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Right versus Right

When Managers Are Faced with Tough Ethical Choices

EXCERPTED FROM

Defining Moments:
When Managers Must Choose between Right and Right

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Right versus Right

THIS CHAPTER INTRODUCES THREE MANAGERS and the right-versus-right conflicts they faced. Each is drawn from actual experience. Taken together, they illustrate the basic types of right-versus-right dilemma. The three cases also reveal the basic elements of the problem Rebecca Dennet confronted, and which other managers often must resolve.

Although the three cases differ in important ways, they all illustrate a dramatic statement made by Oliver Wendell Holmes, one of the most distinguished American Supreme Court justices. Holmes wrote, "I do not give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity."

All three of the managers described here would have understood what Holmes was saying. All urgently needed practical answers to difficult problems. All would have preferred simple answers, such as "Do the right thing." But Barnard's warning about the moral hazards of management life applied in all three cases, and each manager faced the prospect of dirty hands.

CRISES OF MORAL IDENTITY

The first case involves a young man, Steve Lewis, who had just completed his first year of work at a prestigious New York investment bank. Lewis was an analyst, which meant that he spent his days and many of his nights dissecting detailed financial data. The rest of his life he described as "indoor camping." The refrigerator in his apartment was usually empty, he had hung nothing on the walls, and his living room furnishings consisted mainly of unpacked boxes. Nevertheless, Lewis told his friends, with whom he stayed in touch via email messages sent from the office, that he had the best job in the world.

Early one Tuesday morning, Lewis found a message on his desk asking whether he could fly to St. Louis in two days to help with a presentation to an important prospective client. The message came as a surprise to him. Lewis's firm had a clear policy against including analysts in presentations or client meetings, because they lack both experience and expertise. Lewis, in fact, knew little about the subject of the St. Louis meeting, a specialized area of municipal finance. He was especially surprised that he had been selected over several more senior people in the public finance group.

Lewis immediately walked down the hall and into the office of Andrew Webster, a friend and partner at the firm. He showed Webster the note and asked, "Andy, what's the deal here? Did you know I've been asked to go to the orals? Are you behind this?"

Webster interrupted him. "Let me tell you what's happening, my friend. Look at you and me. What similarities are there? Let me tell you that the new state treasurer of Missouri is also black." Webster continued, "Listen, Steve, I hate for you to be introduced to this side of the business so soon. The state treasurer wants to see at least one black professional, or the firm has no chance of being named a manager for this deal. I'm used to these situations, but if you feel uncomfortable with it, maybe you don't have to go. I could try to change my schedule and go instead of you."

Lewis quickly replied, "No, no. Don't do that. Let me just think it over. I'll get back to you." When Webster asked what the issue was, Lewis said he wasn't sure there was one. He thanked Webster and headed back to his desk.

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Lewis spent several minutes answering his email, got a cup of coffee, made a list of things to do during the day, and finally realized that he was avoiding a decision on the St. Louis trip. He understood the issue; this was just one of countless occasions when he had tried to figure out whether he was being included in or excluded from something because of his race. What Lewis didn't understand was what to do. So he took a sheet of paper, drew a line down the middle, and began listing pros and cons.

The pros came quickly. "Opportunity" was the first thing Lewis wrote. At the end of his first week on the job, a fourth-year associate had told him, "The company is interested in making money. Either you're on the team producing, or you're not. That's it." By picking up the phone and saying yes to the trip, Lewis would show he was a team player.

Opportunity also meant something else to Lewis. Both his parents had been strong supporters of civil rights, and his mother was a well-known local activist in Seattle. During the early 1970s, she had spent two years suing her employer for discriminatory promotion practices. The lawsuit had been bitter and costly, but she had won. Lewis wondered if the St. Louis trip wasn't an opportunity to walk through the door his mother had helped pry open.

