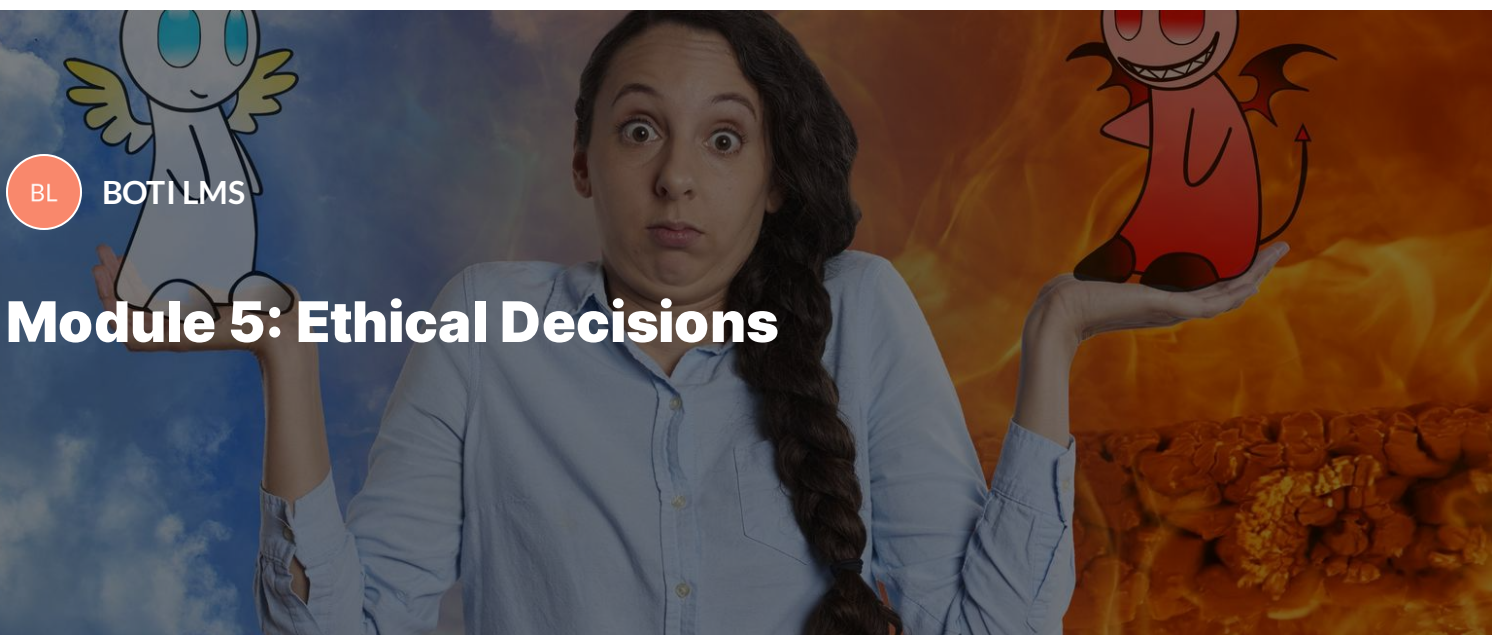




BL BOTILMS

## Module 5: Ethical Decisions

We should always attempt to make ethical decisions. It is possible; however, for two ethical people to make different decisions in a situation. In business, it is important that people understand ethical dilemmas and the ethical decision-making process.

Click on the first lesson below—or the “*Start eLearning*” button above—when you’re ready to begin.



**The Basics**



**Ethical Dilemmas and How to Resolve Them**



**Balancing Personal and Organizational Ethics**



**Overcoming Rationalizations When Making Ethical Decisions**



**Making Ethical Decisions**



**Overcoming Obstacles**



**Knowledge Check**







# The Basics



“ In the end, success or failure will come down to an ethical decision....

Edward O. Wilson

Typically, there are five ethical standards used to interpret the world around us.

**Based on your particular situation when having to make an ethical decision, you have likely used one of the following methods:**

### Utilitarian Approach

This approach focuses on the consequences of actions. The goal is to do 'more good than harm', in a situation.

### Rights Approach

Focusing on the rights of all involved defines this approach. It makes respecting the rights of others a moral obligation.

### Fairness Approach

A fair approach indicates that all people will be treated equally. A fairly based standard is used to determine actions that are unequal such as pay rate.

### Common Good Approach

The conditions that affect all people are considered in the common good approach. Systems and laws are created to ensure the welfare of everyone.

## Virtue Approach

This approach uses virtues such as honesty, compassion, love, patience, and courage to guide behaviour.



Complete the content above before moving on.

# Ethical Dilemmas and How to Resolve Them



## A Financial Crisis

An employee on your team asks for a raise. They say they're going through a tough time and need more money. Otherwise, they'll have to look for a job with better pay.

You sympathise, but the company isn't in a position to increase wages. What's more, giving one employee a raise could be seen as special treatment. Still, this employee's work is outstanding, and you really can't afford to train someone else to take over their role right now.

Faced with this dilemma, how do you know what course of action to take? It's not an easy decision to make, and there's no right or wrong answer.

In this lesson, you'll learn what an ethical dilemma is, how a conflict of values causes it, and what five approaches you can follow to resolve these dilemmas.

## What Is an Ethical Dilemma?

An ethical dilemma occurs when making a decision puts our core values in conflict. In the company example above, you could justify both giving the employee a raise and saying no. This presents a dilemma because the situation puts two values at odds—

making an exception for an individual versus doing what's best for the company as a whole.

---

There are many different ethical dilemmas in business that are specific to industries.

**There are however, common dilemmas that every organization should practice:**

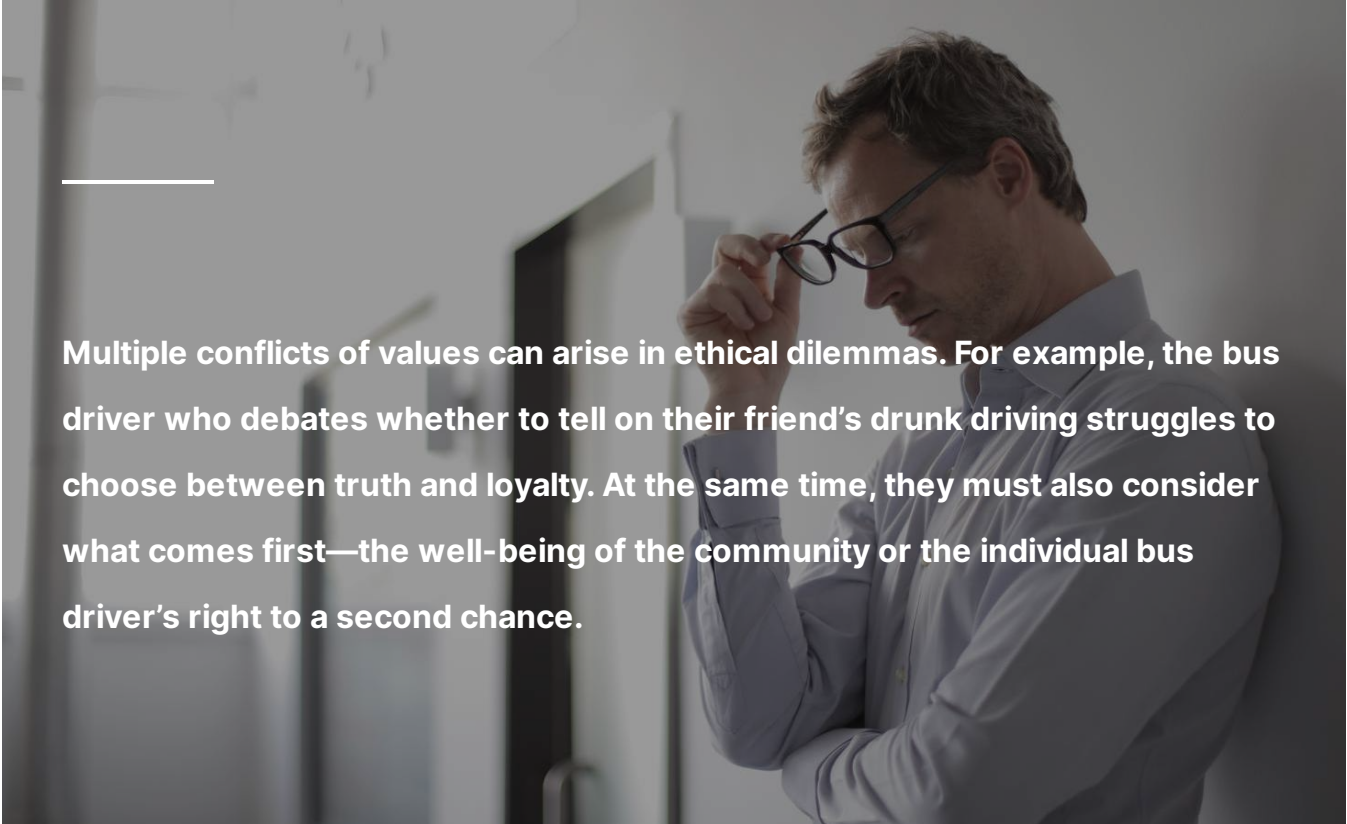
- Honest accounting practices
- Responsibility for mistakes such as accidents, spills, and faulty product
- Advertising that is honest and not misleading
- Collusion with competitors
- Labour issues
- Bribes and corporate espionage



