



# What Is a Giving Voice to Values Case?

*Mary C. Gentile, Giving Voice to Values, Babson College*

*Anne T. Lawrence, San José State University*

*John Melnyk, University of Winnipeg*

Recently, the authors were privileged to serve as judges for a case competition, sponsored by United Nations Principles of Responsible Management Education and Giving Voice to Values, for an outstanding Giving Voice to Values case on anti-corruption. In evaluating the thirty-three cases submitted to the competition, we found ourselves engaged in a deep conversation about what exactly constituted the elements of an outstanding Giving Voice to Values case and instructor's manual, and how these could best be crafted to meet the pedagogical objectives of this approach. In this essay, we share some of the conclusions we reached. Our intention is to stimulate the beginning of a dialogue about how the case method can best support the objectives of Giving Voice to Values. As will become clear in this essay, the criteria for cases to be accepted in the Giving Voice to Values case collection are somewhat more flexible than the criteria for acceptance in the *Case Research Journal*, but the fundamentals of this distinctive pedagogical approach are consistent.<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT IS GIVING VOICE TO VALUES?

Giving Voice to Values (GVV) is an innovative approach to values-driven leadership development that fundamentally shifts the focus of the traditional business ethics curriculum and by so doing, makes it easier for conversations about values and ethics to be integrated across the curriculum (rather than limited to dedicated ethics classes). The intent of GVV is not to persuade students to be more ethical. Rather, GVV starts from the premise that most people already have values and want to act on them, but also want to feel that they have a reasonable chance of doing so effectively. This pedagogy focuses on building students' capability, and therefore confidence, to enact their values effectively.

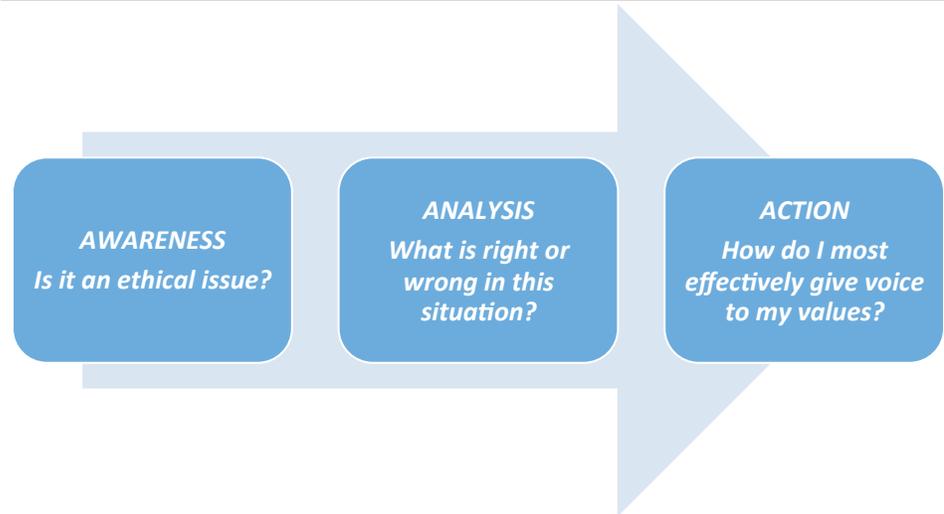
A helpful way to conceptualize the business ethics curriculum is as a three stage process, as shown in **Figure 1**, which we call the "three A's." In stage one, *awareness*, students learn to distinguish an ethical issue from other kinds of issues that arise in business. In stage two, *analysis*, students consider what is right or wrong in a particular

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situation. In stage three, *action*, students learn to act—that is, to effectively voice and enact their values.

**Figure 1: The “Three A’s” of Business Ethics Education**



Traditionally, the business ethics curriculum has focused mainly on stages one and two. Faculty have sought to foster an *awareness* of ethical issues, dilemmas, and conflicts, so that students will recognize them when they encounter them. This is undoubtedly an important endeavor, especially in a world where increasing globalization of business and the rapid development of new technologies result in challenges for which students may be underprepared. Additionally, traditional business ethics courses have emphasized *analysis*, introducing learners to models of ethical reasoning, such as theories of rights, justice, utility, and virtue. These analytical frameworks, derived from moral philosophy, enable students to practice rigorous and consistent reflection upon the sorts of ethical dilemmas that business practitioners are likely to encounter.

