



## Understanding the Ethical Lens Inventory™

### ETHICS DEMYSTIFIED

Mention that you are interested in learning how people become ethically mature and people will give you lots of advice ... often not useful.

Many believe that they learned everything that they need about ethics and morals as kids, so they don't need any more training. However, just like learning addition doesn't give us enough math to function in an adult world, the beginning truths of "don't hit your sister" and "don't lie" don't provide us with enough guidance to know what to do in complex situations.

Many will say that they "just know" what to do. Unfortunately, our gut is not very good at helping us explain to others why a particular course of action is better than another. Self-knowledge and thoughtful reflection help us find the right words to explain our positions and influence a course of action.

Many will say that every problem has only one right answer—and we should know that answer. If that were so, we would not have so many laws and over 5,000 years of conversation about how one should act in community. If all the answers were self evident, few would make terrible and often unintentional errors of judgment that call their ethics into question.

And, finally, every person knows they are ethical—just ask. Yet, as we look around, ethics scandals abound. With a cocked eyebrow we judge each other's ethics but not our own. We often find that the other person is ethically deficient and we are just fine.

And we have this niggling question: why, when so many say they are ethical, do we have so many problems? Is the problem due to human nature—no one can claim to be ethical and there is no hope? Or is there a more basic problem, one of definition? What do we mean by ethics? And exactly how do we determine what actions are—or are not—ethical?

The Ethical Lens Inventory (ELI) is a tool to help you answer those questions and to help you become more aware about your own values. As you understand what values are important to you, you will discover your preferred approach to solving ethical dilemmas. The ELI will identify your natural ethical home. You will also be given strategies to help you become more ethically mature. However, before exploring the four ethical lenses, let's examine some basic concepts.

### BASIC DEFINITIONS

Ethics can be broadly defined as demonstrating our values through our actions. As we make choices, each of us knows our own heart, our values, and our motivations. With each choice, our values are translated into concrete actions in specific situations.

The specific actions are then defined as "ethical" or "unethical" depending on whether the actions match the observer's understanding of what behaviors count.

- *Did you follow accepted principles?*
- *Did you choose ideal goals?*
- *Did you seek justice?*
- *Did you demonstrate the expected virtues?*

We judge ourselves on our motives. We judge others on their behavior.

Kendall Lyman  
FourSquare Consulting

**Morality:** Each of us has a personal set of values that help us decide what to do. While we share values with others in a variety of different communities, such as our family, friends, professional peers, and others with whom we work, the emphasis each of us place on different values and the behaviors that count as living out those values are as personal as our thumbprint. Our character, the habits we build as we express our personal morality, is shaped over our life as we choose what kind of a person we want to be and make choices that live out those decisions.

**Ethics:** All of us live in communities. Beginning with our families, those communities have expectations about what a “good” person is supposed to do. As we learn the norms — the rules and principles by which we are supposed to live — we have conversations about what behaviors and goals count as being ethical. As standards evolve over time, we have continual discussions about what behavior counts as being a person of integrity, acting with courage, or serving justice — what exactly is good character?

**Professional Ethics:** Each profession has a set of expectations for its “ethical” members. As we enter the professions of accountancy, business law, medicine, and others, we learn the appropriate professional code of ethics. We also discover how to harmonize our personal morality and community ethics with our professional ethics.

**Organizational Ethics:** The organizations for which we work also have their own definition for what it means to be a good employee. The word “culture” is used to describe the way that an organization translates its values into action. Culture includes our:

- *Manners — how we treat each other in matters of little consequence*
- *Ethics — how we treat each other and behave in matters of importance*
- *Compliance — how carefully we follow the laws of the community*

Companies describe the culture in many places such as the employee handbook, statement of company values, and code of conduct. Ultimately the culture is determined by the behaviors the leaders model and reward.

Many employees say their companies are unethical because the set of values published on the web-page doesn’t match the values and behaviors that are lived day to day, let alone rewarded by compensation and promotions. This situation at best causes confusion, at worst an unethical, dysfunctional organization.

Greater self-knowledge and consistent harmonization of expectations with rewarded behavior are useful for enhancing our ethical maturity.

