires that when we make inevitable mistakes, when our behavior fails to conform to universal human principles, we need to treat ourselves with compassion and forgiveness. If we are not gentle and forgiving of ourselves, we will not have the energy to move forward to build our moral capacity. Similarly, to inspire others to enhance their moral intelligence, we need to treat others with compassion and forgiveness (Lennick and Kiel, 22).

You may want to add other principles to the list above—generosity, loyalty, liberty and sanctity are other ideals. Self-Reflection Question—The principles I want to abide by are:

VALUES

*You first have to comprehend fully the deeply held beliefs—the values, standards, ethics, and ideals—that drive you.
You have to freely and honestly choose the principles you will use to guide your decisions and actions.
...When you have clarified your values and found your voice, you will also find the inner confidence necessary
to express ideas, choose a direction, make tough decisions, act with determination,
and be able to take charge of your life rather than impersonating others.*

James Kouzes and Barry Posner, The Leadership Challenge

Ethical principles serve as ideals for our best selves to live into, and our particular expressions of those ideals reveal our individual values. In other words, as we put our personal stamp on universal moral foundations, we create our core values, our own moral compass. As Kouzes and Posner explain in *The Leadership Challenge*, whether we are aware of it or not, values influence every aspect of our lives by setting the parameters for the hundreds of decisions we make each day. We seldom act on options that run counter to our values, and if we do, it feels like we are required to conform rather than act authentically. When we are being true to ourselves, we make choices and take actions aligned with our core commitments.

Sometimes this alignment is easy. For example, if you are planning a vacation, you may choose to act on your penchant for adventure and new experiences, and schedule a challenging trek up a mountain. Other times, however, decisions are not so easy because values come into conflict. For example, if you are a parent taking small children on that vacation, you may choose differently, foregoing adventure because you value your children's safety and comfort more in this case. This example shows how we must choose to act on different values in varied situations. Life is full of such decisions, especially when our relationships are involved.

To prepare for such deliberation, it helps to be self-aware of one's own inner wisdom, or moral compass, if you will. When you have clarified your values, you will be able to provide your own best guidance for negotiating when, where and how to take action on each. Which value serves you and your relationships best in each situation you encounter? Examples of values include creativity, learning, power, spirituality, achievement, loyalty, beauty, growth, autonomy, health, equality, and so forth.

It is useful to be as specific as possible when describing your values in order to avoid vague generalities that cannot provide sufficiently detailed guidance when you need it. For example, in general, we all want to be happy, but what does happiness look like for you in particular? When you experience happiness, what are you doing with whom in what situation? Identify the values that actually lead you where you want to go. The exercise below, adapted from *The Leadership Challenge*, will help you get started. It asks you to consider values for working on a project, but you may want to substitute the word "situation" or "event" if that is more fitting for you. The intent is to recognize the ways you have already lived by certain values so that you can more easily identify which ones you want to own as part of your moral compass.

1) Think back over the past few years and recall projects in which you have participated. Which projects were the most meaningful for you? The most energizing and enriching? The most fun? What do the experiences of working on them have in common? What characteristics of the work made it so enjoyable and valuable for you? Make a list of those attributes in the space below.

2) What do the attributes listed in your first answer say about what you value in the way projects are conducted? For example, you might say, “One of the things that I liked most about the project was the chance to work with some really talented people on a project that was really cutting-edge. This tells me that ‘teamwork and collaboration,’ ‘innovation,’ and ‘intelligence’ are important values to me.” Another way of asking this question is: What values and what actions are important to you in creating a climate in which you feel both happy and successful?

GOALS

Our goals are the concrete objectives we would like to accomplish to enact our values, oriented toward ethical principles. For example, you may want to hold the ethical principle of compassion as a compass point for yourself. You decide that being patient with others is one way you will enact compassion, thereby identifying patience as a core value for yourself. What goal would help you put patience into practice? You determine to listen patiently to people by not interrupting until they are finished speaking. You may or may not meet this goal—you may still interrupt occasionally—but having the goal to guide you each time you converse can only improve your listening skills. In this way, aligning our goals, values and principles helps us to be more effective and authentic, empowering us with a moral compass to navigate our personal and professional journeys. Attach at least one goal to each of the values identified above:

Value	Goal(s)
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	

ACTIONS

*A knowledge of oneself allows the crafting and embracing of a desired self-image.
...[A] significant enabler of values-based action is the clarity, commitment and courage
that is born of acting from our true center, finding alignment between
who we already are and what we say and do.*

Mary Gentile, Giving Voice to Values

In order to take action in alignment with your moral compass, you need to understand how and when you are most effective. Then, you can play to your strengths, and guard against your weaknesses, when faced with difficult situations such as values conflicts. The following questions will help you own personality preferences that empower you to act comfortably and competently. For example, if you are more introverted than extroverted, you could plan to give yourself time to collect your thoughts, and calmly prepare your position, before confronting someone with whom you have a disagreement.

a) Are you an introvert? An extrovert?

b) Are you a risk-taker? Are you risk-averse?

c) Do you like to work alone or in a team?

d) Do you deal well with conflict or are you non-confrontational?

e) Do you prefer communicating in person or in writing?

f) Do you think best from the gut, in the moment, or do you need to take time to reflect and craft your communications?

g) Do you assert your position with statements or do you use questions to communicate?