Lewis also wrote "Andy" on the list of pros. This was the heading for another set of considerations. Although Andy had volunteered to change his schedule, Lewis knew that he could make Andy's life a lot easier by going to St. Louis. Lewis had met Andy two years earlier—he was part of the recruiting team that had visited Lewis's MBA program. Since then, Andy had given Lewis a lot of advice, and Lewis liked the way he thought about things.

Lewis also realized that Andy was one of many people at the firm who had helped him out during the past year. The firm had treated him well, given him worthwhile assignments, and taught him more about business than he thought anyone could learn in a year. In addition, the firm paid him a salary that was much more than either of his parents earned.

Lewis next wrote down "Capitalism," thinking back on how his MBA finance professor would have viewed the situation. By attending the presentation, he would have said, Lewis would serve the interests of the firm and its shareholders, as its senior managers defined those interests. This obligation ended at the point of illegal or unethical behavior, but Lewis wasn't being asked to do anything illegal. Attending the presentation did involve dissembling, because Lewis had contributed nothing to the project, yet Andy seemed to indicate that this sort of bluffing was within the rules of the game in the industry. Moreover, by sending Lewis, the firm was trying to serve the client's interests, as the client defined them.

As Lewis reviewed the list of pros, he realized that most of his MBA classmates would have called the problem a "no-brainer." He looked at the phone and thought for a moment about calling to say yes to the trip, but decided to finish his analysis.

The first thing he wrote on the list of negatives was "Phony." Lewis was raised to tell the truth; one of his mother's favorite sayings was "The truth first." As a devout Christian, he believed that the Golden Rule demanded honesty in his dealings with others. How, then, could he go to St. Louis and pretend to be a member of the deal team? This could be called "bluffing," but that might be just a nice word for lying.

The next heading—"Malcolm"—made Lewis more uneasy. He was referring to Malcolm X—in particular, to a comment that an acquaintance had apparently made when he heard that Lewis had taken a job in investment banking. Lewis hadn't actually heard the comment (a friend passed it along), but it referred to Malcolm X's condemnation of "house slaves." They worked comfortably indoors, in return for telling their owners that they were fine and righteous masters—unlike the "field slaves," who had to toil under the hot sun, but with more of their dignity intact.

Lewis hadn't forgotten this comment. He believed in changing the system from within, and he liked Andy's idea that you had to play the game before you could make the rules. But he also understood discrimination. His parents had been its victims for much of their lives. Although Lewis had for the most part been spared overt discrimination, he vividly remembered being called a "watermelon picker" by players on an opposing grade school baseball team.

Now his firm was singling him out solely for his skin color, not for his talent. Lewis believed companies and clients should base decisions on performance, competence, and character, not on games of mix and match based on race, gender, and religion. Was including him as a token black really all that different from excluding him because he was black? What if a customer indicated that he would rather not have Jews or Asians working on a project? What if his firm could close more deals by ornamenting its presentations with pretty young women?

In the midst of these thoughts, Lewis looked at his watch; 45 minutes had passed. He had forgotten about his list of pros and cons, he was 10 minutes late for a meeting, and he still hadn't made a decision. Lewis quickly pulled out the folders he needed for the meeting and then slammed his desk drawer shut. Why was the St. Louis trip such a big deal? Did he have to think about everything as an African American? Couldn't he simply do his job, like any other young manager who wanted a successful career doing work he liked?

Steve Lewis's case illustrates the first basic type of right-versus-right problem: an urgent, complicated, and sometimes painful issue of personal integrity and moral identity. These are problems that raise the questions Who am I? and What is my moral center?

Notice that, as Steve Lewis struggled with his problem, he defined himself in several different ways. At different points in his thinking, he viewed himself as Andy's friend and protégé, as an employee and agent of his firm's shareholders, as a loyal and ambitious young investment banker, and as the son of parents whom he wanted to emulate. At some points, he was thinking of himself simply as a person; at others, as a Christian or an African American. None of these was the right way or the only way for Lewis to think about himself. But each entailed, in his mind, particular loyalties and obligations. Each answer to the question Who am I? sketched a particular way for Lewis to make decisions and live his life. Unfortunately, some answers suggested that Lewis should say yes to the trip; others required the answer no.