**Law governs many of these dilemmas, but an ethically run organization will make the right decision regardless of legal issues. Because these issues are so common, it is important to create ethical standards and enforce the policies and procedures.**

---

Ethical dilemmas are like a fork in the road. You could take either path, but it's up to you to choose.



Multiple conflicts of values can arise in ethical dilemmas. For example, the bus driver who debates whether to tell on their friend's drunk driving struggles to choose between truth and loyalty. At the same time, they must also consider what comes first—the well-being of the community or the individual bus driver's right to a second chance.

## A Conflict of Values

So, how can two choices be equally right? It comes down to which values are at stake. An ethical dilemma pits two fundamental values against each other, forcing us to choose what's more important.

Expand the rows below to learn the three most common value conflicts in ethical dilemmas:

### Truth vs. Loyalty —

Sometimes, telling the truth means turning your back on someone. And it's hard to know when it's worth losing someone's trust.

**Example:** You drive a school bus for a living. So does your best friend. One day, she confesses that she's sometimes drunk when she drives. But she also tells you that she is trying to kick her addiction, and she attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. You don't want your friend to get into trouble, but she's also jeopardizing lives. So, do you tell the truth or remain loyal to your friend?

### Individual vs. Community —

A common problem pits the good of all against the good of one. When can you justify favouring an individual over a group?

**Example:** A recession affects everyone at a company. The CEO could take a pay cut or lay off several employees. Should the CEO sacrifice their own comfort for the good of the group, or should they prioritize their needs over others'?

### Justice vs. Mercy —

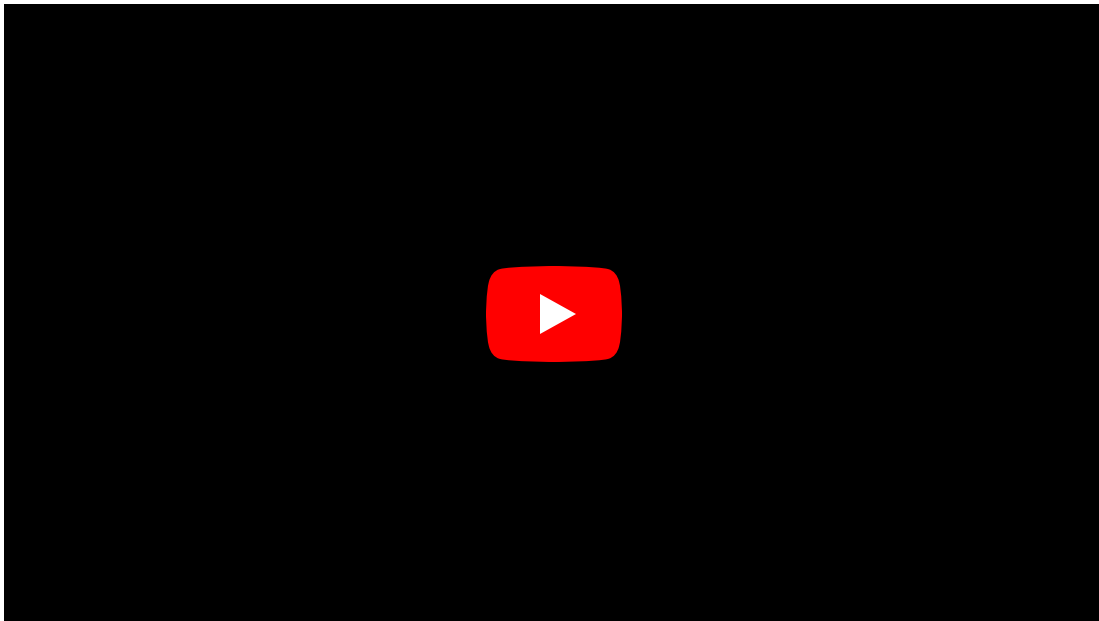
It's good to be just as well as merciful. But these values don't always go together. Enacting justice means enforcing the same consequences for everyone, regardless of the circumstances of a behaviour. Mercy would have us shield someone from those consequences based on the situation.

**Example:** A hardworking, longtime employee at a supermarket fails to lock up, and the store gets robbed overnight. The money stolen includes funds for the next payroll, so the store is unable to pay its employees. The store would be justified in letting the employee go. Or, since



this is the first mistake from a loyal employee, the manager could find a less severe form of discipline. So, do you choose justice or show mercy?

 **YOUTUBE**



**VIEW ON YOUTUBE >**



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

An ethical dilemma is:

---

- ☐ A choice with no easy answer
- ☐ A choice between two or more conflicting values

**SUBMIT**



Complete the content above before moving on.

## **5 Approaches to Resolving Ethical Dilemmas**

So, what do you do when your values come into conflict and there's no easy answer? Click through to learn five approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas.

## Approach 1

### The Common Good Approach



This approach favours choices that benefit the community at large, rather than a few individuals. The idea dates back to ancient Greece. Philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato argued that ideas and policies that benefit society as a whole would, in turn, benefit individuals living in that society.

Some modern-day examples of public policies that embrace the idea of the common good include universal healthcare and environmental protection. In business, we can think about initiatives that reduce office noise levels or prioritize workplace safety.

To apply this thinking to a dilemma, ask:

- *Would most everyone benefit from this decision?*
- *What's the best thing to do for the whole group?*

## Approach 2

### The Rights Approach



Influenced by Enlightenment-era philosophers like Immanuel Kant, this approach argues that individual rights must be respected in ethical dilemmas. Each person in this framework should be treated as an individual with their own, inalienable rights.

For example, a company that values individual rights might place importance on free speech, embracing criticism instead of penalizing those who speak up.

To put this approach into action, consider:

- *Am I ignoring someone else's rights?*
- *What are my rights, and are they being respected?*

### Approach 3

## The Fairness Approach



Fairness is about achieving equity. We should treat everyone based on their inherent value as human beings rather than external factors like race, gender, wealth, or status. Decisions should affect everyone, similarly, bringing them either good or harm. They must be made without bias or prejudice against one group.

