The Ethical Mind

Conversations with Prof. Howard Gardner,
Prof. Gardner

• The John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education
• An influential cognitive and educational psychologist
• In the seminal 1983 book Frames of Mind put forward the theory of multiple intelligences – linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal – broadly accepted throughout the world
Good Work Project

• Since 1995, Prof. Gardner with a team of researchers at 4 universities studying ways in which people do good work – work of high quality that matters to society, enhances the lives of others and is conducted in an ethical manner

• Observed first hand ways in which good work is eroded by cultural, economic and technological forces
The Mind

A set of cognitive capacities
The Five Minds

The Ethical Mind

The Respectful Mind

The Creating Mind

The Synthesizing Mind

The Disciplined Mind

Need to be cultivated if we are to thrive as individuals, members of the community and as human beings.
The Disciplined Mind

• Gain through applying ourselves in a disciplined way in school
• Over time and with sufficient training we gain expertise in one or more fields
• We become experts in project management, accounting, music, dentistry, etc.
The Synthesizing Mind

- Can survey a wide range of sources,
- Decide what is important and worth paying attention to,
- And, weave this information together in a coherent fashion,
- For oneself and others
The Creating Mind

• Casts about for new ideas and practices,
• Innovates,
• Take chances,
• Discovers
The Respectful Mind

• Less purely cognitive in flavour than the first three
• The kind of open mind that tries to understand and form relationships with other human beings
• Enjoys being exposed to different types of people
• While not forgiving of all, give others the benefit of the doubt
The Ethical Mind

• Broadens respect for others into something more abstract
• Asks:
  • “What kind of a person, worker, citizen do I want to be?”
  • “If all workers in my profession adopted the mind-set I have, or of everyone did what I do, what would the world be like?”
Distinction between the Respectful and Ethical mind

• Needed to be made
• Because we assume that one who is respectful is ethical and vice versa
• You can be respectful without understanding why: as a child you respect your parents and grandparents because you were taught to
• Ethical conceptions and behaviours demand a capacity to go beyond your own experience as an individual
An Ethical Mind

• Become more like an impartial spectator of the team, the organization, the citizenry, the world
• Sacrifice respect for another person, if your role as a citizen or worker calls on you to do damage control to protect an idea or institution you believe in
Whistle-blowers

• Display ethical minds
• Many people might see a top manager doing something unethical, but won’t do anything about it, because they want to keep their jobs, and feel they must respect their boss
• Steps back from these concerns and considers the nature of work and the community in a larger way
• Takes a mental leap past daily doings, allegiance to the workplace or the profession
(Cont’d)

• Acts ethically even though it may cost respectful relations with supervisors and colleagues
• Do this because momentary well-being is broader than the broader mission
The ethically mind is more community focus than any of the other four minds.
How does the ethical mind develop?

- Begins at home – children see parents take pride in their work, “play fair”, give the benefit of the doubt, close minded, etc.- absorb parents’ values
- Peers – have an enormous effect as children get older
- Community – behaviour towards its citizens:
  - Are the young and old people cared for?
  - Are there cultural and social events to learn from and participate in?
  - Do parents take part in these “gluing” activities and expect their children to do the same?
Reggio Emilia

- A small city in northern Italy
- Provide high-quality services and cultural benefits to its citizens
- Provide excellent infant and toddler centers and preschools
- Children feel cared for by the community
- When they grow up return this regard by caring for others, become good workers and good citizens
- Rarely encounter comprised – qualitatively or ethically sullied – work
- Community takes action by ostracizing unethical behaviour
What gets in the way of The Ethical Mind?
Bad behaviours of others

• Undermine it
• 56% of MBA students in US admitted cheating on their exams
• If you are very ambitious and people around you are cheating, you assume cheating is the price of success and you do because “everyone does it”
• Think ethical behaviour as a luxury
Young people

• Declared an understanding of and the desire to do good work, but felt they had to succeed by whatever means

• “When we made your mark, we will then become exemplary workers”

• Temptation to skirt ethics mounting
Today

- A time of intense pressure on individuals and organizations to cut corners, pursue own interests and forget about the effects of behaviour on others
- Businesspeople internalized Milton Friedman’s belief that if people pursue their interests and allow the marketplace to operate freely, moral and ethical consequences follow
- Market are amoral and the distinction between shading earnings and committing outright fraud not always clear
Comprised work catching in the same way that the emotional state of a leader affects others.
Staff

- Listen to what their leaders say and watch what their leaders and colleagues do even more carefully
- Psychologically emboldened or pressured to emulate bad behaviour they see in leaders and others “who get away with it”
- Inspired by leaders who ethical behaviours
- When everyone is focused on the same thing easier to do good work
The real test of an individual or an organization’s ethical fibre is what happens when there are potent pressures.

How does one stand up to these pressures?
Leaders

- Best way to retain moral compass is to believe doing so is essential for the good of your organization
- What are you trying to achieve?
- What are your goals of doing good in the world?
- State beliefs unwaveringly from the first and tie rewards and sanctions to their realization
Being ethical

• Easier to hold yourself and others to high standards when everything going swimmingly – costs not evident
• When circumstances tempting you drop your standards, have to practice rigorous self-honesty
• Not fooling yourself or others
• Look yourself in the mirror from time to time and ask “Am I being a good worker? And if not, what can I do to become one?”
Reflection and Thinking

• On broadly formulated mission and determining progress toward its realization Increases chances of carrying out good work

• Everyone need to step back and reflect and think about the nature of their work, develop new projects, or solve work problems
“Positive periodic inoculation”

• When you meet individuals or experiences that force you to examine what you are doing or set a good example for others
• Give them an opportunity to acquire a desired skill
• “Antiviral” – allow you to draw object lessons from instances of comprised work
A more objective gauge than oneself

• Important that other knowledgeable and candid individuals consulted
• Two worthy individuals – mothers and the press
• “If she knew everything I was doing, what would she think?”
• “I will not do something that would embarrass me if it was printed in the morning paper.”
Types of counselors for organization leaders

- Prepared to speak truth to their power
- A trusted adviser within the organization
- Someone completely outside the organization, preferably an old friend who is a peer
- A genuinely independent board
- *Cannot go wrong if you listen to these sources and act on them*
In hiring or promoting, ways to separate the wheat from chaff

- No substitute for detailed, textured, confidential oral recommendations from individuals who know the candidate well and will be honest
- Influence of mentors – “Who influences you in cultivating a particular moral climate, and why?”
- Negative role models more powerful
Speaking truth to power

• With assumption of authority and maturity comes the obligation to monitor what peers do and when necessary call them to account

• “It is not only for what we do that we are held responsible but for what we not do” – Jean-Baptiste Moliere

• Not easy to confront offending individuals but it is essential
Two factors that make it easier

1. Need a firm belief that what you are doing is right for the organization
2. Don’t wait for egregious behaviour – as soon as you see warning signs, confront them not in an accusatory fashion but in a fact-finding mode
   • If a person has been warned or counseled, much easier to take action the next time a wrong identified
Confronting superiors

• If impossible, you are not in the right organization
• Helpful to consult with others to ensure that your perceptions are not aberrant
• If you are not prepared to resign or be fired for what you believe in, then you are not a worker, let alone a professional., but a slave
In the end

• You need to decide which side you are on
• So many ways the world could spiral either up or down
• If you are in a position to help tip the balance, you owe it to yourself, to your progeny, to your colleagues, to your community, and to the world to do the right thing