ETHICS
CONFIDENTIAL

NCGPC National Capital
Gift Planning Council

Doug White
November 8, 2017

The United States v. Holmes

A DILEMMA . . .

. . . is a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially equally undesirable ones.

The Five Core Values That Define an Ethical Mindset:

Honesty

Responsibility

Respect

Fairness

Compassion

ETHICS

"OBEDIENCE TO THE UNENFORCEABLE"

John Fletcher Moulton, English judge
"Law and Manners"
The Atlantic Magazine, July 1924

A WAY TO THINK ABOUT ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

(1)

Gather as much information as possible about the situation requiring a decision.

(2)

See what existing rules apply to the situation. They represent past thinking.

(3)

Exercise the personal discipline of asking whether you would want others to take the action, or whether you want to be a privileged case.

(4)

Predict the consequences as well as you are able. Consider both the short-term and long-term impacts. Sometimes it may be necessary to violate one ethical principle to advance another, but examine your motives and be sure you aren't rationalizing a questionable action that is in your self interest.
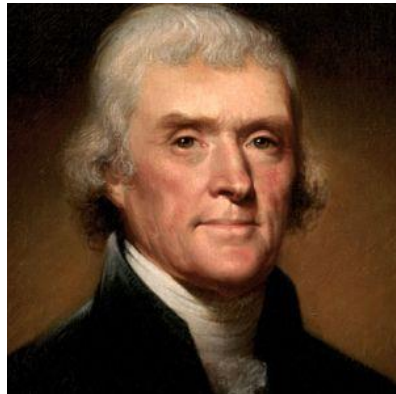
(5)
Reflect on the situation.

(6)

Implement the decision – but be prepared to modify it if new, relevant information is revealed.

"State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor; the former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules."

Thomas Jefferson

The Donor Who Might Not Have All of Her Faculties To Make an Informed Giving Decision

- The children, or other family members, do not want you to talk with the prospect about a charitable gift.

- How do we honor the wishes of the older adult, but not take any advantage of that person?

- How do we guard against being accused of taking advantage of an older adult?

- What should we do when we visit with a prospect and discover compromising information about a family member or caretaker – or someone else – who is bilking or otherwise abusing the older prospect?

- What is our responsibility as human beings and development officers of the charities we work for?

- How do we handle dilemmas internally?

Another thing . . .

In Perpetuity

And yet another . . .

Know Your Prospect

How can fundraisers best execute a broad-based approach to dealing with ethical dilemmas?

Examine ethics as we have today – not as right vs. wrong, but as *right vs. right*. Incorporate values, instead of judgments. And keep learning.

How should development professionals approach the subject of ethical decision-making with donors and board members?

Develop policies.
Revise them as needed.
Communicate them.

How can we best preempt ethical dilemmas?

We might never get to a point where we are always able to preempt ethical dilemmas, but we can be better prepared to address them with dedicated staff and board training in ethical decision-making.

A BASIC TEST OF INTEGRITY?

It is not enough to ask whether our actions are consistent with what we most deeply believe; we must ask instead whether we have done the hard work of discerning whether those beliefs are right.

Stephen L. Carter
Professor of Law
Yale University

"Acting on conscience and principle is the manner in which we express our moral selves, and as such, loyalty to conscience and principle should supersede loyalty to any man or party. We can all be forgiven for failing in that measure from time to time. I certainly put myself at the top of the list of those who fall short in that regard. I am holier-than-none.

"But too often, we rush not to salvage principle but to forgive and excuse our failures so that we might accommodate them and go right on failing — until the accommodation itself becomes our principle.

"In that way and over time, we can justify almost any behavior and sacrifice almost any principle. I'm afraid that this is where we now find ourselves."
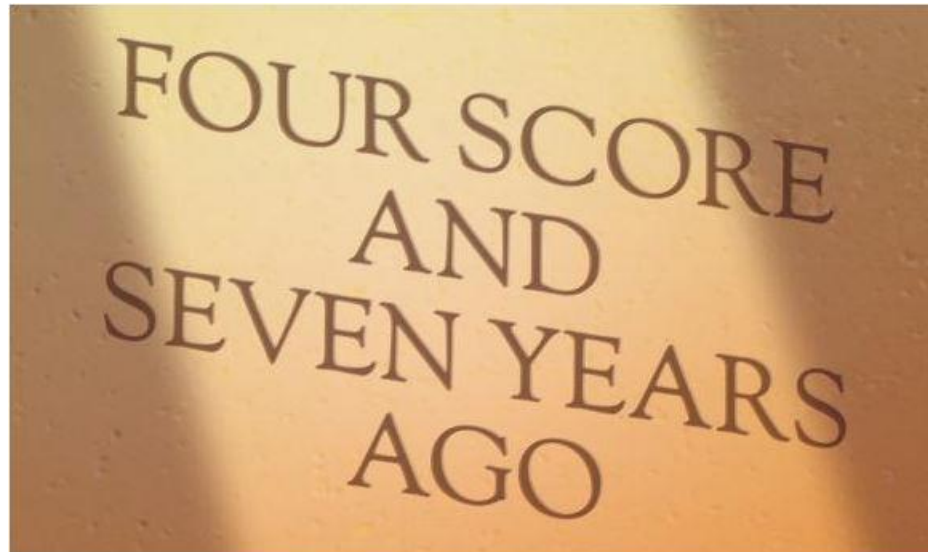

Arizona Senator Jeff Flake
October 24, 2017

Back to the William Brown . . .

The United States v. Holmes

Ethical decision-making . . .

THANK YOU

Doug White