Under this approach, an executive who violated their company's code of conduct can't be shielded from the consequences of their actions just because they perform at a high level.

When applying the justice approach to a dilemma, ask whether a choice would:

- *Apply to everyone equally*
- *Favour one group in particular for an arbitrary reason*

## Approach 4

### The Virtue Approach



Dating back to ancient Greece, the virtue approach emphasizes living up to moral ideals through self-improvement. Action enables us to attain virtues like integrity, compassion, and courage, and we must make choices that will help us live these virtues.

For example, if we strive for the virtue of honesty, we should speak up even when it's hard. If a coworker underperforms, we give them honest feedback. Or, if we make a mistake, we own up to it.

When applying the virtue approach to a situation, ask yourself:

- *What virtues are at stake?*
- *Will this decision help me improve as a person?*



## Approach 5

### The Utilitarian Approach



This approach prioritizes choices that produce the most good—or do the least harm. While ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus originated the notion, 18th- and 19th-century English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill modernized utilitarianism as we understand it today.

For example, university budget cuts mean nixing courses. Under a utilitarian approach, courses that have the fewest students would go first.

To view a dilemma from a utilitarian perspective, think about the following:

- *What's the outcome that will make more people happy?*
- *What choice will do the least harm?*

## Choosing Your Approach

When choosing which approach to use, consider the following:

- **There's no single, correct approach.** Philosophers have been arguing over these approaches for centuries.
- **An approach that works for one situation may not work for another.** Different situations have different stakes. One dilemma may be about justice, another more about virtues.
- **You can apply multiple approaches to the same dilemma.** It's not about choosing one approach to apply. Consider the problem from multiple angles to decide what makes the most sense.



Now let's apply the approaches to some ethical dilemmas...

### Question 1 of 3

Consider the bus driver whose friend and coworker confesses to them about driving while under the influence. Based on the **common good** approach, what choice would they make?

---

- ☐ Tell the truth about the friend's drinking.
- ☐ Remain loyal to their friend by keeping the secret.

**SUBMIT**



Complete the content above before moving on.

### Question 2 of 3

Consider the CEO who has to choose between reducing their salary or laying off several employees. Based on the **utilitarian** approach, what's the correct choice?

---



Lay off employees.



Sacrifice their own salary.

**SUBMIT**



Complete the content above before moving on.

### Question 3 of 3

Consider the hardworking employee whose mistake resulted in a store robbery. Based on the **fairness** approach, what's the right way to proceed?

---

- ☐ Fire them, as the mistake is big enough to warrant termination.
- ☐ Show mercy by letting them off with a warning.

**SUBMIT**

## Summary

An ethical dilemma occurs when a decision puts fundamental values into conflict, necessitating a choice between the two values. It's difficult to judge which one is the better option because both values are important. Common value conflicts include truth vs. loyalty, individual vs. community, and justice vs. mercy.

There are different approaches to weighing these values. Prioritizing the group, considering individual rights, being fair, living up to ideals, and choosing the greater good can provide a lens for our choice. While there's no single correct approach,

considering an ethical dilemma from many angles can help us arrive at a solution that makes the most sense.



**Every case is different.** There isn't one set way to solve an ethical dilemma. Use your judgment and consider your values to determine the best choice in a given situation.



Complete the content above before moving on.

# Balancing Personal and Organizational Ethics



---

It is important to be ethical on a personal and at organizational level. Personal ethics, based on personal beliefs and values, influence decisions both inside and outside of work. Organizational ethics determine workplace decisions.

Organizational ethics flow from the top down. Those in leadership need to promote ethical decisions and lead by example. Occasionally, personal and professional ethics will collide. In the event of an ethical dilemma, it is important to make your decision based on what is most important and what will be the best for the parties involved.

**Watch this video clip...**



Complete the content above before moving on.



# Overcoming Rationalizations When Making Ethical Decisions



## Introduction

Why don't good people always do the right thing? For example, why don't we stand up to a bully after saying we would? Or why would we abandon a cause we intended to support?

Doing the right thing is simple ... in theory. But when we need to take action, we don't always live up to our own ideals. We go with our instinct, ignore our conscience, or take the easy way out. We may not even do it consciously.

The gap between ideals and reality is why making ethical decisions can be difficult. In this lesson, you'll learn some common rationalizations we use to excuse our behaviour, the conflict of interest that causes those rationalizations, and four tips to overcome them.

---

We don't always live up to our own standards, even when our intentions are good.



[Click here to watch: Ethics in the Workplace - Honesty in Words and Actions](#)

---

## What Are Rationalizations?

Sometimes, we justify our less-than-ideal actions with **rationalizations**. We try to explain away our behaviour with logical excuses when our actions miss the ethical mark. Below are some examples:



**I didn't have time.** When we make a rash decision on a busy day, we might justify it by protesting that there wasn't enough time to choose a better option.



**I didn't have a choice.** Another rationalization denies the element of free will. We almost always have another option, but a difficult situation can make it harder to see.



**I didn't know.** Lacking "all the facts" can seem like a convenient way to sidestep a difficult decision. But are we deliberately looking

the other way to avoid troubling information?



**It wasn't my responsibility.** Sometimes, making ethical decisions requires going against the group or someone with more authority. Because this is difficult, we tell ourselves it wasn't our responsibility.



**Everyone else does it.** Shifting blame is a common way to justify problematic behaviour. If others are making unethical decisions, who are we to insist on a better choice?

## Why Do We Make Rationalizations?

An internal **conflict of interest** provokes rationalizations. Even when we want to do the right thing, we sometimes ignore our good intentions if there's an easier option.

### Want vs. Should

What we **want** to do and what we **should** do often conflict, trapping our "want" self and our "should" self in an eternal battle. Flip the cards below to learn more about these warring factions:

## "Want" Self

The instinctual part of ourselves that focuses on instant gratification and self-preservation.

Humans are

## "Should" Self

The idealized part of ourselves that strives to do the right thing.

Most of us aspire to  
make ethical

For example, an executive firing an employee may know they *should* do it in person. But they *want* to avoid that awkward conversation. So, they communicate over email instead and rationalize the behaviour by saying, "*I didn't have time to meet.*"

We *intend* to do the right thing. But when it comes time to *make the ethical choice*, our “want” self sometimes overpowers the “should” self.

“ It takes less time to do things right than to explain why you did it wrong.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



To check your understanding of the lesson content, work through the scenarios below...

## Can You Spot the Self?

The following examples demonstrate either the “want” self or “should” self. Match each behaviour with the correct self.

### Question 1 of 2

Elise overhears her coworkers discussing how they sometimes inflate their business expenses when submitting reports so they can get an extra bit of cash. She just had a car repair bill pop up this month, so inflating her expense report could help her cover that unexpected cost.

Which of the following actions would fall under the “**want**” self?

---

☐

Elise inflates the business expense since everyone does it, and the money would go a long way.

☐

Elise submits accurate expenses even though everyone around her tells her it’s no big deal.

**SUBMIT**



Complete the content above before moving on.

### Question 2 of 2

Jamal heads up the engineering team at his company. He hears rumors that one of his engineers has said derogatory things about a marginalized group. However, this engineer produces excellent work, and Jamal and his team are in the middle of a time-sensitive project. Investigating these rumors will disrupt their productivity.

Which of the following actions would fall under the “**should**” self?

---

☐

Jamal dismisses the rumors and continues to conduct business as usual.

☐

Jamal investigates the rumors and, unfortunately, finds that they are true. He proceeds with disciplinary action against the engineer, even though it disrupts his team's momentum.

**SUBMIT**



Complete the content above before moving on.

“Ultimately, the only power to which man should aspire is that which he exercises over himself.”