## VALUES IN TENSION

Baird’s research revealed that four basic values form the foundation for all ethical behavior. How we prioritize the competing core values determines our primary ethical lens — the perspective that we use to determine what actions are “right” in a given situation.

The first two values are rationality and sensibility. These values describe how we decide what behavior is ethical.

**Rationality:** Using the skills of critical thinking and analysis — our heads — to determine universal principles or systems of justice to be applied in specific situations. Ethical theories known as deontology, the study of duties, emphasize rationality.

**Sensibility:** Using the skills of empathy and compassion — our hearts and intuition — to determine what specific actions we should take in specific situations to reach ethical goals or demonstrate core virtues. Ethical theories known as teleology, the study of goals and virtue, emphasize sensibility.

The second two values are autonomy and equality. These values describe whether we give priority to individuals or the community.

**Autonomy:** Individuals determining for themselves what values should take priority in determining what is ethical behavior. Ethical theories that emphasize personal responsibility tend to favor autonomy.

**Equality:** The community determining what values should take priority in determining what is ethical. Ethical theories that emphasize being responsive to the needs of the community tend to favor equality.

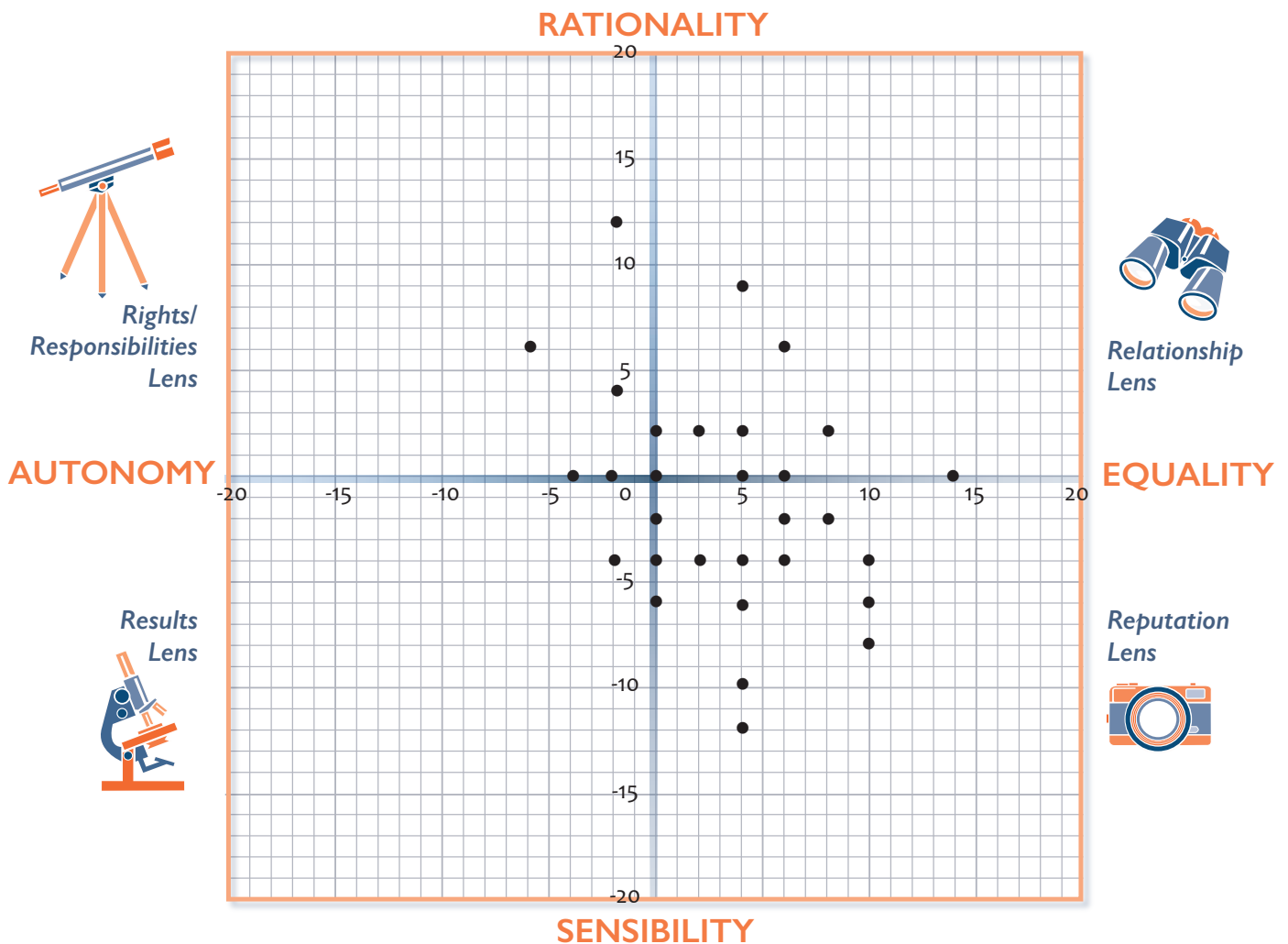
While many philosophers like Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, John Rawls, or Alasdair MacIntyre focused on only one lens, Baird’s insight was that none of the lenses is wrong — just different. Each perspective has its own set of strengths and weaknesses. What is most useful is for each of us to identify our own preferred ethical perspective, our ethical lens. Then we can explore the ethical lenses of others. Through understanding the foundational values of each lens we can better sort out answers to perplexing questions:

- *How can we make sense of the different approaches to ethics?*
- *How can we effectively communicate our own values and choices?*
- *How can we decide what to do in complex situations?*
- *How can we learn to shift perspective as we become ethically aware?*

### DECODING THE RESULTS

The following sections of this handout will help you understand the results of the Ethical Lens Inventory. Of the 36 questions on the ELI, 18 measure your preference along the rationality-sensibility axis and 18 measure your preference along the autonomy-equality axis.

Once a group completes the ELI online, a scatter plot like the one pictured below will be automatically created for the facilitator.

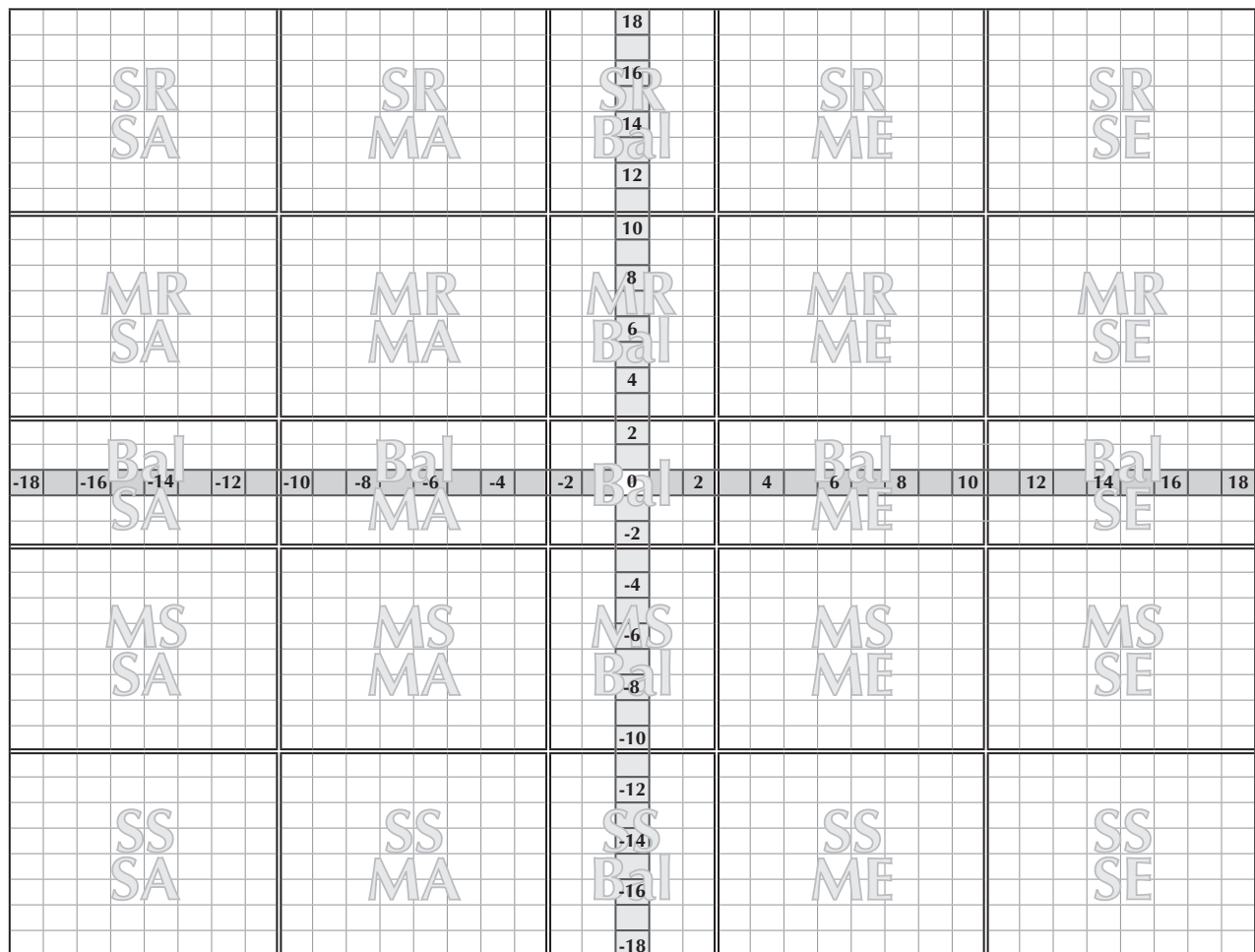


Those who complete the ELI using the printed version of the ELI can place their score on the Ethical Lens Inventory grid on the back side of the instrument and as shown below. (For further information, refer to pages 12 - 13 in the *Person-in-Community* workbook).



RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES LENS

RELATIONSHIP LENS



RESULTS LENS

REPUTATION LENS



A person's placement on the Ethical Lens Inventory grid depends on two variables:

1. Their preference between the competing values of autonomy and equality.
2. Their preference between the competing values of rationality and sensibility.

### AN OVERVIEW OF LENS PREFERENCE

**Autonomy and Equality:** The middle axis that runs from left to right on the chart above represents the continuum between autonomy—where the individual is considered the most important—to equality—here the group is considered the most important. As you work through the following list, place an 'x' by your preference to track your ethical preference.

**Strong Autonomy** Those whose responses indicate a strong preference for the value (SA): of autonomy fall in the far left column.