Although these two emphases are undoubtedly essential and important, GVV shines a light on the third—and often underemphasized—stage: education for *action*. This simple shift in emphasis makes a dramatic difference in how we teach business ethics. In a GVV case discussion, the focus is on accomplishing an objective. Students are challenged to craft an action plan and set of “scripts” that are informed by an examination of the complex pressures faced by major stakeholders and the organizational realities of the situation. Students must consider the leverage the protagonist has, their likely allies, and the most persuasive arguments they could make and to whom. They need to anticipate what kinds of resistance they might face, and how to overcome it. Through this process, students gain competence and confidence—in a safe classroom environment where they are coached by an instructor and peers—to make ethical action a feasible choice. In short, GVV pedagogy is based on the idea that *rehearsal* for informed voice and action is a critically important method for encouraging ethical leadership.<sup>2</sup>

Because of this shift in emphasis, cases written for use in the GVV curriculum differ from traditional ethics cases in several respects. The following sections describe some of the characteristics of an effective GVV-style case study and instructor’s

manual. In the final section, we will address several issues that arose in our deliberations while judging the GVV anti-corruption cases.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GIVING VOICE TO VALUES CASE

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Every GVV case will, of course, be unique, based on the subject matter and objectives of the author. Cases suitable for *CRJ* publication are generally longer and more detailed, whereas cases included in the GVV online collection are often briefer, making them more appropriate for integration across the curriculum in various functional courses. However, most GVV cases will share some common elements.<sup>3</sup>

*Decision point.* One of the key choices every case writer must make is when to end the narrative, that is, where to place the decision point. The decision point of a GVV case generally falls between stages two and three of the “three A’s,” after the protagonist (whom we will refer to as P) has become aware of an ethical issue and has come to a conclusion about what is right and wrong (stages one and two), but has not yet decided how most effectively to act on his or her convictions (stage three). It is “post-decision” in the sense that P is already convinced that something is wrong and action needs to be taken, but “pre-decision” in the sense that he or she has not yet determined the best approach.

*Subject matter.* Like all ethics cases, GVV cases involve values—that is, core beliefs about what is right and wrong. Important core values include honesty, fairness, compassion, responsibility, and respect.<sup>4</sup> An ethical dilemma arises when values are in conflict, or when an individual is expected to do something that would violate core values. An ethics case generally begins with a description of the issue, as experienced and understood by the protagonist. Many situations lend themselves to a GVV approach. For example:

- P has been asked to do something that they feel would violate their values, e.g., to approve a fraudulent financial report, discriminate against a customer, or discipline an employee unfairly.
- P observes another person or persons within an organization doing something that violates his or her values, e.g., deceiving investors, overlooking safety defects, or accepting an inappropriate gift.
- The organization in which P works has policies or practices in place, or plans to put in place, that violate P’s personal values, e.g., selling improperly-rated subprime mortgages to investors, or bribing foreign officials to obtain business.

These examples all imply unethical intent by the organization or one or more of its employees. GVV cases can also be written about situations that may arise “normally” without nefarious intent on anyone’s part. For example, a manager might instruct a subordinate to rush with a particular task in order to meet a deadline—haste that the subordinate realizes would put stakeholders at risk in some way.

GVV cases can be set in virtually any kind of organization or group (e.g., a business, a family, a sports team, a student club), but for the purposes of the *Case Research Journal* and most business school classrooms, the situation must be in a complex organizational setting (e.g., a company, nonprofit organization, or government agency).<sup>5</sup>

*The protagonist.* The protagonist in a GVV case is the individual (or in some cases, a group) that is challenged to voice their values. Many (but not all) GVV cases include a portrait of the protagonist. This portrait might include such elements as:

- Life experiences that shaped P's values, e.g., parental values, religious faith, military or volunteer service, previous work experience, or identification with social movements or causes.
- Prior experiences that were similar in some respects to the present situation, how P responded then, and whether or not the approach taken then was successful.
- How P perceives him or herself: as an introvert or extrovert? As a better writer or speaker? As experienced or inexperienced?
- Family or personal factors that might influence P's willingness to take risk, e.g., sole support of minor children, health conditions, financial security, or ability to find alternative employment if necessary.