Elie Wiesel

## How to Overcome Rationalizations in Making Ethical Decisions

Now that we’ve learned why we don’t always do the right thing, we can explore how to overcome rationalizations when making ethical decisions. Expand the accordion below to learn four tips to help avoid these hurdles.

### Proclaim Your Intentions Publicly —

When we declare our good intentions to the public, it’s harder to go back on our word. Even if we want to waffle on choosing the ethical path, others will hold us accountable for what we’ve promised.

**Example:** A company’s head of human resources sets a public target for attracting more diverse candidates. They know that they will need to see visible changes in their recruiting pool in the months to come unless they want to go back on their promise.

### Seek Out Different Opinions —

Talking to someone else, especially someone who has a different gender identity, cultural background, or professional position, can give us valuable insights when we get stuck in the ethical decision-making process. Doing so can either reinforce our good intentions or provide a much-needed push toward choosing the ethical path.



**Example:** Tim witnesses a tense interaction between two coworkers. One of them is white, and the other, Felicia, belongs to a racial minority. Tim wants to be a good ally and call out discrimination when he witnesses it, but he's not sure if the exchange was racist in nature. He talks to Felicia about it and learns why it was problematic. If a similar interaction happens again, he knows what to do.

## Act Out Scenarios in Advance —

We never really know how we're going to react to something until it happens. To avoid following that first, "want" instinct, rehearse potentially sticky situations in advance. Role-playing can help us map out different responses and orient us toward our "should" self.

**Example:** Janine has been promoted to a new accounting position with more oversight responsibilities. She worries about her ability to confront someone if she sees them mishandling company funds. She asks a trusted colleague to go through a few scenarios with her to come up with ethical responses. This way, she knows how to take the right action instead of justifying her behavior with a rationalization.

## Make Yourself a Promise —

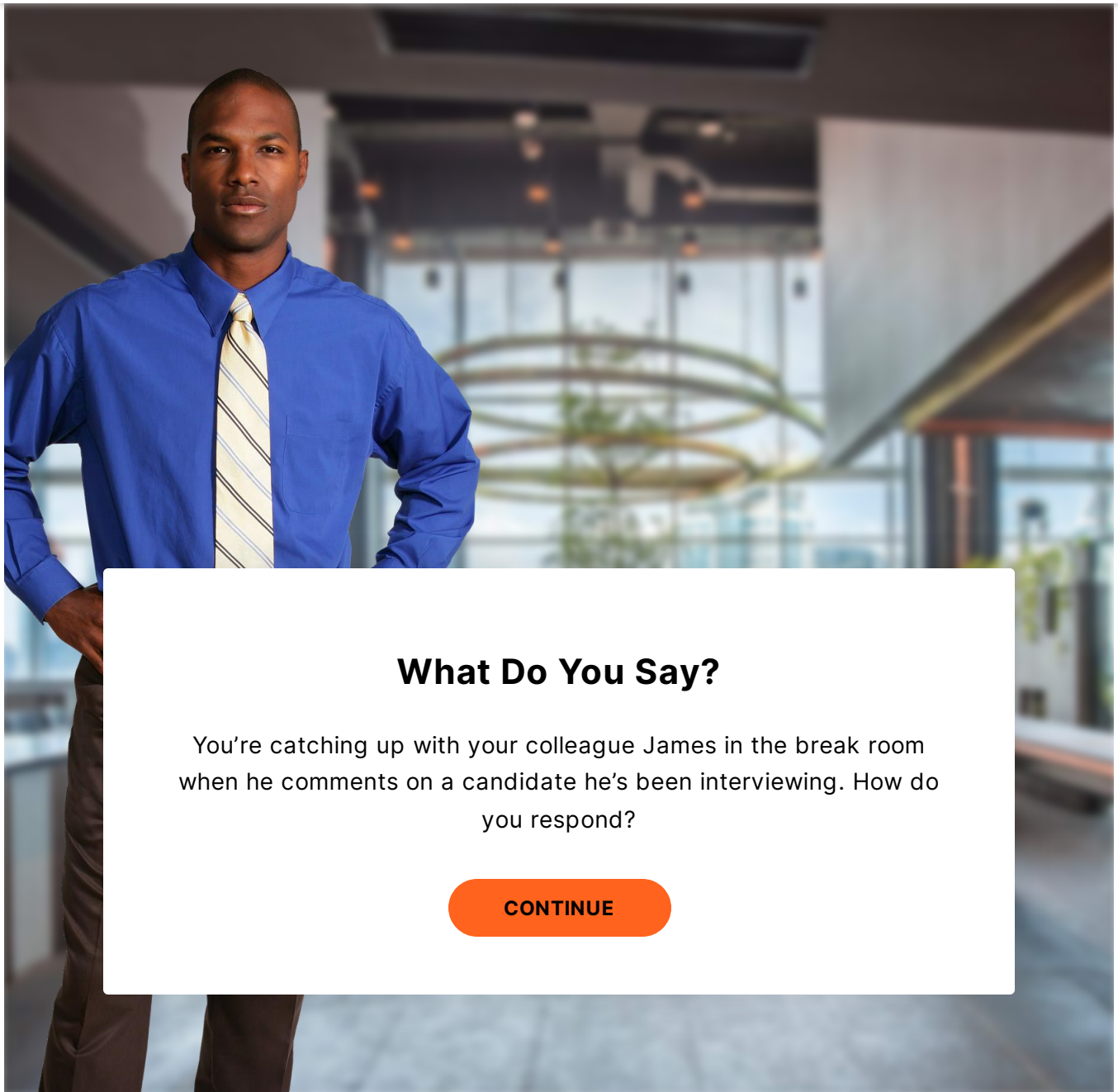
Telling people not to cheat right before a test might seem obvious. Yet it can be very effective. As you go into work, a meeting, or a happy hour, mentally remind yourself to be vigilant for any inappropriate situations and respond ethically.

**Example:** You've noticed that one of your colleagues often dismisses or demeans the comments of other members of your team in meetings. No one has called them out on it. Before you head to the next meeting, promise yourself that you'll speak up. That may give you the courage you need to act.

By making our intentions public, seeking out different opinions, rehearsing situations, and giving ourselves reminders, we can stop our “want” self from taking over. That will help us make ethical decisions.



Apply your understanding of overcoming rationalizations in ethical decision-making by navigating the following scenario.



## What Do You Say?

You're catching up with your colleague James in the break room when he comments on a candidate he's been interviewing. How do you respond?

**CONTINUE**

### Scene 1 Slide 1

Continue → Next Slide



We said we want to improve diversity within our company, but I'm not sure Salma will fit in—she's from Bangladesh. The local candidate, Josh, will be able to connect better with our customers.

1

Yeah, you're right. Better go with someone who understands our culture.

