

# Ethical Muscle Memory

ETHICS CONNECTION

Critical knowledge, skills, and attitudes are vital in displaying professional ethics



Sitting in the salon with my big black cape on, I cringed as my stylist was telling me a story about one of her clients. To be clear, she was not giving me private information or revealing a secret, it was just a funny story. That said, somehow I felt that I was involved with breaking some rule.

After being in health care for many years, it is in my nature not to discuss my clients, and I most definitely would never share names with others. Perhaps I viscerally feel that all professions should follow privacy standards. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1996. With the onset of HIPAA, and the training we receive in health care, we have been groomed to give personal attention to our clients and patients, but then

leave that personal interaction at work, not sharing their names or information with others.

Keeping personal information private is just one of the ethical categories that we practice daily in our field. It is in our nature to protect privacy, which becomes automatic. We might call this “ethical muscle memory,” as muscle memory is the ability to reproduce a particular movement without conscious thought, acquired as a result of frequent repetition of that movement. (Oxford Dictionary)

How is your ethical muscle memory? It is second nature, or do you have to work on it?



**Kristin Klinefelter, MS, RDN, LDN** has been making ethical decisions in the nutrition and healthcare consulting field since 1998. From turning down a \$100 bill when a wellness camper asked her to skip a workout and bring him to a restaurant, to end-of-life feeding decisions with patients, she is thankful for our professional code of ethics and the support of colleagues along the way.

## DEFINING ETHICS

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. (Wikipedia)

In the foodservice and nutrition world, ethics typically refers to our clients/patients/residents/students, but it can also involve interactions with our employees and colleagues, vendors, and community members. One could argue the term *work ethic* also has a place here, as we consider those with a strong work ethic noble and “right.”

Sharon K. Anderson, an ethical therapist and professor, wrote an article titled “Your Ethic Muscles: What Shape Are They In? Fit or Flabby?” She encouraged professionals to work

- giving raises according to policy
- Treating all employees the same and holding them to identical standards
- Accurately and honestly reporting spending and revenue
- Charging a fair price for retail items
- Respecting patients’ or clients’ privacy
- “Doing no harm” as you use food to nourish and heal individuals

As you can see from the infographic titled *Ethics KSAs for the CDM, CFPP*, you must possess critical knowledge, skills, and attitudes in this area. Let’s review a few scenarios to dig a little deeper.

## SCENARIO 1

### TO WORK YOUR ETHICAL MUSCLES:

1. Stay accountable to colleagues by networking
2. Read the profession’s code of ethics and other literature on the topic



their ethical muscles in three ways. First, we should stay accountable to our colleagues by networking. Secondly and thirdly, we should read our profession’s code of ethics as well as other literature on the topic. You can read the CDM, CFPP Code of Ethics and ANFP’s Values Statement on our website. Links are provided under Resources.

In your role as a CDM, CFPP, the list of ethical duties can include:

- Hiring honest, hardworking people
- Objectively giving employee reviews, and

Dan, CDM, CFPP, had a busy day conducting employee reviews. The last person to review was his son’s best friend, Cody. Dan felt a bit awkward reviewing Cody so he simply asked him to “sign here” on his excellent review, giving him a fifty cent per hour raise.

### Ethical Solution

In Dan’s case, he was not practicing fairness (Attitude) or following policy & procedures (Knowledge). Cody was not treated the same as other employees. It would be okay for Dan

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to ask a colleague in HR to attend the review with Cody and even voice his discomfort about the review: *“Cody, I know this might be a bit awkward, but it is important for us to sit down and review your job performance, as well as discuss any concerns you have about your position. I also would love to discuss your goals for advancement in the department.”* Dan would be showing his approachability on difficult topics (Attitude) and his ability to communicate and make decisions (Skills).

### SCENARIO 2

Lori, CDM, CFPP, has worked in the same facility in her small town for 30 years. She knows most of the residents before they move in. This week during coffee hour at church, she was approached by John, whose wife Nancy had just been admitted to the rehab unit. John was wondering about Nancy’s recent lab

work and speech therapy session. Lori used her mobile device to log in to the electronic medical record and show John lab results for Nancy. The other members sitting at that table also chimed in with questions and personal stories about their cholesterol.

### Ethical Solution

Lori was not only breaking HIPAA laws (Knowledge), she was not comfortable with approaching a difficult topic (Attitude). An appropriate response to John would be: *“John, I understand that you are concerned about Nancy’s health. Can we discuss this tomorrow in our facility conference room? How does 10:00 am sound?”* Lori would show empathy (Attitude) with this statement, as well as comply with healthcare law (Knowledge) and clinical policy & procedure (Knowledge).



