# Chapter Six: Ethics

## What are ethics?

People have struggled for years to answer this question. Here is one definition:

"Ethics are standards of conduct that indicate how one should behave based on moral duties and virtues."

❖Another definition of ethics:

"Ethics refers to the values that guide a person, organization, or society — the difference between right and wrong, fairness and unfairness, honesty and dishonesty."

Ultimately, an individual's or organization's ethics come down to the standards we follow in our relationships with others.

## Ethical decisions are based on:

- Our moral choices
- Norms of society
- Legal principles
- Organizational values
- Professional values

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## Classical approaches to ethics

Culture, along with the fields of philosophy and religion, provide the framework for ethics.

- Utilitarianism: Consider the "greater good" rather than individual interests.
- Aristotle's "Golden Mean:" Seek the golden mean of moral virtue between two extreme points of view.
- Kant's Categorical Imperative: recommended acting on that maxim which you will to become a universal law.
- Mill's Principle of Utility: seek the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.
- Judeo-Christian Ethic: love your neighbor as yourself.

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# Corporate Codes of Conduct

❖These are formal statements of the values and business practices of a corporation.

The reasons corporations have adopted such codes vary from company to company. The most common are:

- To increase public confidence.
- To stem the tide of regulation.
- To improve internal operations.
- To respond to transgressions.

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# Corporate social responsibility

This principle holds that any social institution is responsible for the behavior of its members and may be held accountable for their misdeeds.

Social responsibility touches practically every level of organizational activity, from marketing to hiring, from training to work standards. A partial list of social responsibility categories might include the following:

- Product lines
- Marketing practices
- Corporate philanthropy
- Environmental activities
- External relations
- Employment diversity in retaining and promoting minorities and women
- Employee safety and health

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# Ethics in journalism
## Challenges for journalists

- Living up to codes of conduct that prescribe that they should respect the dignity, privacy, rights, and well-being of people whom they encounter as they go about gathering and reporting news

- Contending with new technology that emphasizes delivering news quickly with less regard for accuracy, for balance

- Need not only to provide information but also to provide it in an entertaining way; this is the so-called infotainment focus

- Compelling need for print to "blaze trails" (follow the fire/burn/flash) where other media don't want to take the time to go.

7      **MAR205**

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# Ethics in public relations

❖ Ethics should be the great differentiator between PR and other professions. Here are four relevant ethical theories:

- <u>Attorney/adversary model</u> by Barney and Black. Suggests practitioners have no obligation to consider the public interest or any other outside view beyond that of their client.

- <u>Two-way communication model</u> by Grunig. Suggests practitioners balance their role as a client advocate with one as social conscience for the larger public.

- <u>Enlightened self-interest model</u> by Baker. Suggests that companies gain a competitive edge and are more respected in the market-place if they behave ethically.

- <u>Responsible advocacy model</u> by Fitzpatrick and Gauthier. Suggests that practitioners' first loyalty is to their clients, but they also have a responsibility to voice the opinions of organizational stakeholders.

8      **MAR205**

# Public relations and ethics

The PRSA Code of Ethics specifies six professional core values:

- Advocacy
- Honesty
- Expertise
- Independence
- Loyalty
- Fairness

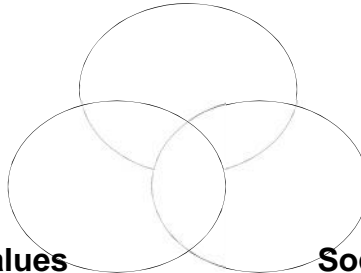The essence of the code is that honesty and fairness lie at the heart of the PR practice.

For details, see Figure 6-2 on pg. 110.

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# A Venn Diagram for corporate PR ethics

**Professional practice must be based on:**
**the Code of Ethics**

**Organizational values** **Social responsibility**

❖Review Question:
- List and explain at least three challenges journalists working in various media face today