

# Free does ethical intelligence really exist in practice essay example

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## **Introduction**

The term ethical intelligence has been coined by the American ethicist Bruce Weinstein, who in his book " Five Principles for Untangling Your Toughest Problems at Work and Beyond", describes the five principles of ethical intelligence that determine the level of one's success in his job, how strong his relationship is with his friends and family, and what he feels about himself. The five principles of ethical intelligence identified by Bruce Weinstein include 1) Do Not Harm, 2) Make Things Better, 3) Respect Others, 4) Be Fair, and 5) Be Loving (Weinstein, 2011, p. 6). According to Bruce, a society or culture cannot function normally without valuing these principles. These five principles, which are the core principles of ethics, provide the very framework that binds people to their nation, to their families and to the community at large. Bruce claims in his book that making the five principles of ethical intelligence as the foundation of life would help one overcome all of the ethical problems and live honorably in the society. Drawing a comparison with emotional intelligence, which refers to the ability to sense the actual feelings going in the minds of people trying to show a different picture to the world, Bruce asserts that having emotional intelligence is not enough to make ethical decisions. Emotional intelligence only helps one size up the actual feelings of one who is trying to hide the real emotions from the world, but it is the ethical intelligence that guides him to take the next course of action by enquiring the matter and offering help (Weinstein, 2011, p. 8). In other words, if emotional intelligence helps one identify an ethical situation, it is the ethical intelligence that directs him towards the right course of action by making the right choices. If Bruce's words are to be taken

as true, then it has to be believed that ethical intelligence is instrumental in making the right decisions in all the areas of life, but the question that naturally arises here is whether or not ethical intelligence really exists in the world in practice. This paper will delve deep into the issue, touching upon the five principles of ethical intelligence in detail and searching an answer for its existence.

## **Five Principles of Ethical Intelligence and Do They Really Exist?**

### **Ethical Intelligence: Do No Harm**

Do No Harm is the first principle of ethical intelligence. Bruce Weinstein states in his book that 'Do Not Harm' is a principle of restraint or nonintervention, which keeps one human being from inflicting physical as well as emotional damage on other human beings. Do No Harm is the basic expectation that one human being can expect from other fellow beings. This principle is taught usually to the healthcare professionals early in their training period, but Bruce claims that it applies not only to healthcare professionals, but also to dentists, nurses, pharmacists, accountants, attorneys, TV News producers, teachers, students, social workers, and any living being that is a part of the society (Weinstein, 2011, p. 12). While living a life in the society, we encounter many kinds of situations, some of which have the potential to hurt someone emotionally, if not physically. For instance, a man by choosing to break up a relationship with his girlfriend will hurt her, but instead of outrightly rejecting her calls or messages or ignoring her or comparing her with his new interest while breaking up, if he applies Do No Harm principle by politely conveying his intention to break up, then

the extent of damage can be minimized to a great degree.

But the question that arises is whether or not the principle of Do No Harm really functions in today's society when there is a general trend of the lack of consideration for others seen among people. The instances of moral degradation and selfishness are rampant in the society. People exploit the feelings of others or betray each other to get ahead or gain an advantage. If not advantage, for the mere sake of fun and amusement, people say hurtful words to each other. It is not uncommon to see a group of students bullying a new pupil or harassing someone on the social network. In a recent event, a 14 years old boy Shaq, who suffered from stunted growth, tired of being bullied at school committed suicide. He was repeatedly pushed down the stairs, mocked at and knocked out of his chair by his fellow school mates (Wesh, 2014). Whenever the news of such incident comes to our notice, it makes us question whether such thing like Do No Harm philosophy or ethical intelligence really exists in practice or not. However, it will not be proper to judge the existence of ethical intelligence only by looking at the negative instances. If ethical intelligence was not followed in practice, then the world would have turned into an unlivable condition because everyone would have then tried to bring the other down and seek vengeance. If Do No Harm principle was not practiced, then every black man or every Muslim person would have been harassed and discriminated for belonging to a race that commits the maximum number of particular crimes. If Do No Harm principle was not practiced, then doctors and nurses would have ill-treated patients and shown malice towards them at the slightest provocation, or the teachers would have ventilated their frustration and anger upon young students. If Do

No Harm principle did not exist, then the social structure and the harmony in it would have collapsed. At every step of the way as we live life, because we meet people who do more good than doing harm, the world is still a beautiful place to live in.