### SCENARIO 3

The yogurt parfaits have been a hit with students and faculty at ABC University. Jeff, CDM, CFPP, cannot keep up with the demand. His vendor is offering a special on a display case this month, so Jeff ordered one and got started on pricing and POS material. On delivery day, the truck left two display cases and only one was listed on the invoice. Jeff's staff member that helped with the delivery that day decided he could use the extra display case in his dorm and sell parfaits and beverages for some extra cash. The next week, at a director's meeting, the dorm director complimented Jeff on putting the display case in the dorm. Jeff was completely confused by this and contemplated how he should approach this when he got back to his kitchen.

#### Ethical Solution

Jeff is confronted with an ethical dilemma. There might be several right ways to handle this, which could even escalate to legal action against the employee. I encourage you to sit with this scenario a bit and explore your Ethics KSAs to assess how you would handle this. The goal when handling ethical scenarios like this is for your knowledge, skills and attitudes to work automatically, and to handle the situation with objective steps. Focusing on the behavior and not the person will allow you to take the correct steps to make the wrong situation right. Let that ethical muscle memory work for you. Using resources such as policy and procedures, your HR department, and even legal counsel as needed will help.

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#### Access These ANFP, CBDM Resources:

- ANFP Values Statement. [www.ANFPonline.org/values](http://www.ANFPonline.org/values)
- CDM, CFPP Code of Ethics. [www.CBDMonline.org/Codeofethics](http://www.CBDMonline.org/Codeofethics)

## REFERENCES

- Anderson S. *Your Ethic Muscles: What Shape Are They In? Fit or Flabby?* Psychology Today website. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-ethical-therapist/201201/your-ethic-muscles-what-shape-are-they-in-fit-or-flabby>. Posted January 15, 2012. Accessed July 8, 2020.
- ANFP Values Statement. [www.ANFPonline.org/values](http://www.ANFPonline.org/values). Accessed July 8, 2020.
- CDM, CFPP Code of Ethics. [www.CBDMonline.org/Codeofethics](http://www.CBDMonline.org/Codeofethics). Accessed July 8, 2020.
- *The Ethical Decision Making app* from Santa Clara University. <https://www.scu.edu/ethics-app/>. Accessed July 8, 2020.

Looking at all the potential ethical scenarios you encounter on a day-to-day basis can be overwhelming. However, if you continue to focus on objective information and break down each KSA, you will find that you may have strong ethical muscle memory. If you feel like you could use some more practice in one area, seek out a mentor or read more on the topic. There is even “an

app for that” which can be downloaded to your smart phone or accessed online. Check out the Ethical Decision Making app from Santa Clara University at <https://www.scu.edu/ethics-app/>. Like many areas of your profession, focus and practice of the knowledge, skills, or attitudes will strengthen your ethical muscles even more. **E**

## ETHICS CE Questions | ETHICS CONNECTION



*This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.*

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Reading *Ethical Muscle Memory* and successfully completing these questions online has been approved for 1 hour of Ethics continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. CE credit is available ONLINE ONLY. To earn 1 Ethics CE hour, access the online CE quiz in the ANFP Marketplace. Visit [www.ANFPonline.org/market](http://www.ANFPonline.org/market) and select “CE Articles.” If you don’t see your article title on the first page, then search the title, “*Ethical Muscle Memory*.” Once on the article title page, purchase the article and complete the CE quiz.

- Ethics is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of:
  - Good and bad people
  - Right and wrong conduct
  - True and false information
- HIPAA stands for:
  - Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
  - Health Initiatives Protect Administrator Actions
  - Health Insurance Privacy Assessments & Actions
- The term for the ability to reproduce a particular movement without conscious thought, acquired as a result of frequent repetition of that movement is:
  - Practice
  - Perfection
  - Muscle memory
- KSA is an acronym for:
  - Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes
  - Knowledge, Structure, Assessment
  - Kitchen Skills Aware
- When discussing a tough ethical issue with an employee, remember to focus on the \_\_\_\_\_ and not the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Strengths, weaknesses
  - Behavior, person
  - Group, individual
- Some professionals you may want to enlist when making ethical decisions could be:
  - Human resources professionals
  - Legal representatives
  - Both professions could be helpful
- To strengthen your ethical muscles, you should:
  - Network with colleagues to remain accountable
  - Read the CDM, CFPP Code of Ethics
  - Both answers would strengthen your ethical muscles

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