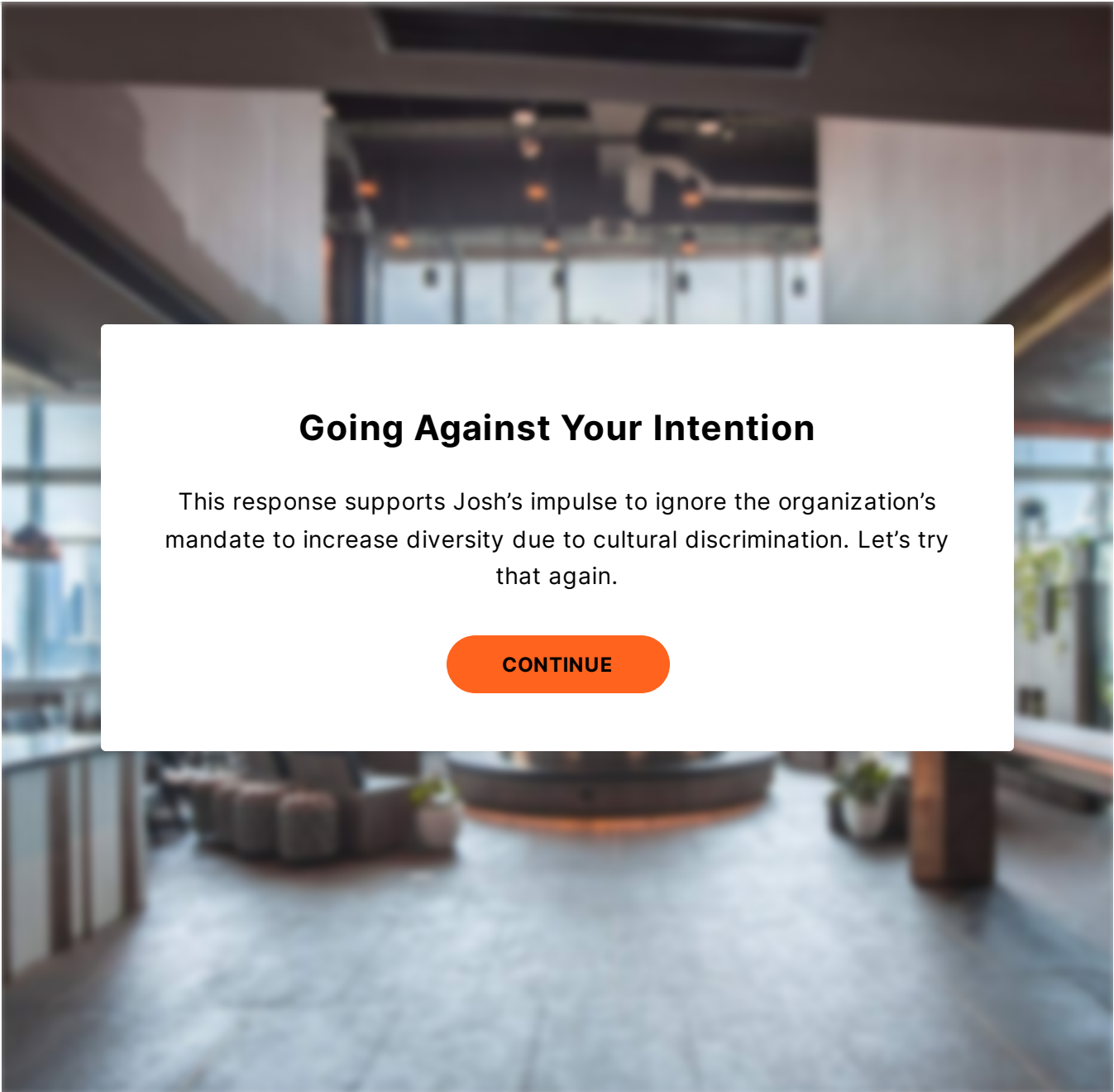
2

I thought the whole idea was to embrace people from different backgrounds rather than favouring one group.

## Scene 1 Slide 2

0 → Scene 1 Slide 3

1 → Scene 1 Slide 4



## Going Against Your Intention

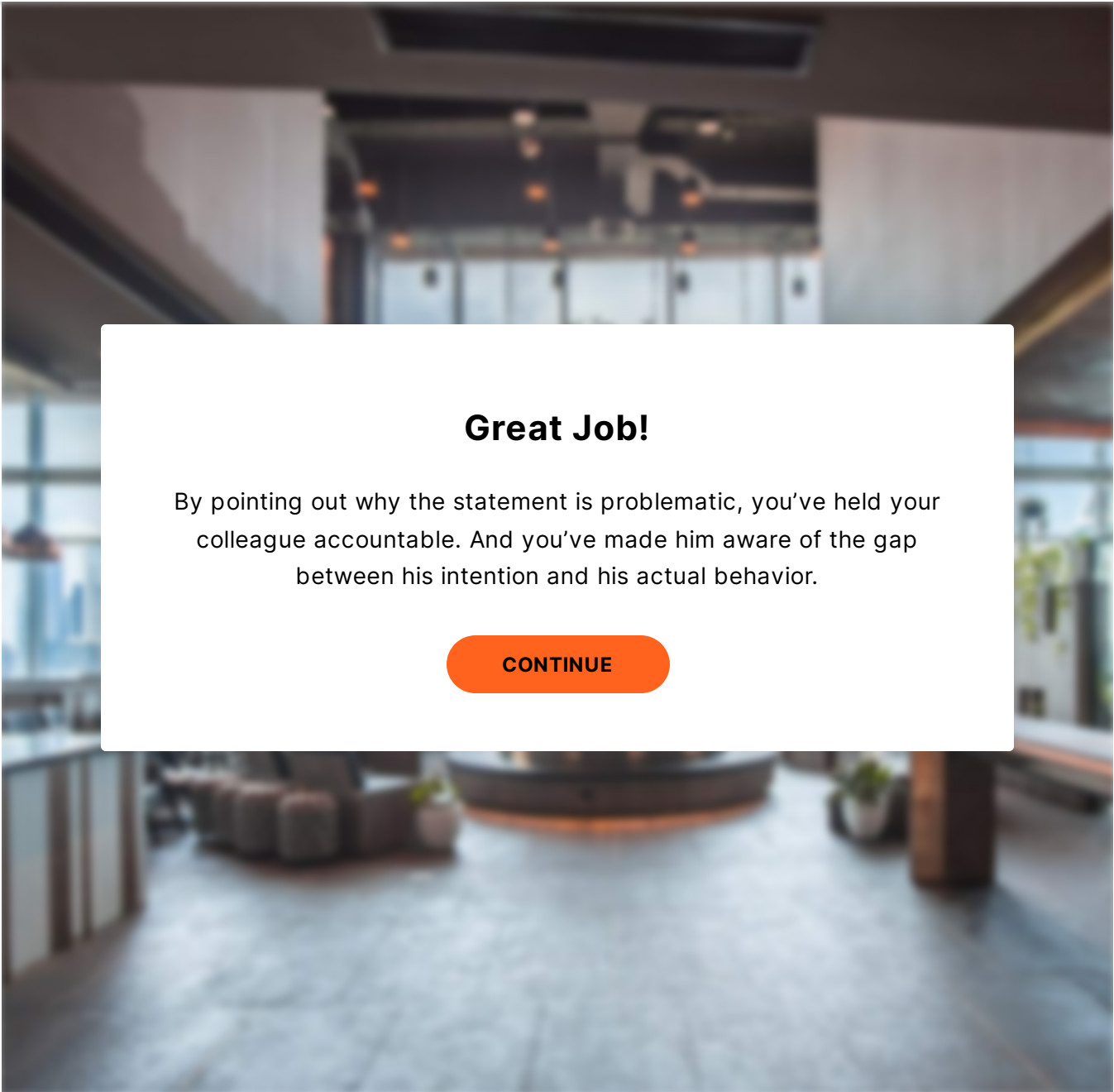
This response supports Josh's impulse to ignore the organization's mandate to increase diversity due to cultural discrimination. Let's try that again.

