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*March 2015*

This newsletter is intended for teachers, leaders, and practitioners in all Buddhist traditions. While *An Olive Branch* is a project of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh, people from all traditions, other spiritual organizations, and secular groups turn to us for help with governance issues and conflict resolution.

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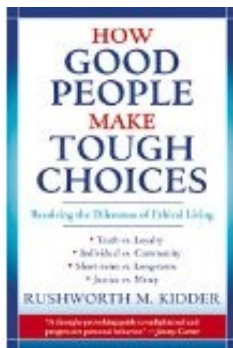
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## ***Ethics and Decision-making***

In our work with organizations struggling with misconduct on the part of a spiritual leader, we have witnessed seemingly unsolvable decision-making dilemmas. For example, some people in the group want justice and some want mercy. Or some want the truth of the situation to be spoken; for others, loyalty to the teacher trumps truth-telling.

The ensuing conflict rests on the "rightness" of the choice: it is right to punish an offender who has harmed a student and it is also right to show compassion and give the offender a second chance. People become entangled in the conflict and agonize over what to do.

Rushworth Kidder, founder of the Institute for Global Ethics and author of *How Good People Make Tough Choices*, wrote, "The really tough choices don't center upon right versus wrong. They involve right versus right. They are genuine dilemmas precisely because each side is firmly rooted in one of our basic, core values." (Kidder, Rushworth M. *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living*. New York: Fireside, 1995).



## [Institute for Global Ethics](#)

### ***Opportunity for Learning***

An Olive Branch's third webinar, March 24, 2015, will be presented by Amber Kruk, Trainer and Senior Project Manager, at the Institute for Global Ethics. In her presentation, "Leading with Values," participants will examine the connection between the Buddhist precepts and the Institute for Global Ethics' research on shared ethical values. Common types of ethical dilemmas will be presented. Participants will learn the Institute's approach to resolving dilemmas using streamlined versions of some of the oldest, most influential concepts in ethical philosophy.



[Click here for a flyer](#) about the webinar.

[Click here to register.](#)

[Previous webinars are available here.](#)

### ***Continuing the Series on Board Governance***

In January in this newsletter, we launched a new series on board governance. At *An Olive Branch*, we assert that the incidence and effects of conflict, misconduct, and other dysfunctions in organizations can be reduced when these organizations have a healthy governance system and well-communicated policies. Further, organizations with healthy board governance are generally successful, resilient, and just plain enjoyable for everyone involved.

Last month, the focus was on the board's responsibility to ensure effective planning. Previous newsletters may be found [here](#). Now we turn our attention to the responsibility to ensure adequate resources.

### ***Board Responsibility: Ensure Adequate Resources***



The nonprofit and voluntary sector is home to a wide range of organizations from very large hospitals and universities which fund their operations primarily from fees or tuition to small community-based groups which survive on charitable contributions. Some organizations, such as religious congregations and private membership organizations, operate without government funding. Others, particularly those serving the elderly, poor, or disabled could not survive without the steady flow of funds from federal, state, and local government.

Revenue models for different types of organizations in the sector are extremely varied and include fees-for-service, dues, tuition, government contracts and grants, foundation and corporate grants, commercial enterprises, and private donations. Whatever the revenue mix, boards should ensure that sources are diverse so if one or two sources decline

precipitously, the organization can continue to operate.

Regardless of the type of organization or sources of funding, the board is responsible for ensuring adequate resources for their organization to carry out its mission. The board carries out this responsibility by:

- Approving plans and goals
- Approving the budget and financial goals
- Establishing fund-raising policies
- Selecting and supporting a resource-savvy leader
- Recruiting board members who will raise funds or otherwise support the organization's revenue model
- Helping to implement the fund development plan and participate in fund-raising activities.

## ***Tips for Improving Fundraising Performance***

Probably no other board responsibility causes more consternation among board members than the expectation that board members make a personal financial contribution and ask others to give. While individual giving by board members has improved over the years, according to the 2014 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices (BoardSource) only 60% of nonprofits surveyed achieved 100% of board giving.

