



**Sustaining a culture of ethics
in the government sector**
Navigating ethical dilemmas

Jabu M. Sengova, Ethics Officer
City of Atlanta Ethics Office

WHO WE ARE

Office established in 2003

(**Celebrated 20 years last year!!!**)

Independent City Oversight Agency

Report to the Governing Board of
the Ethics Office

Ethics Officer - Jabu Sengova

Ethics Office staff - 12
employees with range of skills

WHAT WE DO



ADVICE



TRAINING



**ETHICS
INVESTIGATIONS**



ENFORCEMENT



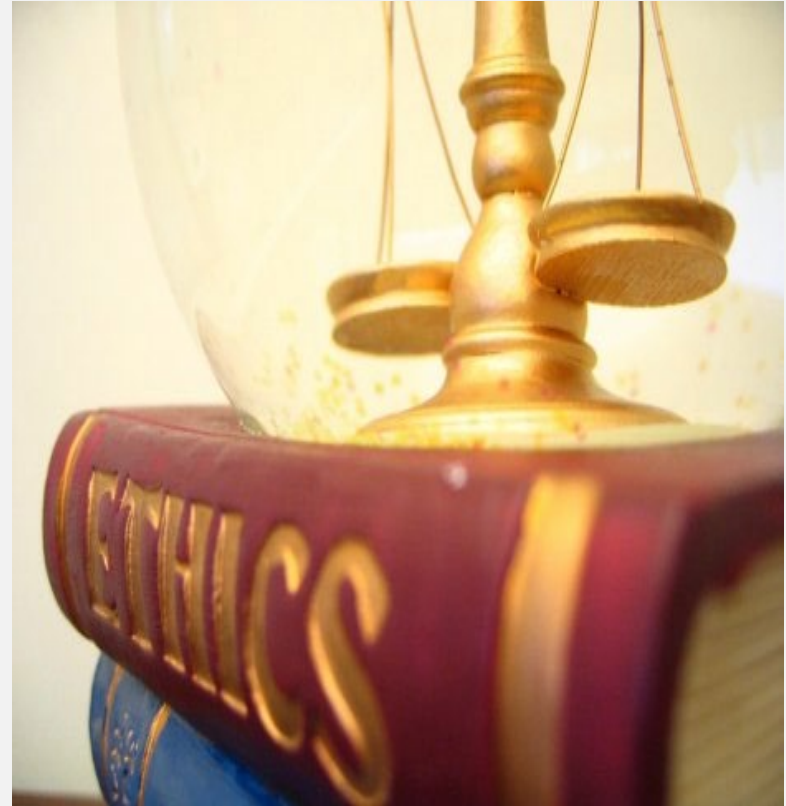
**FINANCIAL
DISCLOSURE**

WHY DOES ETHICS MATTER?



ETHICS

Give a one-word description of “Ethics” and how it applies to your role



DEFINITIONS OF ETHICS

“Ethics are a **code of values** which **guide** our choices and actions and determine the purpose and course of our lives.”

“Ethics is the **moral guide/compass** we choose for our behavior.”

“Ethics are the rules **we choose to follow** even when **no one is looking.**”

WHY DO PEOPLE RESIST TALKING ABOUT ETHICS?



ONE THOUGHT---

“Many people believe that embracing ethics would limit their options, their opportunities, their very ability to succeed in business [their endeavors].”