These details will help students understand the factors that enable P to act (or make it more difficult to act) and what skills and life experiences P brings to this challenge.

*Organizational context.* GVV cases usually also describe the organizational context. The student needs to understand P's position in the organizational hierarchy and his or her sources of formal and informal power. What individual or group has the authority to solve the problem at hand? How is P related to that person in the organization? The case may also describe the organization's culture. For example, is profit generally elevated over other values? What is the compensation system or structure of incentives, and what does that tell us about the organization's values? What formal policies are in place relevant to the situation, such as ones on sexual harassment, financial reporting, conflicts of interest, or worker health and safety? Does the organization have prior experience with the kind of issue at hand, and how did it respond at that time? Another aspect of the organizational context that is often relevant is who are P's potential allies, likely opponents, and people who are simply indifferent. These details allow students to consider the protagonist's levers for effective action.

*External context.* Often, the external context is also relevant. For example, laws and regulations may be in place that would help P craft a persuasive argument. The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and European anti-corruption laws can be used to support an argument against the acceptance of or use of bribes. If the case is about gender discrimination, and the case is set in a nation that has laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, the legal context can be summarized. Professional codes of conduct, such as those adopted by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants or the American Marketing Association, may be relevant. However, simply crafting a script where the protagonist recites the relevant laws or regulations is not generally an effective resolution of a GVV case. Rather, students are encouraged to think about how they might use these rules to support their action plan and prepare their script, in addition to other strategies, such as researching past experiences; identifying and reaching out to allies; or generating alternative approaches to the current challenges. NGOs may be active around an issue. This may be mentioned as part of the external context, because P may be able to argue, "If we don't address this problem, the NGO may expose it and damage the company's reputation." Finally, common practices and precedents of the industry may also be relevant.

*Concluding the case.* GVV cases usually conclude by returning to the problem at hand. This is the point in the case where the author can describe P's early efforts to solve the problem (e.g., P spoke to the supervisor, who dismissed the issue as unimportant). Or, it may simply describe his or her first musings on what to do. These are important, because sometimes impediments to action may be self-imposed. In some

cases, this section will be more developed, e.g., P makes a significant effort that fails, and then has to regroup and determine if there is any other way to solve the problem. In fact, if the situation involved multiple attempts, this may provide the basis for a series of cases. The case ends with the question: What should P do next to voice and enact his or her values effectively?

*Case length.* GVV cases vary in length from short vignettes to full-length Harvard or *Case Research Journal*-style cases. Short cases may be assigned as supplements to longer cases on a related topic in a non-ethics course, so students can apply lessons learned in a discipline-based course to a values-related situation. Shorter cases, although valuable in many settings, may not include all the elements listed above, or may be able to cover them only in abbreviated form. In that event, the case author may wish to reference some topics, such as relevant laws or professional codes, in the instructor's manual, along with guidance on how students might research these further. Full-length cases may be more appropriate for full class periods or written assignments, or for stand-alone ethics courses. Regardless of length, the case must provide enough information to generate a rich and multi-faceted discussion.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GIVING VOICE TO VALUES INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

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NACRA has published a useful guide to the key components of an excellent instructor's manual.<sup>6</sup> This advice applies to any case, including GVV cases, which are submitted to the *Case Research Journal*. In this section, we will comment on some of the distinctive features of a GVV instructor's manual.<sup>7</sup>

*Case objectives and use.* As mentioned above, GVV cases can be used both in stand-alone ethics courses and as a way to integrate preparation for ethical action into a discipline-based course, such as accounting, finance, marketing, or information systems. The instructor's manual should suggest settings in which the case would be most useful.

*Learning objectives.* The rehearsal for action focus of GVV case analysis should be reflected in the student learning objectives. These might include, for example: "Develop an action plan to . . .," "Practice giving voice to values . . .," or "Recommend a strategy to change . . ."

*Research methods and disguise.* GVV cases, like all NACRA and other peer-reviewed journal cases, must be based on a real situation; fictionalization is never permissible. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, however, GVV cases are usually (but not always) disguised. (Cases in the GVV collection, unlike *CRJ* cases, are sometimes composite situations.) This is not necessarily a disadvantage. Since the learning objectives are to hone students' action skills, rather than to research a particular company or decision, a disguise does not detract from a GVV case's usefulness. In addition, by offering a disguise, the case author can often gain access to sensitive situations that would not otherwise be disclosed or released. (If the case is to be considered for *CRJ*, the author must include a comprehensive research methods section that clearly explains the factual basis for the case, the research methods used, and the extent of the disguise.)