**CONTINUE**

### Scene 1 Slide 3

Continue → Scene 1 Slide 2





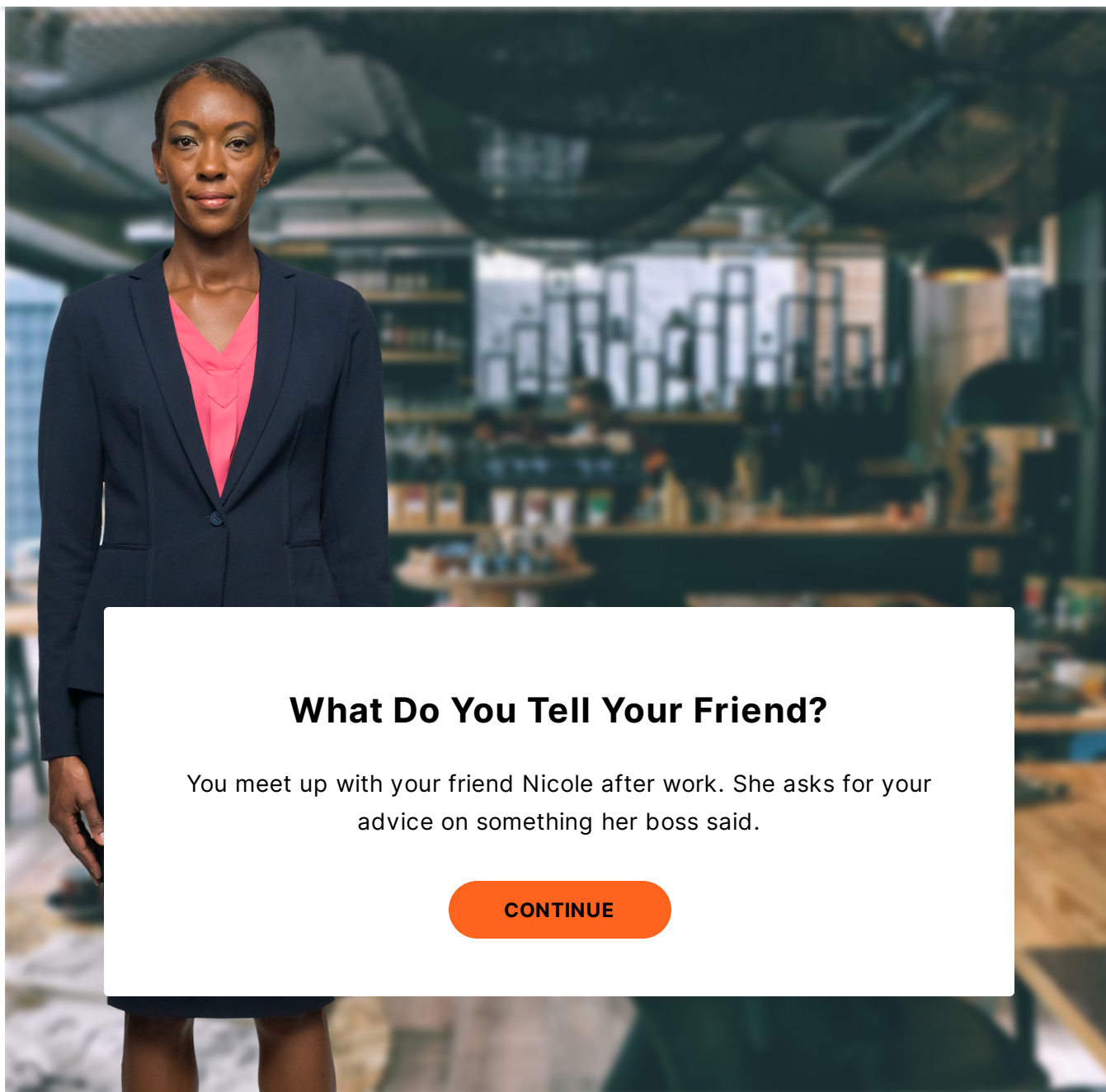
## Great Job!

By pointing out why the statement is problematic, you've held your colleague accountable. And you've made him aware of the gap between his intention and his actual behavior.

**CONTINUE**

### Scene 1 Slide 4

Continue → Scene 2 Slide 1



## What Do You Tell Your Friend?

You meet up with your friend Nicole after work. She asks for your advice on something her boss said.

**CONTINUE**

### Scene 2 Slide 1

Continue → Scene 2 Slide 2



I heard my boss berate my colleague in public, but I didn't speak up in the moment. I'm torn because I've always said I would never condone that type of behaviour. Should I have said something?

1

I don't think so. Speaking up could have had negative consequences for you at work.

2

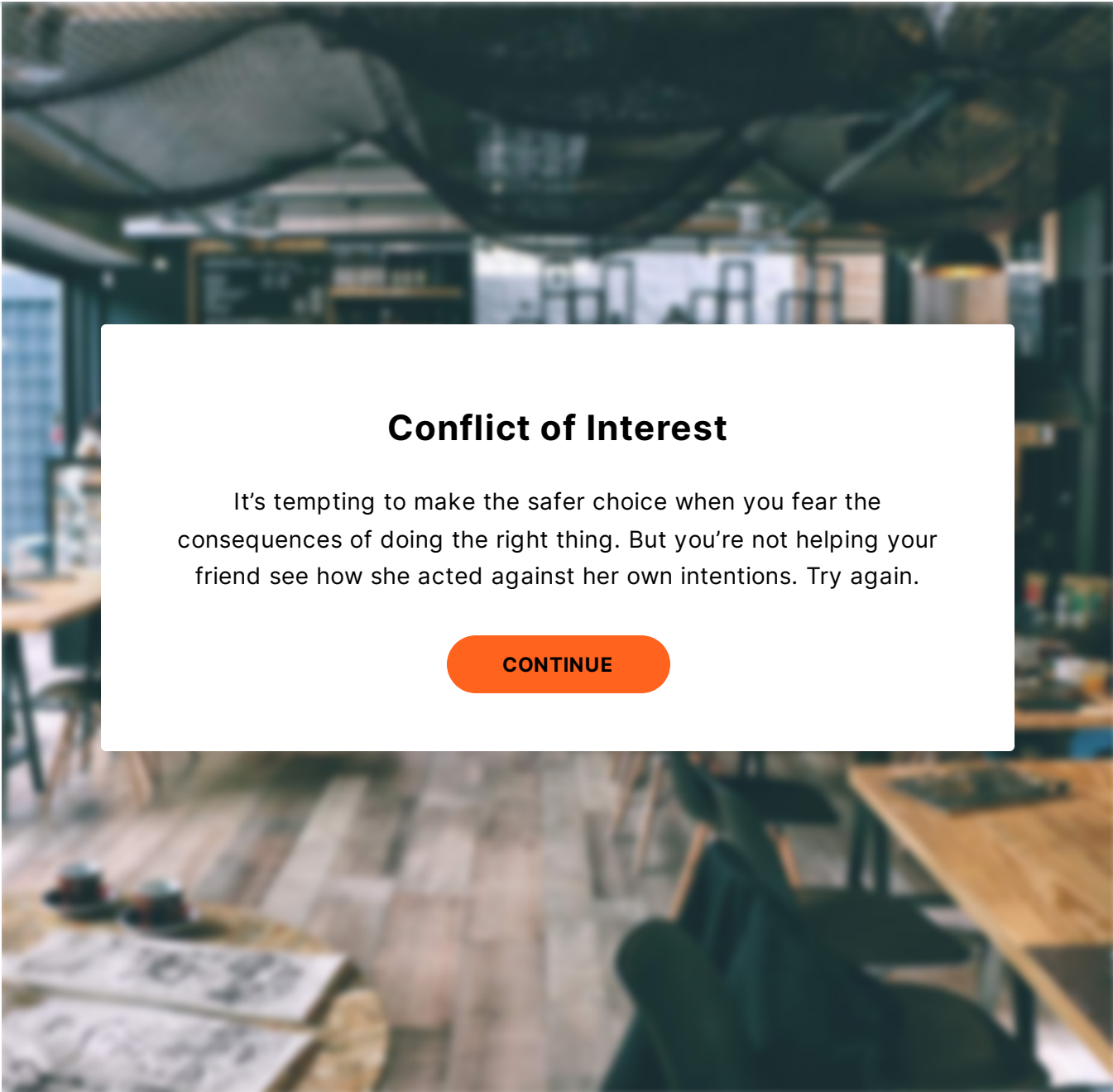
You've always said it's important to stand up to bullies. But when the time came, you chickened out.