**Moderate Autonomy** Those whose responses indicate a moderate preference for the (MA): value of autonomy fall in the middle left column.

**Balanced** Those whose responses are balanced between the values of autonomy and equality fall in the middle column.

**Moderate Equality** Those whose responses indicate a moderate preference for the (ME): value of equality fall in the middle right column.

**Strong Equality** Those whose responses indicate a strong preference for the value (SE): of equality fall in the far right column.

**Rationality and Sensibility:** The middle axis that runs from top to bottom on the chart represents the continuum between rationality — where the individual primarily uses their head and reason to determine the right actions — to sensibility — where the individual follows their heart and uses intuition to determine the right action. Again, as you work through this list, place an 'x' by your preference to track your ethical preference.

**Strong Rationality** Those whose responses indicate a strong preference for the (SR): value of rationality fall in the top row.

**Moderate Rationality** Those whose responses indicate a moderate preference for the (MR): value of rationality fall in the second row.

**Balanced** Those whose responses are balanced between the values of ratio- (Bal): nality and sensibility fall in the third row.

**Moderate Sensibility** Those whose responses indicate a moderate preference for the (MS): value of sensibility fall in the fourth row.

**Strong Sensibility** Those whose responses indicate a strong preference for the (SS): value of sensibility fall in the fifth row.

## INTERPRETING THE CORE VALUES

No score is inherently better than another. Your placement on the grid gives you an indication of not only your strengths and gifts but the points of temptation and hubris, places where you are ethically vulnerable.