*Discussion questions.* Although every case is unique, the following questions often work well in a GVV case and are, in fact, the core elements of the guidance provided

to students in preparing a GVV case. Of course, these questions are often supplemented by others more specific to the case under discussion.

- *What values are involved in the situation? What is the values-driven position of the protagonist?* These questions prompt students to define the values that are in play, and why P feels compelled to take action. Since the implications of the values aroused may be in conflict, students may need to consider the relative importance of the values involved.
- *What are P's objectives?* What does P wish to accomplish through his or her action and voice? This is not the action plan itself, but the goal; for example, to change an organizational policy or practice.
- *What is at stake and for whom in this situation?* This question requires students to identify various stakeholders' interests. This will help P determine their likely allies and adversaries, and will be helpful later when students must craft arguments able to persuade various parties. The instructor's manual should avoid offering a laundry list of all stakeholders, but rather focus on those most relevant to resolving P's issue.
- *What factors make it easier for P to act? What factors may make it more difficult for him or her to act?* These are characteristics of the protagonist or the situation that, in the language of GVV, "enable" or "disable" action.
- *What are the risks of action, and how can P best minimize these risks?* GVV explicitly trains students to minimize career or financial risk when voicing their values, as they would in taking any action in a business setting.
- *Who are P's potential allies in this situation? What resources and "levers" does P have?* This question requires students to draw on their analysis of stakeholder interests to identify possible sources of support, as well as to consider where in the organization the authority lies to accomplish the objective.
- *What is P's most effective action plan? What are the most persuasive arguments, to whom should they be delivered, when, and how? What "reasons and rationalizations" (counter-arguments) might P expect, and what would be the most effective responses to them?* These questions provide an opportunity—critical in the GVV approach—for students to script and rehearse giving voice to values. Students should consider whom the protagonist is trying to convince and what types of arguments or approach will be most persuasive. Should P speak to people one-on-one or in a group? Would a conversation or written communication be more effective? What should he or she say? How should the value proposition be framed?

Effective rehearsal for action involves anticipating possible objections and crafting responses to them.<sup>8</sup> Students will likely need to craft a sort of "decision tree" of scripts and responses. In addition, they will want to think not only about what to say but about what to do—an action plan. They may want to build a set of allies. They may want to make sure that a key individual or perspective is included in the deliberations, altering the course of the decision-making process. They may identify some data gathering that will be powerful. This portion of the IM affords an opportunity for considerable creativity. For example, students can be asked to draft scripts and then deliver them orally in the class for peer assessment and peer coaching. They may be asked to prepare these scripts as homework, as class work, and individually

or in teams. The IM can include sample scripts, noting the elements of an outstanding student response.

- *What additional actions might P take to effect the desired change? What contingency plan should P have in place if the approach used doesn't work?* The key here is to identify the responses that are most crucial to the success of the action plan but not directly controllable by the protagonist, and provide a way to cope if these responses are unfavorable.

*Epilogue or (B) case.* Because GVV cases focus on implementation, their instructor's manuals should ideally include an epilogue or, alternatively, a (B) case that describes the actions the protagonist actually took in giving voice to their values and the resulting effect on the situation and the protagonist. (However, some cases in the GVV collection do not have such an epilogue.) We will say more about this in our concluding observations.

## SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

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In conclusion, we raise three specific questions about GVV writing and pedagogy that arose in the course of our deliberations in the case competition. We share our observations here, in the hope that they will stimulate further dialogue.

*From whose perspective should a GVV case be analyzed?* GVV does not promote a one-size-fits-all approach to ethical action. Rather, it emphasizes that individuals must develop sufficient self-knowledge and insight that they are able to draw on their idiosyncratic strengths in crafting an effective strategy for giving voice to their values. For example, an introvert might want to write a letter or speak to someone privately, while an extrovert might choose to speak out at a meeting. Someone who is at particular risk might choose to work quietly behind the scenes, while someone with little to lose might intervene more boldly. Someone with extensive experience as a chief financial officer might be confident that they had uncovered fraud, while someone with less experience who suspected fraud might need to seek advice from more knowledgeable people.