Lewis found his decision so difficult because he sensed, quite accurately, that it involved much more than the trip. It touched on the matter of who he was, what he stood for, and what regrets he would be willing to live with.

The challenge for Lewis, and for others facing questions like this, is not summoning the courage to do the right thing. The challenge is deciding *which right thing to do*. Lewis has to choose between right and right, on a complex issue of personal integrity. His question was not *whether* to be ethical; it was *how* to be ethical. His problem was the centrifugal pull of responsibilities to his employer, to its shareholders, to friends and his mentor, to himself, to his parents, and to his ideals.

It is tempting to dismiss Lewis's dilemma as a special case or a minor episode. Perhaps problems like this are restricted to beneficiaries of affirmative action programs. Perhaps investment banks are especially prone to ethical shenanigans. Perhaps the problem is mostly in Lewis's head, so that what he really needs to do is just make up his mind. Business calls for decisiveness; maybe Lewis should stop stewing in his own juice. And, in practical terms, the consequences of his decision are small: if Lewis doesn't go to St. Louis, Webster will.

Comments like these miss the essence of Lewis's problem. Experiences like Lewis's shape how people view their careers and themselves. Most managers can look back on a few early-career events that had far-reaching effects on their view of themselves and their sense of how the world works. These experiences are etched in their memory. They can recall mental pictures of key episodes, they still see how others' faces looked, and they feel again—often in the pit of their stomach—what they felt years earlier.

An acute sense of vulnerability and uncertainty often intensifies such recollections. As a young manager, Lewis is just beginning his effort to climb what British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli called "the greasy pole." Lewis was now playing in the big leagues and just learning the rules of the game, and he didn't want to make a naive mistake.

In this type of right-versus-right dilemma, it is crucial to look beyond the immediate practical consequences of a decision and examine how a decision can shape managers' views of obligations, their work, and their lives. Managers in these situations are like jugglers who are afraid to drop any of the balls they have in the air. Each is a part of themselves. Dropping one means failure, self-betrayal, feelings of regret and guilt—in a phrase, dirty hands. A later chapter will return to Lewis's dilemma, examine the way he resolved it, and assess these personal considerations in more detail.

Managers in the Middle

Conflicts of moral identity and personal integrity usually appear in sharpest relief in the early years of managers' careers. This is because organizations typically limit what apprentice managers can do and how much mischief they can make. As a result, the personal stakes in early-career dilemmas often outweigh the consequences for other people.*

For many managers, the balance soon shifts. Their careers prosper, and they find themselves in charge of a department, a branch, or some other business unit. Their decisions now affect the paychecks, self-respect, career opportunities, and families of other people—in short, their livelihoods and their lives. As a result, these managers often face problems less like Steve Lewis's and more like those of the veteran political leader in *Dirty Hands.* As the head of a unit of the Communist party, he was, roughly speaking, a middle manager in a large organization, with significant power over other people. With such power come serious responsibilities. When these responsibilities conflict with each other or with important personal values, managers face the second basic type of right-versus-right conflict.

A classic example of this kind of problem involved a 35-year-old manager, Peter Adario. Adario headed the marketing department of Sayer MicroWorld, a distributor of computer products. He was married and had three children. He had spent most of his career as a successful salesman and branch manager, and he eagerly accepted his present position because of its management challenges. Three senior managers reporting to Adario supervised the other 50 people in the marketing department. Adario reported to one of four vice presidents at corporate headquarters.

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* There are surely exceptions to this generalization. The most notorious in recent years have been the so-called rogue traders, such as Nick Leeson at Baring Securities, who lost more than $1 billion and bankrupted his firm, or Joseph Jett, who was accused of creating phony bond trading profits, fatally weakening Kidder Peabody. But these exceptions are only partial. Closer examination of some of these cases indicates that the young managers did not act entirely on their own, but rather were given leeway and encouragement by their superiors.

