**What is Ethics?**

“The study of principles relating to right and wrong conduct; morality; the standards that govern the conduct of a person, especially a member of a profession.”

**What Are Morals?**

“The quality (positive or negative) that renders something desirable or valuable; the degree of importance you give to something.”

**What Are Values?**

“Of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior, especially for teaching right behavior; conforming to a standard of right behavior; sanctioned by or pejorative on one’s conscience of ethical judgment.”
Ethics, Morals, and Values

So how do these three terms relate to each other? Why do they matter? Well as individuals, the first encounter with any of these concepts was probably an encounter with morals, or with concepts of morality. People are taught right from wrong from a very early age by their parents, siblings, immediate, and extended family members. That education continues in institutional forms as well, and also from a very early age. People are taught the principles of right and wrong in school, at their places of worship, and to a lesser degree, in their neighborhoods and communities growing up. These lessons starting as a young child help people as individuals develop their own sense of morality of what is right and wrong. One’s life experiences will also play a role in that development.

In the case of many individuals, their religious upbringing played a role in their moral development. Many of the institutionalized religions share commonalities with respect to their moral teachings. Their prohibitions on many crimes were a basis for many of the crimes in our criminal codes of today. They defined some of the most basic and most significant wrongs—the cosmic level “do not’s.”

Whether these morals were learned from family, friends, community, school, or the church, most individuals have an established set of morals that they operate by the time they are in junior high school. This basic foundation continues to grow and mature as individuals do. By the time individuals are adults, they have a solid moral foundation that they reference as they move through every aspect of their lives.

As people mature into adulthood, they start to see things for themselves, and they often start to differentiate their own values from those of their parents. Those individuals raised by their parents will often share the same moral foundation as their parents, but their values may differ. Values deal with those things that one considers most important. Morals often deal with the question of right and wrong whereas values don’t necessarily emphasize that distinction. Values are a reflection of what the individual considers most important. If that individual values money over doing what is right, then that individual may be willing to do what he or she believes is wrong if it can bring that individual enough money.
People's morals can shape their values, and it's also possible their values can conflict with their morals. Where do ethics come into play? Ethics can be viewed as the intersection of morals and values. When looked at from the perspective of organizations and/or professions, ethics is the standard of behavior for members of the organization or profession. Members of the organization or the profession determine what values are important to the organization or to the profession, and these values are often based on the shared morals of the membership. Other values may not be based on shared morals but instead based on principles related to business or related to the specific profession.

A code of ethics works to eliminate some of the personal differences of opinion when dealing with ethical dilemmas, when faced with a decision-making situation. Two reasoned, intelligent individuals can view a particular situation quite differently and based on their own set of morals and personal experiences, the two reach a totally different conclusion as to acceptable behavior in the circumstances. A code of ethics will clarify the type of response that is the right thing to do in that circumstance.

Keep in mind, however, that the right thing to do is not always the legal thing to do and sometimes, the legal thing to do may not be the right thing to do. Also, the right thing for an individual who is in business for him–or herself may not be the right thing to do when employed by a particular organization.

References