## Scene 2 Slide 2

0 → Scene 2 Slide 3

1 → Scene 2 Slide 4





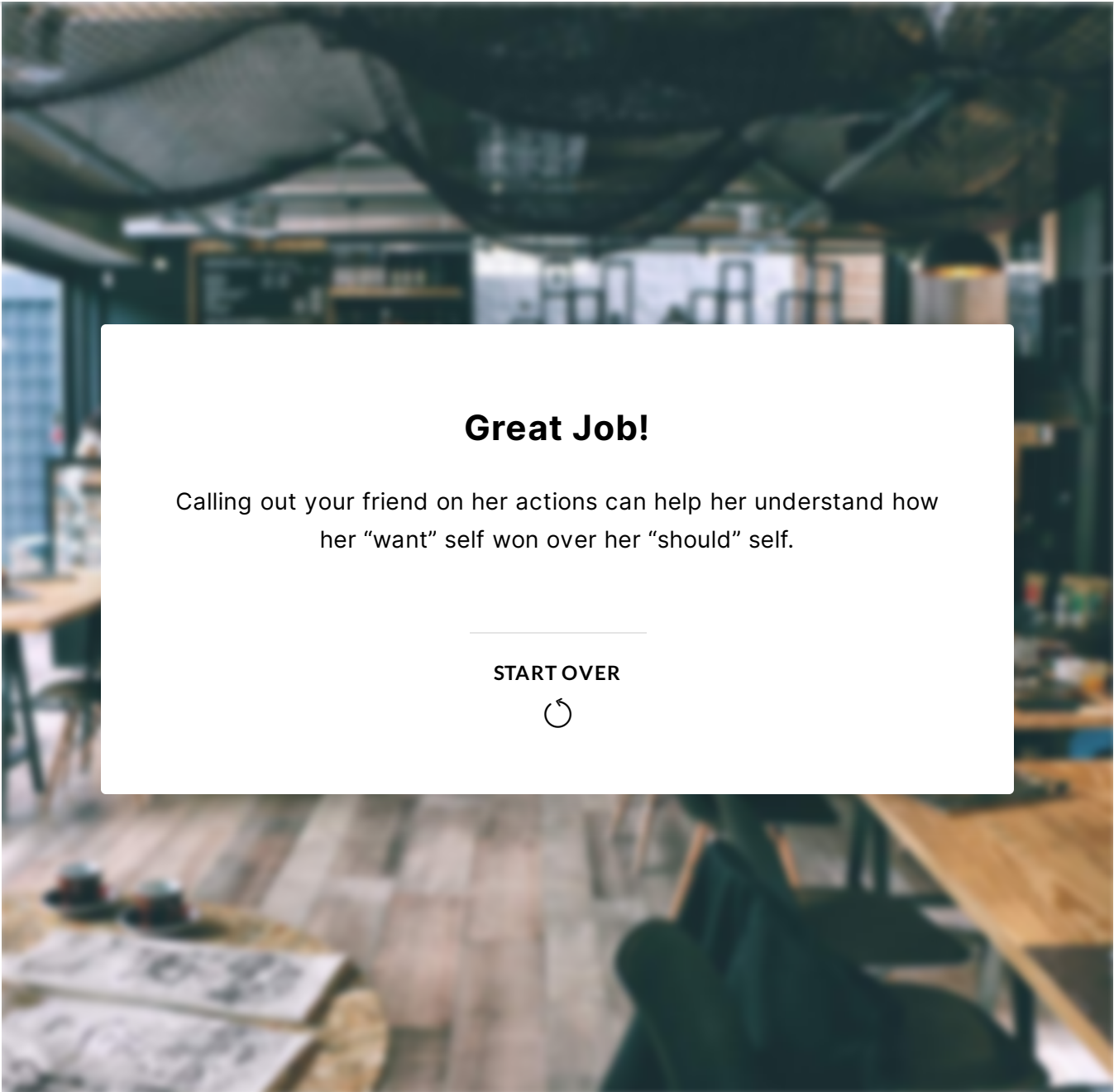
## Conflict of Interest

It's tempting to make the safer choice when you fear the consequences of doing the right thing. But you're not helping your friend see how she acted against her own intentions. Try again.

**CONTINUE**

### Scene 2 Slide 3

Continue → Scene 2 Slide 2



## Great Job!

Calling out your friend on her actions can help her understand how her “want” self won over her “should” self.

---

START OVER



### Scene 2 Slide 4

Continue → End of Scenario

## Summary

When we don't choose the ethical path, we often try to rationalize our behavior. We make excuses like: *"I didn't have time."* *"I didn't have a choice."* *"I didn't know."* *"It wasn't my choice."* or *"Everyone else does it."* The conflict between our "want" self and "should" self complicates our desire to do the right thing.

By making our intentions public, seeking out different opinions, rehearsing situations in advance, and setting reminders for ourselves, we can take proactive steps to overcome rationalizations that stop us from making ethical decisions.



**Embrace challenges.** We avoid ethical decision-making because it's hard. Try conditioning your brain to welcome challenges by seeing them as opportunities to grow, just as you'd condition your muscles to lift heavier weights at the gym. The more we practice overcoming difficulties, the easier it gets.



Complete the content above before moving on.

# Making Ethical Decisions



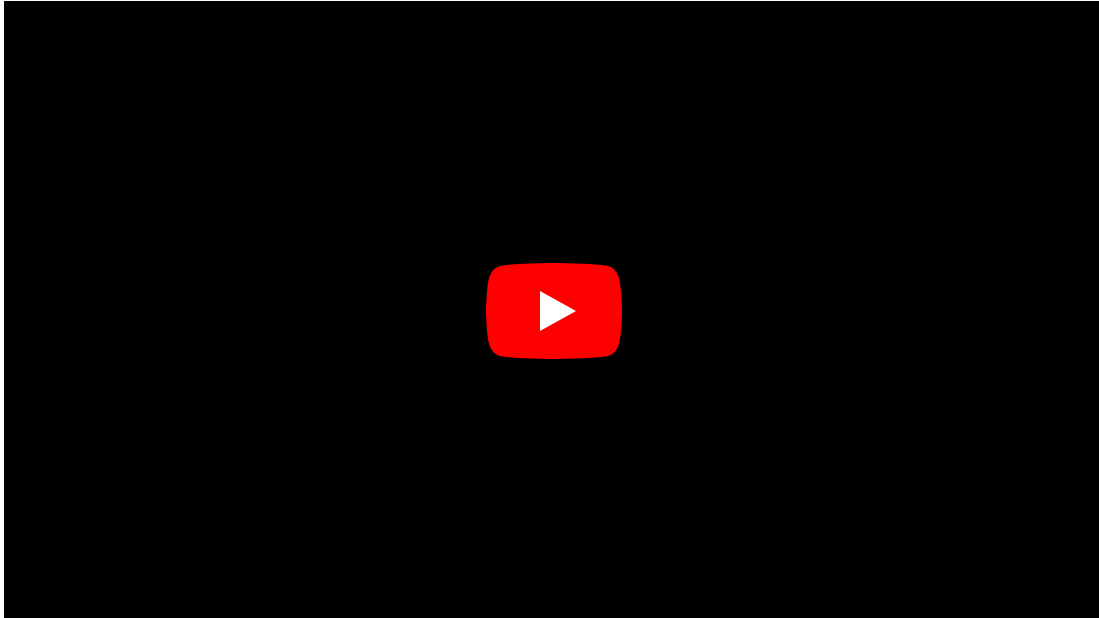
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Before making any final decisions, use the following steps to make sure that you are making ethical decisions:

- **Determine the ethics of a situation:** Does the decision affect a group or have legal ramifications?
- **Gather Information:** Learn as much as possible about the situation, and get the point of view from all parties involved.
- **Evaluate Actions:** Make different decisions based on the different ethical standards.
- **Test Decisions:** Would you be proud of this decision if it were advertised?
- **Implement:** Implement the decision, and evaluate the results.