Adario's dilemma arose from a conflict between Lisa Walters, one of the three senior managers who reported to him, and Kathryn McNeil, who worked for Lisa Walters. Walters wanted the company to fire McNeil. Adario had to decide whether to do so.

McNeil, 37 years old, had worked for Sayer MicroWorld for only four months. She was the IBM product manager, a job for which she seemed well suited because she had worked in marketing at IBM for eight years. McNeil was responsible for Sayer's purchases of personal computers from IBM. She and her two assistants handled $40 million of products each month. Their work involved daily contact with IBM, negotiation of pricing and delivery dates for the retailers, constant communication with the Sayer reps who sold IBM products at the retail stores, announcements of problems or product changes, and weekly analyses of the IBM product line for corporate headquarters.

McNeil worked for Lisa Walters, a single woman in her late twenties. Walters handled the IBM account during the two years before McNeil was hired, and she excelled at the job, consistently meeting deadlines and demonstrating initiative in promoting her product line.

Lisa Walters worked longer hours than most of her colleagues, never taking lunch breaks and seldom leaving the office before 8:00 P.M. She had a serious, down-to-business personality that impressed and, on occasion, irritated Adario. Nevertheless, he respected Walters's high professional standards and knew he could count on her, no matter how demanding the circumstances. Two years earlier, when one of the senior manager positions opened up, Adario immediately recommended Walters for the post. Her work since then had been excellent.

Walters wanted to fire McNeil because McNeil's work was falling behind schedule. McNeil was a devoted mother with full custody of her six-year-old and no child support or other assistance from her ex-husband. Walters believed that McNeil's responsibilities at home were causing her problems at work. Walters had grown frustrated and very impatient with the situation.

Adario believed that the conflict between Walters and McNeil had been intensified by the hothouse atmosphere in which everyone was working. Computer retailing was a low-margin, highly competitive business. Sayer's strategy depended heavily on completing a merger with a recently acquired competitor and paying down the debt that financed the deal. Under these pressures, 10- to 12-hour days had become common. Because most of the employees in Adario's department were in their twenties and unmarried, the long hours hadn't raised work-family issues.

Adario had not paid much attention to Walters's concerns until the morning he found a handwritten note from her on top of his pile of unfinished paperwork. It was her second note in as many weeks. Both complained about McNeil's hours, and both mentioned replacing her. Adario realized that the conflict between Walters and McNeil wouldn't end unless he got involved. He would have acted sooner but had hesitated because he was pulled in two different directions.

On one hand, although McNeil was working 60 hours a week, she was not pulling her weight. Everyone else, including Adario, was working longer hours. Moreover, no letup was in sight—because of the merger, the debt load, and the nature of the computer retailing business. McNeil's work on the all-important IBM account was clearly behind schedule, and her relationship with Walters had deteriorated badly. When Adario thought about the work that lay ahead, he felt that Walters's suggestion was close to the mark. He was inclined to find a replacement for McNeil and then let her go.

At the same time, however, Adario had a serious reservation about this approach. On several occasions, Sayer's executives had said they believed in creating a "family-friendly" workplace, and a headquarters task force was studying ways to do this. Adario viewed the Kathryn McNeil situation as an opportunity to do something tangible along these lines. He didn't think of himself as a crusader or reformer, but he believed that people worked better when the rest of their lives were sane.

This professional conviction was reinforced by Adario's personal experiences. Like McNeil, he was barely seeing his own family. And his wife had given up her job as an accountant when their second child was born after struggling with inflexible work schedules at two different employers. In addition, Adario's next-door neighbor had been laid off three years earlier, when his company had restructured; even though he soon found another job, his self-esteem and confidence had been badly damaged. Above all, Adario thought it was simply wrong to fire someone, especially a dedicated single parent, who was working very hard at her job.

What is distinctive about Peter Adario's right-versus-right conflict? If we compare his problem to Steve Lewis's, the answer becomes clear. One important difference has already been noted: the scope of a manager's power and responsibility. Lewis's primary responsibilities were *to* others and *to* himself. Managers like Adario are also responsible *for* other people.