This observation gives rise to two alternative ways to teach a GVV case. The instructor can ask, if you *were* the protagonist (with *his or her* particular experiences, personality, risk factors, and so forth), what would be your most effective strategy? This approach allows students to analyze the portrait of the protagonist provided in the case and to devise a strategy tailored to him or her. It also enables theory-building, in which students are asked to match various personal characteristics with effective methods. Alternatively, the instructor can ask, if *you personally* were in this situation (with *your*—the student's—particular experiences, personality, and so forth), what would be your most effective strategy? (Note that this second approach is akin to the "GVV Thought Experiment," which asks not whether you should act, but *if* you were going to act, how could you do so most effectively?) This approach pushes students towards self-analysis, and may usefully be paired with diagnostic tools that help students assess their own strengths and weaknesses.<sup>9</sup> It also helps them cultivate personal responsibility. This second approach is also a reflection of one of the seven GVV Pillars, "Self-Knowledge, Self-Image and Alignment."<sup>10</sup> Either approach can be effective. However, it is often useful to encourage students to take the former approach first (what can the P do to effectively enact his/her values?), reserving engagement with their own personal approach until after they have had a chance to more dispassionately

analyze options for someone else. The objective is to avoid triggering defensive reasoning and rationalization.

*Can a case about whistleblowing be a GVV case?* One of the issues that arose in our deliberations was whether or not a case about external whistleblowing fits the criteria for a GVV case. A whistleblower is an employee who reports alleged organizational misconduct to the media or government officials (such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, Department of Justice, or Federal Bureau of Investigation) because he or she believes that the organization or someone in it has done (or is about to do) something that is wrong or harmful to the public. Whistleblowing is often a risky or even career-ending move. Giving Voice to Values was launched, in part, to counter the assumption that stopping unethical behavior necessitated going *outside* the organization or taking heroic, but self-sacrificing, action. Instead, it sought to normalize values conflicts and to prepare individuals to achieve results by mobilizing support, effectively framing issues, and advocating persuasively *within* organizations before situations reach the point where external whistleblowing becomes the only option—and hopefully to do so without getting fired or ostracized. As Mary Gentile stated in her book, “The type of action we are talking about here [giving voice to values] precedes, and hopefully makes unnecessary, external whistleblowing . . .”<sup>11</sup>

So, can a case about whistleblowing *ever* be considered a GVV case? A whistleblower certainly is a person who is voicing their values—in a particularly extreme and sometimes courageous way. Yet, the unspoken message of such a case seems to be that whistleblowing is the highest form of voicing values, when in fact it may be one of the least effective ways of doing so. This point seems to argue against ever considering a whistleblowing case to be a GVV case. On the other hand, many whistleblowers make repeated efforts to solve an ethical problem internally and resort to external whistleblowing only after all other methods have failed. A case that describes these internal efforts and allows students to explore why they failed—and what other internal options might have been open to the protagonist—as well as more effective ways to actually “blow the whistle”—can be useful in a GVV curriculum.

*Does a GVV case need a successful protagonist to be a successful case?* In the case competition, we received several submissions in which the protagonist, when confronted with a values challenge, either did nothing to voice their values or acted ineffectively. This gave rise to a discussion about whether a GVV case can be effective even if the protagonist was not. For most teaching cases, whether or not the protagonist or company succeeds is largely irrelevant (although always of interest to students). For example, a case designed to teach students to apply the five forces model or to make a net present value calculation must include the necessary information to carry out such an analysis. However, the *result* of that analysis in terms of a favorable or unfavorable prognosis for the company or investment is not crucial to learning about the analytic technique *per se*, nor is an unfavorable result a reflection on the validity of the analytic technique. However, GVV cases are somewhat different, in that a key learning outcome is the realization that the GVV approach to addressing ethical challenges *can work*. Because GVV focuses on *implementation*, whether or not the protagonist was effective may impact students’ learning outcomes and their perception of validity of the approach. The GVV approach emphasizes that enacting one’s values is not easy, and may not even be possible in some situations. Importantly, however, individuals may become more proficient and likely to act and be effective through the rehearsal process.

