

## Using Potter's Box to Make Ethical Decisions in Media

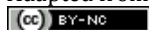
Ralph B. Potter, Jr., a Professor of Divinity at Harvard, developed this method for making ethical decisions. His method suggests that there are four key components to every ethical dilemma (definition, values, principles, loyalties) and that by subjecting the dilemma to analysis, a person can more clearly see all sides prior to making the decision.

Using this method, different people can (and will) come to different decisions, based on their values, the principle to which they adhere, or their loyalties. Think of it as a process, not a solution. Remember that as journalists, your code of ethics is based on two fundamental ideas: one, that those who have a special measure of freedom have an obligation to use it responsibly; and two, that society's welfare is paramount, even above an individual's.

**While your first question is always, "Can we do that?" your second question must be, "Should we do that?"**

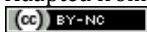
<p><b>DEFINITION:</b></p> <p>In this box, you need to give a summary of the situation. This should include all known <b>facts</b>. Do not include unverified rumors or suspicions. Just the facts!</p> <p>Do this in the form of a bulleted list.</p>	<p><b>VALUES:</b></p> <p>State the values involved for you as a member of the press and for others involved in the situation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Professional values</i> (e.g. truth seeking, public's right to know, transparency in government, person's right to privacy)</li> <li>• <i>Legal values</i> (e.g. law supersedes emotion, all persons deserve equal treatment under the law)</li> <li>• <i>Patriotic values</i> (e.g. love thy country, respect the flag, uphold constitutional rights)</li> <li>• <i>Religious values</i> (e.g. do unto others, thou shalt not kill)</li> <li>• <i>Freedom-based values</i> (e.g. freedom of speech, right to a trial by jury, right to not incriminate oneself)</li> </ul>
<p><b>PRINCIPLES:</b></p> <p>Use these ethical principles to evaluate your dilemma:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Aristotle's Mean</i>: "Moral virtue is a middle state determined by practical wisdom." Virtuous people will arrive at a fair and reasonable agreement for the legitimate claims of both sides <b>in the middle of two extreme claims</b>.</li> <li>2. <i>Kant's Categorical Imperative</i>: "Act on that maxim which will become a universal law." It implies what is right for one is right for all, which <b>establishes precedent, universality of an underlying principle</b>.</li> <li>3. <i>Mill's Principle of Utility (Utilitarianism)</i>: "Seek the greatest happiness for the greatest number." Consider the consequences, produce the greatest possible balance of good over evil, and distribute this as widely as possible. Act with <b>the greater good</b> in mind.</li> <li>4. <i>Rawl's Veil of Ignorance (Egalitarianism)</i>: "Justice emerges when negotiating without social differentiations." Step away from real circumstances into an "original position" behind a barrier where roles and social differences are eliminated. <b>Place yourself in the position of those your decisions may influence</b>.</li> <li>5. <i>Judeo-Christian Persons as Ends</i>: "Love thy neighbor as yourself." Unselfish, cooperative. <b>The "Golden Rule."</b></li> </ol> <p>You may combine philosophical principles in making your final judgment.</p>	<p><b>LOYALTIES:</b></p> <p>Determine to whom your <b>primary loyalty</b> belongs in this situation. Begin by listing out all of your loyalties and then prioritize them.</p> <p>Evaluate how each of those loyalties comes into play in this decision. For this, you should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duty to self</li> <li>• Duty to audience</li> <li>• Duty to organization</li> <li>• Duty to the profession</li> <li>• Duty to promiseholders</li> <li>• Duty to society</li> </ul>

Adapted from: Warner, Charles. "How to Write a Media Ethics Case Analysis." *Papers by Charles Warner*. Web.



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