In addition, Steve Lewis's problem raised fundamental personal questions, such as Who am I? and What do I stand for? In contrast, Peter Adario's decision raised basic organizational questions: Who are we? What do we stand for? What norms and values guide how we work together and treat each other? How do we define ourselves as a human institution?

These organizational questions do not replace the issues of moral identity and personal integrity that Steve Lewis faced. In reality, they are closely intertwined with them. If Adario supports Walter's recommendation to fire McNeil, he will be making a personal commitment to a particular set of values: serving the interests of Sayer's shareholders and customers, protecting the jobs of people in the company, and defining fairness as expecting the same effort from everyone on a team. But, if he supports Walters's recommendation, Adario will weaken or even disavow his personal and professional commitments to vulnerable people like McNeil and her son, as he does to them what other bosses did to his wife and his neighbor.

But Adario's decision cannot remain purely personal. Its consequences will ripple far and wide. The people working for him will watch carefully and interpret his decision—to understand what his values are, how much they can trust him, and how they have to behave if they want to get ahead. Adario's choice will shape the rules of the game and define what fairness means in the small human community he leads. Does fairness mean that everyone pulls an equal weight? Or does it mean that managers should take account of the legitimate personal needs of their dedicated employees?

Adario and managers like him are truly "managers in the middle."[1] They are pulled in different directions by their bosses, peers, and subordinates, and by their personal values and commitments. Often they bear the burden of difficult decisions even though they have "a boss's responsibility without a boss's authority." Most are under intense pressure to deliver the profits their company's executives have promised to shareholders. Restructuring and reengineering threaten their jobs.

These pressures also distinguish their right-versus-right conflicts from early-career issues like Steve Lewis's. Young managers are sometimes advised to put aside six months' salary as "go to hell" money. In theory, these funds enable them to quit a bad job and spend time finding a good one. But things are more complicated for managers like Adario, because they are "in the middle" in yet another sense. These men and women are often well along life's path—with families, mortgages, professional relationships, and expertise in particular kinds of work. Rarely can they tell their bosses where to go and storm out the door. They usually have little choice, at least in the short run, but to soldier onward, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Right-versus-right decisions *force* managers in the middle to make choices. When we return to Peter Adario's problem in a later chapter, we will see that he had no option labeled "Do nothing" or "Quit the job." He must choose—and in doing so commit himself and his department. It was right-versus-right conflicts like these that led Chester Barnard to warn about the moral destruction that sometimes threatens managers and to admire deeply the men and women who find practical, responsible ways to resolve these conflicts.

NEGOTIATED ETHICS

The third type of right-versus-right conflict is the most complex and challenging. In these cases, managers have personal responsibilities *to* themselves and *to* other groups, as did Steve Lewis. Like Peter Adario, they are responsible *for* others, sometimes for an entire organization. But this third kind of right-versus-right problem involves responsibilities that a company shares *with* other groups in society.

A classic definition of a company describes it as an independent economic unit or, more elegantly, as "an island of managerial control in a sea of market relations."[2] This view, however, is badly out of date and appears only in introductory economics books. In reality, most firms are now enmeshed in networks of ongoing relationships. Strategic alliances link firms with their customers and suppliers, and sometimes with labor unions, governments, university laboratories, and even competitors. Many companies also have complicated dealings with the media, government regulators, local communities, and various interest groups.

These networks of relationships are also networks of managerial responsibility. Taken together, a company's business partners and stakeholders have a wide range of legitimate claims, but no company can satisfy all of them. Obligations to some groups often collide with those to others. At times, these stakeholder responsibilities conflict with managers' personal and organizational obligations. When these conflicts occur, managers confront the third type of right-versus-right problem.