[Watch this video clip...](#)

 **YOUTUBE**



## **Ethical Decision Making: Ethical Tests**

No matter what kind of ethical dilemma you face, you need some simple tests to help you decide what to do. The following are a series of tests through which you can put ethical dilemmas. The purpose of these tests is to help you clarify the situation and avoid rationalizations.

**[VIEW ON YOUTUBE >](#)**



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

How many ethical tests were described in the video?

---

☐ 1

☐ 3

☐ 5

☐ 7

**SUBMIT**



Complete the content above before moving on.

# Overcoming Obstacles



There will always be a temptation to act unethically. These obstacles are particularly difficult to overcome when other people are encouraging you to behave unethically. They may be in positions of authority or simply intimidating, but you do not have to give in to them.

## Ways to overcome obstacles include:

Sympathise

Do not attack unethical people. Sympathise with their situation, but refuse to compromise your standards.



2 of 5

Reason

Provide them with logical reasons for your refusal to compromise your integrity.

3 of 5

Stay Firm

Make a decision and stick to it. Do not let people wear you down.

4 of 5

Take Precautions

Keep a paper trail of your encounters, and be prepared to defend yourself.



## **Ethics in the Workplace - Solving Situational and Critical Dilemmas**

Even the knowledge that something is wrong may not be enough to help you to resist the urge to do it. There may be more variables in play than simple knowledge of the rules. The key to reducing situational dilemmas is to ask the questions: Why do we do what we do?

**[VIEW ON YOUTUBE >](#)**



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

Even the \_\_\_\_\_ that something is wrong may not be enough to help you to resist the urge to do it.

Type your answer here

**SUBMIT**



Complete the content above before moving on.

Lesson 7 of 8

# Knowledge Check



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Module 5: Review Questions

---

**Question**

**01/10**

Typically, there are how many ethical standards for interpreting the world?

---

☐

3

☐

5

☐

8

☐

10

**Question**

**02/10**

Organizational ethics flow from where?

---

- ☐ Bottom up
- ☐ Top down
- ☐ Public domain
- ☐ Employee actions

**Question**

**03/10**

Honest accounting practices, accurate advertising, and taking responsibility for mistakes are examples of what?

---

- ☐ Common dilemmas
- ☐ Ethical targets
- ☐ Laws
- ☐ Rights of business

**Question**

**04/10**

What is the first step to making ethical decisions?

---

- ☐ Can the problem be ignored?
- ☐ Does the decision have legal ramifications?
- ☐ Can the issue be solved with more money?
- ☐ Is there a way to make money from the situation?



**Question**

**05/10**

Which tactic was not recommended for standing your ground when others are trying to influence you to behave unethically?

---

- ☐ Bribery
- ☐ Sympathy
- ☐ Reason
- ☐ Staying firm

**Question**

**06/10**

The goal when making ethical decisions is to:

---

- ☐ Do more good than harm
- ☐ Leave no stone unturned
- ☐ Go with the flow
- ☐ Take it easy

**Question**

**07/10**

Make a decision and \_\_\_\_.

---

- ☐ Hope for the best
- ☐ Play it by ear
- ☐ Stick with it
- ☐ None of the above

**Question**

**08/10**

Respecting the rights of others is \_\_\_\_.

---

- ☐ Not your concern
- ☐ A moral obligation
- ☐ Hard to do
- ☐ A lesson to learn

**Question**

**09/10**

This approach uses honesty, compassion, love, patience, and courage to guide behaviour.

---

- ☐ The Common Good Approach
- ☐ The Fairness Approach
- ☐ The Utilitarian Approach
- ☐ The Virtues Approach

**Question**

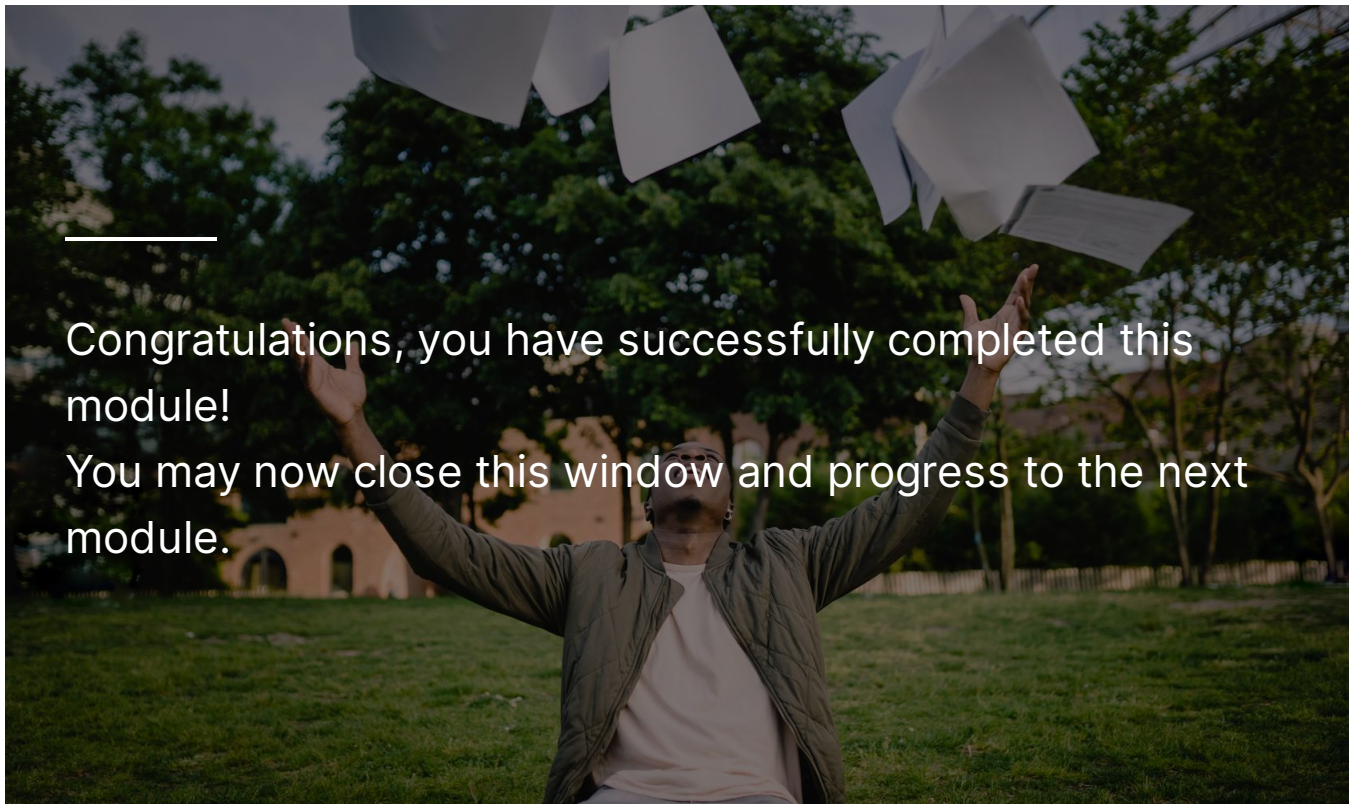
**10/10**

An ethically run organization will make the right decision \_\_\_\_\_.

---

- ☐ Regardless of legal obligation
- ☐ Every time
- ☐ If they feel it's the right thing to do
- ☐ None of the above

## Module 5: Completed



Congratulations, you have successfully completed this module!

You may now close this window and progress to the next module.