BLHV 251 01: Critical Thinking and Ethical Decision-Making

Spring 2015 – Tuesdays - 6:30 – 9:00 PM

Walsh 496

Instructor: George A. Reese

Training and Organizational Development

Georgetown University Human Resources

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Required Texts:


Other articles to be distributed in class.

Course Description:

*Many people would sooner die than think. In fact they do.* – Bertrand Russell

*Don’t worry about what people think. They don’t do it very often.* – (Bumper Sticker)

Each and every day we make choices and decisions, both personally and professionally. Ideally, these choices and decisions are guided by the norms of rationality, made after considered judgement, which, when properly executed, result in effective action.

One objective of this course is to identify the individual, interpersonal, and institutional forces that shape our judgement processes. In particular we will identify factors and processes that
can lead good people to make bad decisions. A second objective is to identify the strategies and practices that promote rationality and considered judgement.

A lack of critical thinking in the workplace produces inferior products and services, leads to groupthink, and reduces the effectiveness of decisions. This class will also examine how groups evaluate and analyze ideas, resolve problems, and make key decisions.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will demonstrate a basic understanding of the ProACT model of decision-making;
- Students will be able to identify logical fallacies and hindrances to critical thinking;
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of groupthink and identify ways to avoid it;
- Students will recognize the role emotional intelligence and group dynamics play in group decision-making;
- Students will explain how to apply these concepts to personal decision-making and future practice.

**Course Requirements:** For this course you will be evaluated on the following assignments:

- “Biff Tannen” analysis (10 percent)
- Smart Choice Decision paper (20 percent)
  
  This assignment will be to take a decision, real, current, or past or future, and write out a plan following the ProACT model described in the text and discussed in class.

- **12 Angry Men** analysis (Mid-term – 20 percent)
  
  For our discussion of “12 Angry Men” I want you to prepare a bullet point analysis of the issues for discussion that will be identified in class. The bullet point analysis should highlight key points for answers to each of the questions.

- **Thirteen Days** analysis (Final – 35 percent)
  
  For this final project you will focus on leaders who exercised judgment under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity. More specifically, this case focuses on a decision-making process that ultimately resulted in a successful resolution to a crisis. You will identify the critical events and processes that shaped the decision-making process and analyze the strategy and execution (or was it just good luck?) in the result.

- Contributions (15 percent)
Class participation is a very important part of the learning process in this course. You will be evaluated on your contributions as part of that participation. A contribution is a comment or reflection from you that possesses one or more of the following properties:

- Offers a different and unique, but relevant insight to the issue;
- Moves the discussion forward to generate a deeper, richer appreciation of the concept or issue;
- Transcends the ‘I feel’ syndrome. That is, it includes references to the readings, cases, or exercises and identifies possible tradeoffs or dilemmas associated with ethical decision-making.

**Grading:** Undergraduate course grades include: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, and F.

- A 100-93
- A- 92-90
- B+ 89-87
- B 86-83
- B- 82-80
- C+ 79-77
- C 76-73
- C- 72-70
- D+ 69-67
- D 66-60
- F 59 and below

**Attendance:** Please review the BA LS Student Handbook in the section, “Class attendance/absence” (http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/student-handbooks). You are required to attend all classes, except for documented emergencies or university permitted absences. **Three (3) absences may result in a failing grade for the course.** You are responsible, and will be held accountable, for any work missed due to an absence, late arrival or early exit.

**Academic Integrity:** Georgetown University has an *Honor System* to which it strongly adheres, and you have signed an *Honor Pledge* upon your matriculation. Familiarize yourself with this system and pledge, and follow them completely; they can be found in your BA LS Student
Handbook under the section “Academic Integrity,” or http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53516.html. Academic dishonesty, cheating and plagiarism, all of which are violations of the Honor System and Honor Pledge, will not be tolerated. If the Honor Council determines that you are in violation of the Honor System and Honor Pledge, then you will receive an F (failure) grade for this course.

Students with Disabilities Policy: Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm) before the start of classes to allow their office time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

Classroom Etiquette: Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers, or other communication devices while in class. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of other’s views and opinions.

University Resources:

-Georgetown University Writing Center (Lauinger Library, 217A; 202-687-4246; http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/)

-Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; http://ldss/georgetown.edu/)

-Counseling and Psychiatric Services (One Darnall Hall; 202-687-6985; http://caps.georgetown.edu/)

Class Calendar - The following schedule is subject to change.

Jan. 20 – Recognizing and Avoiding Critical Thinking Hindrances, Propaganda and Logical Fallacies

Jan. 27 – First Assignment due – “Biff Tannen”
The Realities of Decision-Making, Individual, Interpersonal and Institutional Dynamics that affect Decision-Making
Smart Choices, Chap 10

Feb. 3 – Smart Choices – How to think about, how to define, and how to clarify what you’re really trying to solve
Smart Choices, Chaps 1-3
Drive, Chaps 1-2

Feb. 10 – Spring Break – No Class

Feb. 17 – Decision under Uncertainty – Alternatives, Consequences, Trade-Offs
Smart Choices, Chaps 4-7
Drive, Chaps 5-7

Feb. 24 – The Wise Decision-Maker – How to account for your appetite for risks, How to plan ahead, How to make wise decisions a way of life
Smart Choices, Chaps 8, 9, 11
Drive, Chaps 8-9

Mar. 3 – Prepare to Be Wrong
Drive, Chaps 10-12

Mar. 10 - Assignment 2 due – Smart Choice paper


Mar. 24 – Group Decision-Making – Groupthink

Mar. 31 – Group Decision-Making – Twelve Angry Men (movie should be watched prior to this class.)

April 7 – Assignment 3 due – Twelve Angry Men analysis

April 14 – Judgment Under Uncertainty – Thirteen Days

April 21 – Final class – Assignment 4 - Analysis of Thirteen Days due 9 AM May 10

Late Assignments: The expectation is that assignments should be turned in (hard copy or electronic copy) on the due date; however, I am aware of the reality of students with
full-time jobs, families, and other obligations. I want your best effort and best work, not something incomplete, or something you wouldn’t be proud to turn in. Please discuss with me if extra time is needed to complete an assignment. Late assignments that haven’t been discussed with me and haven’t been turned in by the next class following the due date will be lowered one full letter grade.