And according to the same survey, only 6% of board members said they were "very comfortable" with asking for donations. Slightly more, 12%, said they were "very comfortable" with meeting donors, and 24% were "very comfortable" with identifying donors.

To improve board members' participation in personal giving as well as in asking others to give:

- Develop a policy that defines the board's fund-raising responsibility.
- Use a board job description that clearly states fund-raising expectations both for personal giving as well as for participation in fund-raising activities.
- Provide fund-raising training.
- Be sure all board members can speak passionately about the organization and have key messages about the impact of the organization's programs and services.
- Provide an array of ways board members can support the fund-raising effort so they can choose activities with which they are comfortable.
- Set achievable goals, starting small if the board is new to fund-raising.
- Celebrate like crazy when goals are reached.
- Capture "lessons learned" so improvements can be made.

## ***Book Recommendation : On the Topic of Vulnerability and Conflict***

When conflict arises in our lives, we often struggle to engage with it in a way that is constructive and beneficial to all parties involved. Each of us has our own patterns of reaction depending on which relationships and values are at stake in the conflict.

For the difficult conversations involved in conflict resolution, *An Olive Branch* advocates an approach based on broad-issue, interest-based mediation. We call the approach [Shared Wisdom](#).

A feeling of vulnerability hinders most conflict-related communication. When those feelings arise, habitual defense mechanisms -- usually of the fight-flight-or-fix variety -- kick into gear. These mechanisms squash the curiosity and empathy we strive to cultivate in the Shared Wisdom process of conflict resolution. What can we do in the midst of such feelings, and how can we better understand them?

"Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences," says Brené Brown in *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. Dr. Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, studies shame and vulnerability. Her TED Talks on [vulnerability](#) and [shame](#) have gone viral, and she recently was recently interviewed by Krista Tippett for [On Being](#).



In *Daring Greatly* Brown discusses what she learned in her research on vulnerability, its relationship to shame, and how it affects relationships and communities. There are many insights and suggestions for conflict navigators, not the least of which is her homesy assurance that she struggles with vulnerability as much as the next person. The book is useful for understanding, not only ourselves, but others as we engage them in uncertainty of conflict resolution. We highly recommend Dr. Brown's book for anyone - everyone? - who wrestles with vulnerability.

## Question of the Month



**Q:** What should you do if you don't agree with the board's decision?

**A:** Good decisions usually are the result of healthy debate. The board culture should foster a climate in which all views are welcome. After all, if everyone were to hold the same opinion all the time, it would be a boring world!

Eventually, after all board members' views on a topic are expressed, a decision needs to be made. If the board operates according to some version of Robert's Rules of Order, when a vote is taken the majority rules. Dissenting votes and abstentions should be recorded in the minutes. When a board operates on a consensus model, discussion continues until everyone agrees with the decision being made. The consensus decision is recorded in the minutes.

In either case, once a decision is reached, all board members need to speak with "one voice." It is not acceptable for those who disagree with the decision to talk about it outside the board room or use media of any kind to establish their position in opposition to the board. This principle of confidentiality is part of the board members' fiduciary responsibility.

Here is an [excellent resource](#) from the Association of Corporate Counsel that further addresses the topic of board members' duty of confidentiality. It discusses the source of the duty of confidentiality, when the duty of confidentiality is engaged, suggestions for a confidentiality policy, and consequences of breaching the duty of confidentiality.

**Please remember,** YOU are invited to submit questions related to boards/governance or conflict resolution simply by emailing them to [katheryn@an-olive-branch.org](mailto:katheryn@an-olive-branch.org). All questions will be answered via individual email; some may be selected for this newsletter - without the asker being identified. If you have a question or board-issue and just want someone to talk it through with confidentially, please call 412-99-OLIVE (412-996-5483) or send email. There is no charge for these conversations.

***An Olive Branch strengthens organizations by helping leaders understand the role of conflict in organizational health.***

- *To proactively address conflict, we offer dispute resolution training and help organizations design ethical governance procedures.*
- *To respond in the midst of disruptive conflict, we provide processes for healing and restoring harmony.*

*An Olive Branch brings the calming influence of a neutral third party, inspired by the tradition of Buddhist teaching that stretches over 2500 years.*

[More information](#)

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