**Strong Preference:** The more strongly you have a preference along either of the continua, the more aware you need to be of the blind spots that come with that particular part of the lens.

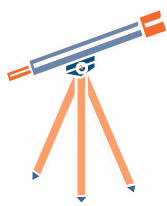
**Moderate Preference:** If you find yourself in a position of moderate preference, you often know your own ethical commitments and are able to act upon them, but also can nuance your actions in response to the other ethical preferences.

**Balanced Preference:** The balanced preference is not necessarily better. The closer to the center of the grid you find yourself, the more likely that you may be conflicted among the values and thus be unable to choose a path of action or unaware of your own ethical preferences.

## ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Our value preferences land us in a particular ethical lens, each of which emphasizes different secondary values — values that flow from the intersection of the values on the primary continuum. This placement means that we give priority to different values, which give us various perspectives on ethical problems. The placement on the grid determines our preferred ethical lens and the strengths and weaknesses of our preference.

**Rights/Responsibilities Lens:** Natives of this lens emphasize the core values of autonomy and rationality. This vantage point bears the icon of a telescope: taking a very long view to find the ideal values that are important for human beings. This lens captures the work of Plato, Immanuel Kant, W. D. Ross, and others who advocate for the ethical theories known as deontology (doing one's duty).



These theorists focus on identifying the ideals (whether revealed through Nature or given by God) that we as people should seek. The task is to identify the ethical principles that apply to all people. The secondary values that are associated with this lens presume that an ethical person is highly self-aware and self-managing as choices are made.

### Secondary Values Associated with Rights/Responsibilities Lens

|                   |             |
|-------------------|-------------|
| Loyal             | Faithful    |
| Highly principled | Pure        |
| Inviolable        | Predictable |
| Honorable         | Scrupulous  |
| Upright           | Trustworthy |
| Incorruptible     | Consistent  |
| Entitled          |             |



**Results Lens:** Natives of this lens emphasize the core values of autonomy and sensibility.



This vantage point has the icon of a microscope. This lens focuses our attention on the immediate here and now as we make choices that will help us reach the goals we have set for our life. This lens captures the work of Epicurus, John Stuart Mill, and others who focus on individual results and goals as they ask each of us to identify what will make us happy.

Because the focus is on the results of our actions, these theories are part of the teleological tradition better known as consequentialism or utilitarianism. The secondary values that are associated with this lens emphasize the freedom of action of the ethical actor. These values flow from carefully considering the consequences of our choices and making decisions that will help us reach our goals.

**Secondary Values Associated with Results Lens**

|                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Free</i>            | <i>Diligent</i>    |
| <i>Authoritative</i>   | <i>Meritorious</i> |
| <i>Self-controlled</i> | <i>Dutiful</i>     |
| <i>Independent</i>     | <i>Accountable</i> |
| <i>Responsible</i>     |                    |

**Relationship Lens:** Natives of this lens emphasize the core values of equality and rationality, traditionally known as theories of justice.



This vantage point bears the icon of binoculars. Rather than taking the extreme long view, we are encouraged to look around our particular community as we seek justice. This lens captures the work of John Rawls and others in the prophetic tradition who call us to fundamental fairness and encourage us to care for those less fortunate.

These theories are also part of the deontological tradition in that we are called to fulfill our duties in service to the ideals of a perfectly just community. The secondary values flow from a passion for fundamental fairness — assuring that all members of the community are treated with dignity and respect. These values also assume that every member of the community is entitled to some measure of the basic goods and services needed for people to thrive, regardless of their financial position.

**Secondary Values Associated with Relationship Lens**

|                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| <i>Fair</i>       | <i>Just</i>      |
| <i>Equitable</i>  | <i>Proper</i>    |
| <i>Evenhanded</i> | <i>Impartial</i> |
| <i>Unselfish</i>  | <i>Balanced</i>  |
| <i>Restrained</i> |                  |

**Reputation Lens:** Natives of this lens emphasize the core values of equality and sensibility.



This vantage point has the icon of a camera, to help us identify the roles which we have in this life and the context in which we do our work. Another idea captured by the icon is that we each frame and name what we see in our life. This lens highlights the work of Aristotle and Alasdair MacIntyre.