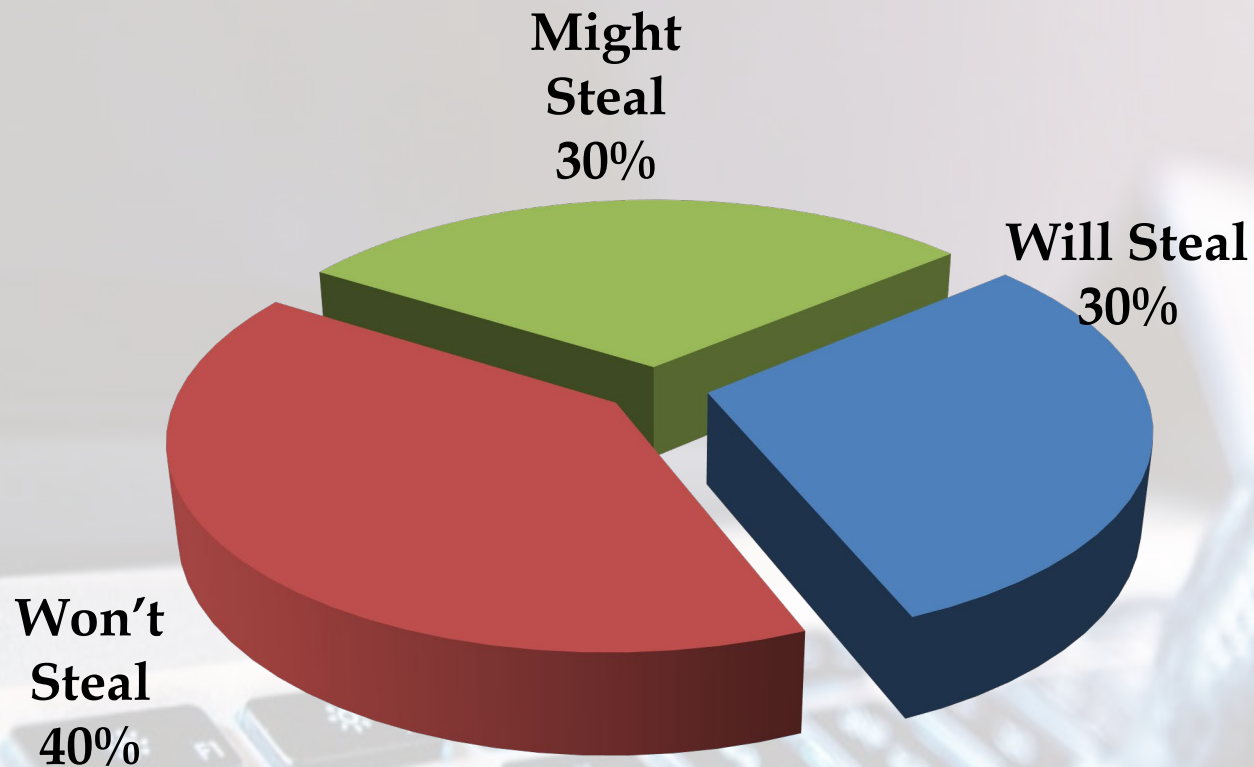
Corruption challenges posed in government



- All organizations face common challenges with waste, fraud, abuse, unethical conduct and corruption
- State and local corruption schemes becoming more sophisticated
- Citizen distrust and disengagement continues to increase

Source: Center Advancement Public Integrity: Taking a Byte Out of Corruption (Columbia Law School)

Likelihood Employees Will Steal



Rationalization for Unethical Behavior

- **Everybody else does it, so it must be okay.**
- **If we don't do it, someone else will.**
- **This is the way it has always been done!**
- **It doesn't hurt anyone!**
- **Its just a tiny breach of "integrity."**

Source: Mullinax Group, LLC

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE COSTS OF UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR?



COSTS OF UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

- Hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees
- **Waste due to inadequate oversight**
- **Internal inquiries and investigatory time**
- Lost productivity of employees
- **Training time for bringing in new employees**
- Loss of institutional knowledge

BIGGER COSTS

- **LOST OPPORTUNITY** due to real or perceived ethics problems.
- **REPUTATIONAL DAMAGE**
- **LOSS OF TRUST**
- **LOSS OF PROFITS** or the ability to carry out the mission of your organization

The Fraud Triangle



Why do ethical people make unethical decisions?

Former Chief Procurement Officer





Case Study

Former Chief Procurement Officer

- 14-year tenure
- Executive level employee
- \$250,000+ salary
- ***Previous chairman of the Atlanta Ethics Board***
- Responsible for overseeing the city's purchasing department that included every **single major contract** in the city.
- Between 2015 and 2017, charged with conspiracy and committing bribery
- Pled guilty to accepting about **\$40,000** worth of bribes

