

Contact: Puja Sangar
Fortier Public Relations
650-210-8219; puja@fortierpr.com

GIVING VOICE TO VALUES

Speaking Your Mind When You Know What's Right

by Mary C. Gentile

“Gentile, director of the Giving Voice to Values curriculum and senior research scholar at Babson College, offers a powerful action-oriented manifesto for living with integrity, fighting for one’s convictions, and building a more ethical workplace. Arguing that if enough of us feel empowered to voice and act on our values then the business world will be transformed, she shows how to practice and perfect speaking up, thereby building skills and confidence.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“*Giving Voice To Values* heralds a revolution in ethics education. Gentile isn’t interested in abstract (and often fruitless) debates about ethical principles—rather, she wants to help you practice *what to do* when you know something is unethical. It’s like a self-defense class for your soul.”

—**Dan and Chip Heath**, bestselling authors of *Switch* and *Made to Stick*

If you had worked at BP or Goldman Sachs, would you have stood up for what you thought was right? Could speaking out about your values early enough have helped to prevent the ethical transgressions that contributed to these disasters?

When your boss wants to cut corners at the expense of safety, your colleague alters the financial report, or your sales team wants to embellish the capabilities of a product, knowing right from wrong is easy. But speaking your mind about it can be hard—especially if you are feeling pressure from your boss, your colleagues, or your own career concerns. Once we make the decision to speak up in such circumstances, what does it take to get heard? How can we be more effective at speaking our mind—even building coalitions with likeminded colleagues—so that pressures of time and money don’t always trump our efforts to act on our values?

In **GIVING VOICE TO VALUES: Speaking Your Mind When You Know What's Right** (Yale University Press; \$26; August 24, 2010), Babson faculty member and consultant Mary Gentile shows us not how to decide what’s right or wrong, but the much harder step of how to speak our minds and act on our values when we already know what’s right.

Drawn from actual business experiences as well as social science and management research, Gentile's findings reveal that acting on our values is a skill set that is just as learnable as ethical decision making. Just as an athlete practices his or her moves to commit them to muscle memory, Gentile wants to help us make voicing our values the default position instead of something that falls apart when a transgression hits unexpectedly. To gain the courage to "do the right thing," she advises that you:

- **Learn the antidotes to powerlessness.** Research tells us that a sense of futility is one of the major deterrents to voicing unpopular positions in the workplace. We don't believe anything will happen so we don't bother, but this recognition in itself holds a seed for action. We need to celebrate the stories of times when people did, in fact, successfully change things through speaking up. And we need to do that close to home. While it might be inspiring to read stories or watch movies that celebrate the courage of the men and women who changed history—Nelson Mandela or Gandhi or Susan B. Anthony—the real impact for us as individuals is to see individuals close to us, in our workplace or in our community, who speak up.
- **Think about how we frame and express what's at stake.** We know that people tend to discount future costs and consequences over near term implications. So if we want to be heard about an impending risk, we need to make the costs feel real—quantify them, put them in a vivid story, point to a similar event.
- **Amplify the impact of our own conscience by finding allies.** By normalizing the experience of values conflicts in the workplace, we make them discussable. We start from the position that most of us would like to act on our values if we thought we could do so effectively, so this is less about preaching or judging and more about asking an interesting question about innovation and collaboration: "*WHAT IF you knew what you thought was right? How would you get it done?*"
- **Voice our concerns regardless of the timing.** It's never too early or too late to voice our concerns. It's just that they need to be voiced, framed, and targeted in different ways depending on the timing. Early in the process, the kind of evidence-gathering and scripting of arguments and gathering of allies is effective. At the time of the crisis, the need is different. These are the moments when individuals need to speak loudly, to reach out to their colleagues explicitly for support.
- **Practice.** One of the things we have learned from other high stakes contexts, such as hospitals, is that practice is essential. We need to pre-script and practice delivering our responses to difficult situations. We need to commit the expression of such arguments to our muscle-memory, so that it becomes the default rather than the exception.

Challenging the foundation of how most companies and business schools approach ethics, these innovative prescriptions and many more in the book were inspired by a program launched by Gentile at the Aspen Institute with founding partner Yale School of Management, and now based at Babson College. The approach has been piloted in well over one hundred institutions worldwide, including leading schools such as MIT, INSEAD, Columbia, and HBS.

The BP oil spill and the financial crisis were caused not by just a few people who did things that were wrong, but by the thousands of people working with them who didn't stand up for what they believed was right.

With the courage that this book gives us to act on our values, the business world can become a better place.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

MARY C. GENTILE consults on management education and values-driven leadership. In her ten-year tenure at Harvard Business School, she was one of the primary developers of the school's first required curriculum on ethical decision-making and was the creator and teacher of its first course on managing diversity. Currently she is Director of the "Giving Voice to Values" curriculum and Senior Research Scholar at Babson College. Her articles have appeared in *Harvard Business Review*, *Financial Times*, *strategy+business*, *BizEd*, *CFO Magazine*, and *Risk Management*, and she has written several books on ethics and diversity. She lives in Arlington, Massachusetts.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Yale University Press: Giving Voice to Values: Speaking Your Mind When You Know What's Right

Publication date: August 24, 2010

Hardback; \$26.00; 320 pages

ISBN: 978-0-300-16118-2

Visit the book's website at: <http://www.givingvoicetovalues.thebook.com/>