## **Ethical Intelligence: Make Things Better**

Bruce Weinstein asserts that everyone in this world tries to make things better for others in some way or the other. He also points out that ethics is not just about how one treats others. It is also about how one treats himself. Respect and regard for one's own self ensures one to be in sound condition both mentally and physically (Weinstein, 2011, p. 16). It is only when one is in a good mental and physical condition that he will be able to make things better for others. An irritated or depressed or sick customer representative, for example, won't be able to provide satisfactory service to his customers unless he is in sound mental and physical condition.

The principle of making things better for others is widely practiced everywhere. A physician by providing medical treatment makes the lives of others better by helping them recover from illnesses. An artist by painting pictures gives others a visual satisfaction and an opportunity to indulge in the beauty that has come alive through his painting. A musician by composing and a singer by singing songs make things better for others by giving them a musical relief from their stress and the daily boredom. Music is also used as a healer for pain. A novelist by writing a novel transports readers into an imaginary world away from the mundane day to day life. The NGOs dedicated to serving people make things better for those who are in

the need of help. For instance, the CRY foundation and all the people who work in it provide a better future for the underprivileged children by improving their lives through education and support. The delivery boy of Pizza Hut assigned with the duty of delivering pizzas to the customers' home makes things better for the customers by delivering their orders on time. The police on highway patrol make things better for others by keeping a check on rash drivers, thereby reducing the risks of accidents for people. The examples of how we make things better for each other are aplenty, showing how this principle of ethical intelligence is widely practiced.

### **Ethical Intelligence: Respect Others**

According to Bruce Weinstein, any behavior that causes harm or violates the rights of another is "a breach of ethics". People, who are ethically intelligent, show respect to others by "honoring the values, preferences and the rights of others". The formation of social structure has been such a way that every one of us is entitled to certain fundamental and human rights. The right to life, the right to expression, the right to privacy, the right to dignity, and the right to education are some of the basic fundamental rights we enjoy as social beings. The legislation has enforced many laws in order for these rights to be maintained. However, Bruce has differentiated between the laws and ethics. Laws are something that obligates someone to follow certain codes of conduct for living in a society, and ethics are something that prompts one to an action not out of the legal obligation, but out of his ethical principles. Bruce has applied the principle of 'respect others' to the issues of confidentiality, truth telling, and promise keeping (Weinstein, 2011, p. 20).

Ethical breach of confidentiality occurs when a person who has been trusted with confidential information discloses it to outside intentionally or unintentionally (Weinstein, 2011, p. 20). For example, if a teenage girl who has got pregnant confides the same into her best friend, and then the best friend makes a gossip out of it and shares it among her friends, she is practicing a behavior not consistent with ethical intelligence, because this way she betrays the trust her friend has placed on her. In practice, confidentiality is the very basis of trust. We share our secrets with our friends and people whom we are close to, believing that they would respect the confidentiality of the information shared with them. We also share our private information with banks, workplaces, hospitals and clinics, attorneys and psychiatrists. The maintenance of confidentiality as regards the information shared by the clients is the professional ethics most of the psychiatrists, attorneys, hospitals, and even banks maintain, and therefore, we can trust our information with them. However, the actions and whims of human beings cannot be always predicted, and therefore, the instances of the breach of confidentiality are aplenty. Not a long ago, when Prince William's wife Kate Middleton fell sick during her pregnancy, a few of the hospital staff breached the confidentiality by disclosing information regarding her health to a hoax call (Hunt, 2012). However, in the maintenance of confidentiality, another thing that has to be kept in mind that the confidential information shared should not have the hint of a potential danger to anyone. In that case, it is wise to disclose the information and alert the police to prevent a mishap from happening or else it could lead to a misfortune as happened with the murder of Tatiana Tarasoff (De Bord,

Burke and Dudzinski, 2013).

