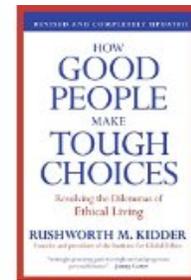


How Good People Make Tough Choices:

Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living

Book's Argument: There are *ethical dilemmas* and *moral temptations*. Ethical dilemmas are “right versus right” problems whereas moral temptations are “right versus wrong”. The abortion debate or end of life decisions are ethical dilemmas. Insider trading or withholding evidence are moral temptations. With a bit of reflection, people generally can tell the difference between ethical dilemmas and moral temptations.



There are four paradigms of ethical dilemmas: Truth vs. Loyalty, Individual vs. Community, Short-term vs. Long-term, and Justice vs. Mercy. While each paradigm presents what seems to be an either/or choice, there may be other options dependent on the situation/context. There are three basic rules that most people use to reach a conclusion on ethical dilemmas. The rules are ends-based, rules-based, and care-based. Do the most good (ends), do what you believe other should do (rules), and do unto others (Golden Rule) (care).

Key Takeaways: Ethical dilemmas are difficult decisions with no clear right and wrong answers. Research into the question of the existence of universal values suggests that across religion and culture, a shared set of values does exist. Further, research shows that discussions on morality better prepare and equip people to face and make ethical decisions much better than presenting them with a variety of scenarios and forcing an outcome.

Best Quote: On ethical fitness, “Nor do you get it by osmosis. You’ve got to think about it, reason it through, get the mind in gear, and grapple with the tough issues. In other words, you’ve got to be mentally engaged. What’s more, you’ve got to care, to be committed through the feelings as well as through the intellect. It doesn’t come from woollying around with apparently insoluble dilemmas or arguing endlessly and inconclusively over case studies.” “Ethics [is] not an inoculation. It’s a process. They have it because they keep exercising it. That’s what ethics is all about: practice, exercise, and doing right at every turn.”

Why It’s Important: Ethics is never static. New technologies, ever-changing social issues, and geopolitics will continue to present new ethical dilemmas. Therefore we must strengthen our ethical fitness to deal effectively with the situations we will face. Organizations with strong ethical cultures have far fewer issues with misconduct (24%) than weak cultures (98%). When misconduct does occur, strong ethical cultures are twice as likely than weak ethical cultures to report the misconduct (66% vs 33%). The downside is that only 9% of U.S. companies in 2007 were characterized as having a strong ethical culture.