



ETHICAL SERVICE

—
AWARENESS . ENGAGEMENT . ACCOUNTABILITY

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE
ORIENTATION OF EXECUTIVE BRANCH EMPLOYEES

Instructor Guide for Initial Ethics Orientation/Training

I. Introducing Public Service Expectations—(Slides 2 & 3)

Initial Ethics Orientation/Training should introduce new employees to the expectations of ethical conduct in public service. Ethical conduct involves just that—conduct. Employees are expected to make decisions and perform their duties in accordance with **public service principles and standards**. How we each show up every day, perform our work and support the missions of our agencies –with honesty, professional integrity, impartiality and in the spirit of service to others—demonstrates what it means to engage in ethical conduct.

II. Expectations--Employee's Commitment (Slide 4)

The three “expectations” of ethical service introduced in the new employee handbook are:

Awareness—taking responsibility for familiarizing ourselves with ethical principles, rules and laws so we know when our actions may be questioned or may cause reputational harm to ourselves or our agencies.

Engagement—knowing when to ask questions and seek the advice of others before taking actions.

Accountability—acting in ways that reflect a commitment to ethical principles, rules and laws, and holding ourselves and others accountable.

III. Introducing Ethical Principles and Standards (Slides 5-7)

Orientation to the ethical principles and standards should be an exercise in awareness building. As such the goal of the orientation is to familiarize new employees with key ethical themes that can act as “red flags” to help them identify circumstances where they may be facing an ethical issue. *Covering the entirety of the Standards of Conduct and criminal laws is not a desirable or achievable objective.*

In lieu of discussing each of the 14 Principles of Ethical Conduct you are encouraged to introduce employees to the three overarching themes—Loyalty to Law, Selfless Service, Responsible Stewardship—as these more broadly capture the expectations of public service. Likewise with the Standards of Ethical Conduct, you are encouraged to introduce, discuss and explore, the general topics and the circumstances in which employees might experience them, rather than focusing specifically on the rules themselves.

Should you elect to introduce the criminal laws, you should again focus on building awareness of the circumstances in which an employee might face a statutory ethical issue.

IV. Building Awareness Through Discussion

Employees encounter “ethics” in the day-to-day work they perform. Ethics orientation therefore should:

1. give new employees an opportunity to explore their own instincts and test their understanding in simple scenarios that encourage discussion, AND
2. allow them **to think about** and discuss what they would actually decide to do and how they would make those decisions.

If an employee does not have sufficient awareness and understanding of ethical expectations to recognize when a situation poses an ethical issue, they cannot make ethically-informed decisions.

If an employee has some awareness and understanding of the expectations but doesn’t know what steps to take when facing an issue, the employee is in jeopardy of violating the principles, the rules or the law.

V. Training Conversation Prompts: Objectives and Methodology

Objectives: In this training you will introduce your new employees to a variety of simple conversation prompts that reflect real-life circumstances. The objective of these exercises is to encourage employees to test their ethical awareness, build their knowledge, become comfortable discussing “ethics,” and practice decision-making.

Methodology: For each conversation prompt you should first decide upon the “learning points” you want your audience to address, and then develop discussion questions to assist you in facilitating conversations with your new employees about their ethical obligations. These learning points and discussion questions should reach to the “expectations” of ethical service—Awareness, Engagement, and Accountability—introduced in the new employee handbook

For each of the prompts provided, you are encouraged to engage your audience accordingly:

- 1. Test “instincts”**--As an initial matter, it is important to have employees **consider their instincts as a starting place** for identifying potential ethics concerns. Encourage employees to combine that instinct with any basic knowledge or understanding they have of the general principles and standards (and laws) based upon their review of the IEO materials they were given.
- 2. Build Awareness**—Help employees identify **key ethical themes** (e.g. misuse of position, financial interest, impartiality, fairness, gifts) that can assist them in knowing when they are facing an ethical issue and may need to seek assistance. Discuss the importance of cultivating habits of asking questions and seeking advice. Encourage employees to acquire additional knowledge through their own research or through consultation with their colleagues, supervisors and the ethics office.
- 3. Encourage Engagement**—Give employees an opportunity to consider how they will make decisions, including whether and when they will take a final action unassisted and when and with whom they will seek guidance (from a supervisor, co-workers or ethics officials).
- 4. Underscore Accountability**—Discuss with employees the importance of holding themselves accountable both for the actions they take (and any repercussions of those actions) and for the

process they choose to follow in arriving at that final decision/action. Remind them that seeking advice may afford them protection. Be prepared to provide concrete examples of the consequences of unethical conduct both to the employee and the agency.

VI. Applying the Methodology

1. Learning Points

For each conversation prompt, you are encouraged to develop your own **“learning points”** based on your mission and your target audience. View learning points as the “take-aways” of your training. These may vary from audience to audience.

NOTE: The employees should already have read any summaries or other written materials you provided. Your learning points should add value to the information they have already read on their own.

2. Discussion Questions

For each learning point you should craft **open-ended discussion questions** that provoke thought and elicit responses that address the learning points for that prompt.

There are a variety of ways you can use the discussion questions to generate engagement:

1. Ask for direct responses from the audience.
2. Have participants write down their thoughts.
3. Have participants share their thoughts with each other, in pairs or in small groups.
4. Where appropriate, ask for a show of hands in lieu of a verbal response.

The simple act of having your audience actively participate in the learning is a critical objective.

3. Training Plan

To prepare for your training it is useful to have a basic training plan that contains at a minimum your conversation prompts, learning points and the discussion questions you will use to address them.

Sample Training Plan:

Conversation Prompts: Combine Prompts 1 and 2 to cover Use of Position and Resources

Prompt 1: You've been given a Government computer, a desk phone, maybe a mobile device. You notice some of your colleagues have their personal email and social media accounts open on their desktops.

Sample Learning Points:

- New employees observe other's behavior and may make incorrect assumptions
- Instincts about what is and isn't appropriate may or may not be accurate
- The agency itself has expectations (policies)
- Use of position and resources is a daily ethical issue for employees
- Use of position and resources covers a lot of things (tangible and intangible)

Sample Discussion Questions:

- What are your assumptions based upon what you've observed others doing?
- What would you likely do?
- What if any expectations do you think the agency might have?
- What or who will you rely upon to decide what's okay and what isn't?
- What resources other than equipment might be "misused?"

Prompt 2: Your family and friends ask you to help them with an issue they have with the Government (getting a job, Social Security benefits, federal

taxes, student loans, policy concerns, licenses, contracts, grants, internships, etc.).

Sample Learning Points:

- Using our positions to help out friends and family is problematic
- The public expects a “level playing field”—no favoritism
- Impartiality and maintaining fairness are so important that there are criminal laws that limit what we as federal employees can do for family and friends
- Educating family and friends about restrictions may help with any pressures you feel
- Knowing who to talk to and when is vital
- Misuse is one of the most observable, reported and disciplined forms of misconduct

Sample Discussion Questions:

- What, if anything, is wrong with using our position with the government to help out others we know personally?
- Why are fairness and impartiality important in the work we do?
- How might you deal with any expectations family and friends have?
- Who will you talk to about using your position/resources and when?
- What are the repercussions of misusing position/time/equipment?