A dramatic example of this type of conflict has been unfolding in the pharmaceutical industry since 1988. Late that year, the senior management of Roussel-Uclaf, a medium-sized French pharmaceutical company with less than $2 billion in annual sales, had to decide where and how to market a new drug, called RU 486. Early tests had shown that the drug was 90 to 95 percent effective in causing miscarriage during the first five weeks of pregnancy. The drug came to be known as "the French abortion pill," and Roussel-Uclaf and its managers found themselves at the vortex of the abortion controversy.

The chairman of Roussel-Uclaf, Edouard Sakiz, was a physician with a longstanding personal commitment to RU 486. He would make the final decisions on introducing the drug. Earlier in his career, while working as a medical researcher, Sakiz had helped develop the chemical compound on which RU 486 was based. He believed strongly that the drug could help thousands of women, particularly in poor countries, avoid injury or death from botched abortions. In the developed world, he believed, RU 486 would provide women and physicians with a valuable alternative to surgical abortions.

But Sakiz couldn't base his decisions on RU 486 solely on his personal values. As the head of a company, he had other important obligations. Some were to his shareholders; from this perspective, RU 486 was a serious problem. Revenues from the drug were likely to be quite small, particularly in the early years. Yet, during this period, antiabortion groups would mount an international boycott of products made by Roussel-Uclaf and Hoechst, the German chemical giant that was Roussel-Uclaf's largest shareholder. A successful boycott would cost the two companies far more than they would earn from RU 486. At worst, a boycott could imperil Roussel-Uclaf's survival, for it was a relatively small company with weak profits.

Like any executive, Sakiz also had responsibilities *for* the people in his firm. He had to assess the seriousness of the threats of violence against Roussel-Uclaf and its employees. At the same time, Sakiz's decisions about RU 486 would define the fundamental values of Roussel-Uclaf. This was an especially important issue because his employees were sharply divided about the drug. Some were passionately committed to RU 486, while others opposed the drug on ethical grounds or feared that the protests and boycotts would harm Roussel-Uclaf and its other products. Sakiz knew that debates about the product and the company's responsibilities were sapping employee morale and diverting a good deal of management time. He also knew that his decisions would commit Roussel-Uclaf to one stand or another.

Thus, at a personal level, Sakiz faced a version of the question Who am I? Was he, first and foremost, a medical doctor, a scientific researcher, an advocate of women's rights, or a corporate executive with responsibilities to shareholders and employees? In addition, his decisions on RU 486 would commit his company to some values rather than others, thereby answering the organizational question Who are we?

Personal and organizational issues like those facing Sakiz are difficult enough. But the prospect of introducing RU 486 placed him at the center of a network of responsibilities to important groups and institutions outside Roussel-Uclaf. One of these was the French government. It owned 36 percent of Roussel-Uclaf, and the French Ministry of Health closely regulated the company, thus shaping its business opportunities. The French government supported the introduction of RU 486 on the basis of women's rights, the value of a less invasive medical procedure, and the prospect of lowering the nation's health care costs by substituting a pill for surgery.

Hoechst, which owned 55 percent of Roussel-Uclaf, was another critical stakeholder, and it, too, made strong ethical claims on Roussel-Uclaf. Its chairman was a devout Roman Catholic, who opposed abortion on moral grounds and had repeatedly stated his position in public. Moreover, Hoechst had a mission statement committing the firm to lofty goals, which was put in place partly in reaction to Hoechst's role in producing Zyklon B, a poison gas used in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. (This bit of history was not lost on antiabortion protesters; some marched outside Roussel-Uclaf's offices, carrying posters that read "RU 486 turns a woman's uterus into a death chamber.")

China was another powerful actor in the drama. It wanted access to RU 486 for population control. The moral ground for China's position was avoiding the misery and risks of starvation resulting from its surging population.

Roussel-Uclaf's network of relationships and responsibilities raised extremely difficult questions for Sakiz and Roussel-Uclaf. What, in fact, were the company's obligations to women? To the government laboratory that helped develop the steroid molecule on which RU 486 was based? To the larger medical and research communities? Were the unborn a stakeholder group? Could Roussel-Uclaf introduce the drug both in the West, citing a woman's right to choose, and in China, where women had apparently been coerced into abortions, even near the end of their pregnancies?