According to Bruce Weinstein (2011), if telling lies for the purpose of deception is ethically wrong, sometimes telling truths also can end up hurting the feelings of others, and therefore, ethical intelligence commands that one should not mind telling a white lie if it saves someone from being hurt (p. 21). One's behavior would be inconsistent with ethical intelligence if he announces right on his friend's face about how bad the food cooked by her was. A new research study, conducted by Aalto University School of Science in Finland, also corroborates this point by emphasizing that little white lies can strengthen friendships and relationships as it saves people from getting hurt by knowing the truth. This team of researchers asserts that sometimes by lying how wonderful (actually awful) the new haircut of your boyfriend is would keep a relationship strong and get going (Kirkova, 2014). According to Bruce Weinstein " striving to be true to one's word is an essential element of ethical intelligence" (p. 22). He points out that someone will violate the principle of ethical intelligence if he does not keep the promises he made (Weinstein, 2011, p. 22). Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the promise as " a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified; or a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of a specified act" (Merriam-Webster, 2014). Not keeping promises shows that the person does not value his own words, let alone valuing the feelings of others. Keeping of promises shows the integrity of the person and helps develop trust and respect in others for him. It is very important to keep the promises that are made and refrain from making



promises that cannot be kept. If a manager cannot keep his words, the subordinates would lose trust in him. People who follow ethics and principles in their actions would stay true to the promises, but those who are inconsistent in their words and actions are more likely not to keep the promises they make. Over a period of time, people unable to keep promises lose trust among colleagues, friends and family.

### **Ethical Intelligence: Be Fair**

Fairness is another core principle of ethical intelligence. According to Bruce, the essence of fairness is about "giving others their due" (Weinstein, 2011, p. 26). The three areas in which the principle of fairness is particularly important include allocating scarce resources, disciplining or punishing, and rectifying justice. Time is a scarce resource that should be managed diligently. Bruce believes that time management is crucial to live a life of fairness because time is of limited supply. If someone gives all his time in office, ignoring his wife and children, he violates the principle of ethical intelligence. Bruce pinpoints that in the matter of applying discipline or punishment, it is important to demonstrate ethical intelligence so that the need to be fair takes precedence over other things. He also asserts that in order to practice fairness, people should rectify injustices whenever possible, but that does not imply that people in the act of rectifying injustices will become revengeful. Rather, they should try to redress the situation in a way that it does not bring harm upon anyone (Weinstein, 2011, p. 27-29).

In practice, time management, which refers to the act of planning and controlling the amount of time spent over specific activities, is essential for

the success of not only professional life, but also for the happiness of personal life. In order to increase productivity and efficiency, it is important to apportion time to each specific task according to one's own planning and need. Time management helps employees remain right on their targets without missing goals. At the same time, it is important for an employee to manage work life balance by giving time to his family. It would be unfair if an employee gives all his time to his work showing little regard to his wife and children. In today's world when people are busy pursuing the rat race of success, often due to career ambitions and performance goals, they miss out on the family side of life, and therefore, the work life balance has become a serious matter for discussion these days. The organizations that give employees the flexibility to work from home are consistent with ethical intelligence by allowing their employees balance time management more effectively.

In the case of applying discipline or punishment, sometimes the judgments of people get influenced by the emotions and impulses. Discrimination also takes a part in unfair disciplinary treatments. Statistics show that the use of suspension as a disciplinary measure in school has increased a lot. The data collected by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) shows that colored students were meted out more harsh disciplinary treatments for the 2011-12 school year than the non-colored students. As a result, the education of these students suffered badly (DOE, 2014).