In discussing this point, we observed that a successful outcome, as described in the epilogue or (B) case, is beneficial, because it provides students with an exemplar and helps validate the approach. However, it is not essential. Neither the protagonist's actions nor the resulting effect on the situation need be ideal for a case to be useful pedagogically. However, when they are not, it is imperative that the instructor's manual include an action plan that might have worked better and a discussion of how the protagonist might have given voice to their values more effectively.

This essay has identified and discussed the elements that constitute an outstanding Giving Voice to Values case and instructor's manual, as well as how to craft these to meet the pedagogical objectives of GVV. We look forward to further discussion of ways that case research, writing, and teaching can support the Giving Voice to Values curriculum.

## NOTES

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1. Launched by The Aspen Institute as Incubator and, along with Yale School of Management, Founding Partner, Giving Voice to Values is now based and supported at Babson College. See [www.MaryGentile.com](http://www.MaryGentile.com); [www.GivingVoiceToValues.org](http://www.GivingVoiceToValues.org); and Mary C. Gentile, *Giving Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). An online collection of GVV-style cases, exercises, and readings is available for free at [www.GivingVoiceToValues.org](http://www.GivingVoiceToValues.org).
2. For a more extensive discussion of the pedagogy and the rationale behind it, see Mary C. Gentile (2012): "Values-Driven Leadership Development: Where We Have Been and Where We Could Go," *Organization Management Journal*, 9:3, 188–196.
3. Some readers may wish to examine other GVV cases and instructor's manuals as possible models. The Giving Voice to Values website ([www.GivingVoiceToValues.org](http://www.GivingVoiceToValues.org)) includes numerous cases. Two examples from this collection that readers may wish to examine are: "Not an Option to Even Consider: Contending with the Pressures to Compromise (A) and (B)," by Heather Bodman under the supervision of Cynthia Ingols; and "The Client Who Fell Through the Cracks (A) and (B)," by Mary C. Gentile and William Klepper, with the assistance of Sharon Sarosky and Suprita Goyal, with funding from the Sanford C. Bernstein and Co. Center for Leadership and Ethics. (The latter case is also available through the Columbia CaseWorks collection.) As of this writing, the *Case Research Journal* has published two GVV cases. They are: Mary L. Shapiro, Cynthia A. Ingols, and Mary C. Gentile, "Helen Drinan: Giving Voice to Her Values," *Case Research Journal* 31(2): Spring, 2011; and Anne T. Lawrence, "The Midnight Journal Entry," *Case Research Journal* 32(2): Spring, 2012. An excellent general guide to case writing is William Naumes and Margaret J. Naumes, *The Art and Craft of Case Writing*, 3rd edition (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2012).
4. Rushworth Kidder, *Moral Courage: Taking Action When Your Values Are Put to the Test* (New York: William Morrow, 2005).

5. In fact, GVV has been used (and in some instances cases have been developed) in many fields, including student athletics, career planning, police force training, health care, military training, and social entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship.
6. Lew Brown and Deborah R. Ettington, "Writing an Outstanding Instructor's Manual," *Case Research Journal* 32(3): Summer 2012. These elements are: synopsis, case objectives and use, learning objectives, linking to concepts and theories, research methodology, discussion question, discussion (answers), teaching suggestions, epilogue, exhibits and appendices, and references.
7. Valuable as the following guidance is in general, this precise format is not necessarily required for a GVV instructor's manual to be accepted for inclusion in the GVV curriculum online collection.
8. For ideas on how to craft a script or action plan, see: "Ways of Thinking about Our Values in the Workplace" and "Scripts and Skills Readings" (at [www.GivingVoiceToValues.org](http://www.GivingVoiceToValues.org)) and *Giving Voice to Values*, op. cit.
9. For example, *Giving Voice to Values* provides self-assessment questions in Table 1, "Key Self-Assessment Questions," pages 116–177, and Appendix D, "Personal-Professional Profile," pages 232–239.
10. This GVV pillar states: "Generate a 'self-story' or personal narrative about the decision to voice and act on your values that is consistent with who you already are and builds on the strengths and preferences that you already recognize in yourself. There are many ways to align your unique strengths and style with your values. If you view yourself as a 'pragmatist,' for example, find a way to view voicing your values as pragmatic." (*Giving Voice to Values*, op. cit., p. 108.)
11. *Giving Voice to Values*, op. cit., p. xxiv–xxv.