In later chapters, we will return to Sakiz's exceedingly complex problem. For now, it is important to notice how it compares to the problems facing Steve Lewis and Peter Adario. In one respect, Sakiz's situation clearly parallels theirs. He had to make a decision that involved, in direct and powerful ways, his personal integrity and moral identity. In Sakiz's case, these personal issues involved the morality of abortion and his responsibilities as a human being, an executive, and a physician and medical researcher. Sakiz's decision also resembles Peter Adario's: in both cases, their decisions will define important values for their organizations.

But Sakiz's situation differs from the other two in a crucial way. His decisions on RU 486 will define his firm's role in society and its relationships with its stakeholders. These powerful groups and important institutions were pushing and pulling the company in different directions. Each of them had staked out a clear moral position on RU 486. Some wanted Roussel-Uclaf to abandon RU

486. Others wanted it available, as soon as possible, around the world. Still others advocated a gradual introduction, starting only in developed countries, which had the medical infrastructure to deal with any unexpected side effects from the new drug.

There was no way for Sakiz to satisfy all these claims. As in the other two cases, right collided with right. Unlike those cases, however, the RU 486 issue involved a wide range of responsibilities and relationships outside Sakiz's firm. As a result, this type of right-versus-right problem has a distinctive feature: a company and its managers cannot resolve these problems unilaterally.

When power over a decision is shared and fragmented, an extensive period of jockeying, maneuvering, and sometimes attack and counterattack precedes and shapes the final resolution of this type of right-versus-right issue. As a result, a company's responsibilities, its role in society, and its relations with stakeholders do not, and cannot, spring full-blown from the internal deliberations of its managers. They are inevitably negotiated with stakeholders. This task usually falls to a company's senior executives, as it did in the RU 486 case.

The difficulty of this task can be concealed by benign words like *negotiation, stakeholders,* and *strategic ally.* In reality, managers sometimes must bargain with and battle against powerful adversarial groups: some of a company's stakeholders—such as the antiabortion groups in the RU 486 case—want to drive a stake through the heart of its plans. This raises a whole new set of issues, both managerial and ethical. When, for example, should managers fight fire with fire? And what are the most effective and responsible ways to do so?

The complexity of right-versus-right problems escalates to its highest level with problems like RU 486. These situations are the managerial equivalent of the game of three-dimensional chess. Ordinary chess is difficult enough, but this game is played on three chessboards, stacked one above the other. Players can move and capture on any board, so that whatever happens on one board inevitably affects the other two. Managers face similar complexity when a right-versus-right issue involves their personal, organizational, and societal responsibilities.

Thus Sakiz's problem is the most complex version of the conflict that Steve Lewis and Peter Adario faced. In all three cases, some of a manager's responsibilities conflicted with others. The stakes were high, and there was no exit—a manager had to decide, choose, commit, and act. Doing one right thing would sacrifice others. Each situation confirmed the view of Sartre's veteran political leader: dirty hands situations are sometimes the inescapable lot of men and women with real responsibilities in life.

But perhaps Sartre is too gloomy. Perhaps these problems aren't really so grave. It may be possible to find what Oliver Wendell Holmes sought—"the simplicity on the other side of complexity"—if only one looks in the right places. Perhaps managers can rely on fundamental ethical principles, or the law, or carefully crafted company mission statements and ethical guidelines, to clear a path through these ethical conflicts. Or perhaps managers should simply consult their moral instincts and intuitions, and then pursue a course of action that they can live with in good conscience.

Notes

Chapter 2

1. This phrase is from a classic article on middle managers: Hugo E. R. Uyterhoeven, "General Managers in the Middle," *Harvard Business Review,* March–April 1972, 84.
2. This phrase appears in G. B. Richardson, "The Organization of Industry," *Economic Journal* 82 (1972): 883.