These theorists are part of the teleological tradition known as virtue ethics. The focus of this lens is on what virtues the community believes should be cultivated by those in positions of responsibility. The secondary values are those related to a good character that is developed through habitual reflective behavior. According to people who study this lens, these virtuous habits of being are to be developed for their own sake, not because one of good character will have advantages in the community.

**Secondary Values Associated with Reputation Lens**

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Charitable</i> | <i>Prudent</i>       |
| <i>Courteous</i>  | <i>Respectful</i>    |
| <i>Moderate</i>   | <i>Temperate</i>     |
| <i>Measured</i>   | <i>Benevolent</i>    |
| <i>Kind</i>       | <i>Generous</i>      |
| <i>Merciful</i>   | <i>Compassionate</i> |

**RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LENSES**

As we learn to look at simple and complex problems through different lenses, we can make better decisions. As we seek guidance from people whose home lens is different than ours, their perspectives will inform our actions. Our choices will then be more thoughtful and more likely to meet the ethical expectations of others.

**Home Lens:** This lens best reflects the values that we hold dear. We tend to see every ethical dilemma through our home lens. We also tend to agree with others whose lens matches our own.

**Cross Lens:** We will find the values of the lens that is kitty-corner from ours the most troubling. We are most likely to find people whose home is our cross lens “unethical” and their reasoning difficult. However, considering the value preferences of the cross lens will provide the quickest antidote to questions or temptations for our own unethical behavior.

**Neighboring Lenses:** Depending on where we fall within a particular lens, we will find the values of the neighboring lenses comfortable. However, the more strongly we identify with any one of the four foundational values, the more foreign the opposite value will seem.

**Dual Lenses:** Those who find themselves straddling two lenses will resonate with the values of both lenses. The placement relative to the other foundational values will determine how well the tools of the lenses can be used.

## THE THREE VANTAGE POINTS OF ETHICS

We become ethically mature as we practice self-awareness and make choices that reflect the best of our values. Ethics is developmental: as children we receive our earliest ethical teaching, and our childhood understanding of ethics is insufficient to get us through adulthood. Like any other developmental task, we can get stuck and stop growing.

Just as a surveyor must measure from multiple vantage points to get an accurate read on the terrain, ethics must be examined from three different vantages to give us a robust, three-dimensional picture. Examining one’s ethics from each point is necessary to move toward ethical maturity; no one dimension is sufficient by itself.

**Vantage Point of Intention:** Each of us chooses how we will act in a given situation. Developing our ability to carefully reason helps us choose values to pursue and gives us the strength of will to follow through on commitments.

**Vantage Point of Empathy:** We are not alone on this journey. Developing our capacity for emotional awareness and health helps us care for others as we work for moral balance — assuring that each person with whom we are in relationship is treated with respect and given the right to choose how they will live their life.

**Vantage Point of Integration:** As we seek to be whole human beings, we are able to learn to love ourselves and others as we serve. The recent surge of interest in spirituality and work clarifies the vantage point of integration.

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- *Does the preliminary description of your identified lens resonate with you?*
- *Ask a close friend or family member whether they think this lens reflects the values that underlie your action.*
- *Do you think this lens is your primary lens at work? At home? In social settings? What is your evidence for this belief?*
- *Examine other observations or insights.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Catharyn A. Baird** CEO and Founder of EthicsGame and Professor Emerita of Business at Regis University, Denver, Colorado. The creator of the initial EthicsGame simulations, Baird also wrote *Everyday Ethics: Making Wise Choices in a Complex World*. Her work has focused on equipping people to make effective ethical decisions as they become self-aware agents for leadership and change.

**Jeannine M. Niacaris** COO of EthicsGame. Over the course of a 30 year career, Niacaris has shepherded three start-ups and two restarts in the California Bay Area. She has extensive experience as an executive and consultant in human resources. Her work has focused on empowering people to become ever more effective and ethical in the workplace.

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6 Inverness Court East, Suite 220 | Englewood CA 80012 | 303-759-3739 or 888-248-6974 | [www.ethicsgame.com](http://www.ethicsgame.com)