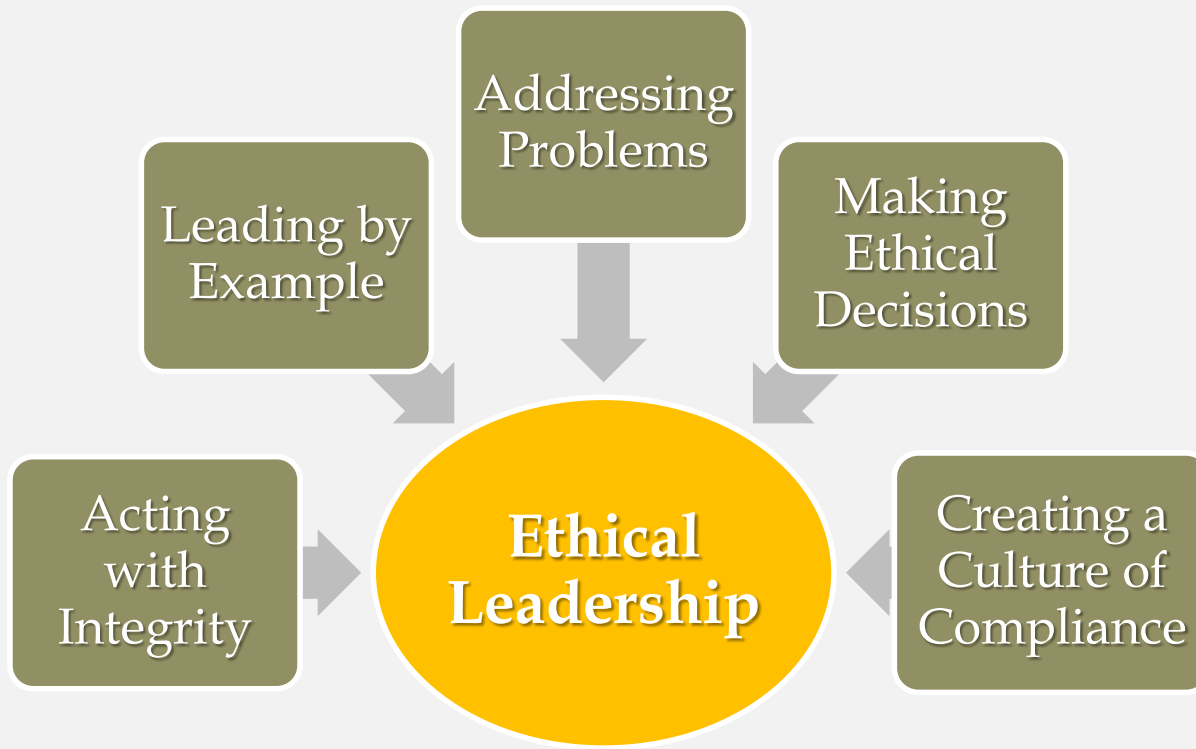
Case Study

Former Chief Financial Officer

- 7-year tenure
- Executive level employee
- **\$250+ salary**
- Responsible for preparing and monitoring annual budget, including establishing and maintaining fiscal policies
- Ethics investigation into improper use of executive's official credit card to charge personal expenses, expensive travel (hotel, first class international tickets, high end restaurants) and personal expenses for family members



What is a strong ethical culture?



Situational Ethics

- We do what's most *convenient*.
- We do what we must to *win*.
- We do what we believe is right in the *moment*.

Source: Mullinax Group, LLC

ETHICS IQ



- I am always ethical.
- I am mostly ethical.
- I am somewhat ethical.
- I am seldom ethical.
- I am never ethical.

ETHICS IQ: Scenario



An elected official is invited by the COO of a Fortune 500 company to fly to Texas in the company's private jet to seek clean energy solutions for the City. The official calls to discuss with you and presents a convincing case.

Please select a response below:

- A. The official should be able to travel on the private jet if the City reimburses the company.**
- B. The official should not go to Texas for this purpose.**
- C. The official can go to Texas but not on the private jet.**

ETHICS IQ: Scenario



An Airport executive is invited by his brother to attend the Superbowl at the Mercedes Benz Stadium in his suite. The brother owns a several restaurants and is planning to respond to concession bids at the airport. The executive comes to you to ask if he can accept his brother's invitation.

How would you advise him?

- A. He should go because his brother is inviting him.**
- B. He should probably not go because of his role.**
- C. He should go but not be involved in the concession process.**

ETHICS IQ: Scenario



A city executive wants to rent a condominium from a city contractor who she has been friends with for many years. The executive comes into your office to discuss whether this would be a potential “ethics issue”.

How would you advise her about the potential “issue”?

- A. There should be no issue if she pays fair value for the rent.**
- B. She can rent the condo if they stop being friends.**
- C. Advise her to consider another condo.**

ETHICS IQ: Scenario



An employee with the Department of Aviation, Ground Transportation Division, develops a close friendship with an individual that holds a city permit to operate his business at the airport. The permit is issued by the employee's Division. The employee wants to know if they could exchange gifts during the holidays.

How would you advise the employee?

- A. This should be fine because their personal relationship is their business.**
- B. This friendship violates the ethics rules.**
- C. The gift exchange may be an issue, and you do not recommend.**



How do organizations sustain a strong ethical culture?

In *strong* ethical cultures, leadership and management

- Communicate ethics as a **PRIORITY**
- Set a good example of ethical conduct
- Provide information about what is going on
- Support and uphold organizational standards



How do organizations sustain a strong ethical culture?

In *strong* ethical cultures, employees:

- Consider ethics in making decisions
- Set good examples of ethical conduct
- Report unethical conduct in a safe environment
- Support following organizational standards

Practical Approaches to Ethical Decision Making

Prepare in advance for ethical challenges!!

Make good decisions in the moment

Reflect and learn from ethical successes and failures

Final Words

- Basic childhood foundation of knowing *good* and *bad* is *never enough*
- Our behavior does not always match with our “stated values”
- *Everyone* has a capacity for good or evil
- Self-awareness/self-check is critical



CLOSING THOUGHT

“Ethics require making conscious decisions – **every day** – about the impact of your choices on the people you serve directly as well as the world at large.”

CHRISTOPHER BAUER, PH.D.

*Better Ethics Now: How to Avoid the Ethics
Disaster You Never Saw Coming*



Questions?