

Arguing Ethics?

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Does arguing enhance our ability to make better ethical decisions? Yes!

The best arguments do not involve name-calling or put-downs. Instead, they promote rational questioning to probe through facts and priorities when opposing viewpoints are present. Research shows these discussions can stimulate our problem-solving abilities, critical thinking skills and even our capacity to learn.

Last weekend, teachers from fifteen Oklahoma-based high schools registered to attend a special workshop on the University of Oklahoma's campus. Arguing seems to be a natural propensity for teenagers, but these proactive educators will show them how to channel those energies using self-control, respect and rationality. Their students will then compete in a statewide ethics bowl where they will debate ethical issues with others from diverse backgrounds. As a result, these young scholars will be better equipped to resist peer pressure and do the right thing when situations arise.

Several Oklahoma colleges have participated in these events for years. Student teams compete to qualify for the Regional Ethics Bowl in San Antonio. When they beat the Texas schools, they become eligible for the National Ethics Bowl in D.C. This year, three Oklahoma schools joined 36 of the best and brightest teams from across the country. In the final rounds, Oklahoma Christian won third place, defeating such notable institutions as the Naval Academy.

Dr. Jeff Simmons, Oklahoma Christian's team advisor, believes these efforts are important. He recently led the winning squad consisting of engineering, finance, political science and English majors. The incredible dedication of the undergraduate students, who voluntarily participated without incentives of extra credit or scholarships, was clearly apparent. They met twice a week at 6:00 a.m. for several months to prepare. Their future employers will be fortunate to have these bright champions of integrity who are truly prepared to face and resolve ethical dilemmas.

Tulsa business leader, Colin Schoonover, serves as Co-President of the OK Ethics Foundation, a sponsor of local ethics bowls. He admires the way students use constructive arguments to discern ethical priorities through practical application of their skills, including effective civil discourse using non-confrontational approaches.

Instead of shunning arguments for the sake of status quo, successful businesses need to teach employees to put aside their egos and thoughtfully challenge one another's ideas. It makes for better decision-making and sharpens the development of skills so necessary for success in today's work environment.

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