Discrimination also influences the nature of punishment. In the case of punishment, discrimination against the racial minorities is huge. For example, the black defendants are more than three times likely to get the

death penalty than their white counterparts (Pilkington, 2013).

The practice of ethical intelligence in the matter of rectifying injustices could be seen in the movements that were held in order to abolish an evil and unethical system or practice. The Abolitionist Movement is the perfect example of it. There was a time in the 18th and 19th centuries when slavery was widely practiced in the USA. Slaves were sold, beaten and treated like a cattle. Their worth was determined by their ability to work. The commission of a slightest mistake would end them up either with lacerated back or killed. The Abolitionist movement, in which great leaders like William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Brown, and Harriett Beecher Stowe participated, was a non-violent movement carried out in the most ethical way possible. The majority of the leaders used the distribution of pamphlets, publication of journals, lectures and public meetings to spread their message and influence people against slavery. They sent newspapers and pamphlets via mails to gather support. They also travelled within Europe and the US to give their movement a momentum (Mercieca, 2013). As a result of their efforts, they earned success by putting an end to the system of slavery for good.

### **Ethical Intelligence: Be Loving**

The last principle of ethical intelligence is 'Be Loving', which is more of an ideal for people to follow and not exactly ethical intelligence as the previous four principles are. According to Bruce, love in ethical intelligence does not associate with romantic feelings or feelings of love for parents and friends. Love in ethical intelligence is " kindness, care and compassion" for others.

One might say that in the world of today when moral scruples are dwindling with people becoming more selfish every day; kindness, care and compassion for others have become a nonentity. Even in the profession of healthcare the very essence of which centers around the principle of showing care and compassion for patients, there are incidences of severe ill-treatment of patients. Not a while ago, a patient named Kane Gorny died of dehydration in London when the nurses failed to provide him with water even after his making several pleas (Dewsbury, 2013). There are also similar incidents of nurses verbally and physically abusing critical patients or failing to feed them on time. The lack of compassion could be found in incidents like what happened in the New York when a man accidentally fell on the railway track and lay bloodied and injured for several minutes, but nobody came for assistance. People were seen laughing at the man for falling down or shooting videos, but no one cared to help (TWU, 2014). The news of incidents like these completely shakes our faith in the existence of any compassion for the fellow human beings. But all hope is not lost yet as there are many people who rush to help whenever they find anyone in danger. When the news of people risking their own lives to save the life of a stranger comes into our notice, it renews the hope in us that all is lost yet. For example, recently, a 14 year old boy Latrell McCockran put his own life at risk to pull up a disabled man and his dog from a burning building (Wang, 2014). There are other instances of such humanitarian gestures of compassion and care exhibited by people around the world, making us believe that there are still a great many people who practice ethical intelligence.

## Conclusion

The five principles of Do No Harm, Make Things Better, Respect Others, Be Fair, and Be Loving have been collectively named as ethical intelligence by Bruce Weinstein in his book ' Five Principles for Untangling Your Toughest Problems at Work and Beyond'. These five principles are the very essence that makes a human being what he is, a human in the true sense of the term. The principle of Do No Harm prevents harm and minimizes the damage of harm; Make Things Better improves the lives of people; Respect Others underscores the need of respecting confidentiality, telling white lies to prevent hurting someone and promise-keeping; Be Fair proposes fair time management, fair application of discipline and punishment, and the rectification of injustices; and finally, Be Loving propagates the love for fellow human beings through care and compassion. While investigating the issue whether or not ethical intelligence exists in practice, it came into notice that though the instances of moral degradation, the lack of compassion, and discrimination in the distribution of justice have engulfed the world today, there are still people who practice ethical intelligence by refraining from not inflicting any harm to another, making things better for others, respecting the rights of the fellow human beings and showing compassion for others. The world is made of both good and bad people. For every bad person, there are 100 good people existing in the world. Therefore, it will be wrong to believe that ethical intelligence does not exist in practice only by looking at a few bad examples.

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