



## Making the Call: Some Parting Reflections

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The APA Ethics Code states that “in the process of making decisions regarding their professional behavior, psychologists must consider this Ethics Code...and “undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence.” There are a wide variety of resources available to CPA members who wish to provide competent and ethical services to their clients. In addition to reading *The California Psychologist*, talking with other psychologists and consultation with Dr. Chuck Faltz, CPA membership also provides members with confidential consultation with members of the CPA Ethics Committee.

My turn to write this column coincides with the completion of my sixth and last year of service on the Ethics Committee, so I hope it will be helpful to describe the process and experience of taking the calls as a way of encouraging readers to “make the call.”

1. *It takes courage to make the call:* I want to commend callers for their courage in making the call. In spite of whatever reluctance or ambivalence callers may be experiencing, it still takes courage to make the call and share one’s concerns with a stranger. How often have most of us struggled with an issue and decided to not consult and try to sort things out by ourselves? Jan Sonne, PhD (2005) wrote a paper for the CPA Ethics Committee encouraging consultation aptly titled *How to Avoid Doing What You Ordinarily Would Not Do and Causing Harm: Ethical Decision-Making in Professional Practice*. Ultimately the decision to call is influenced by many factors, some situational and some temperamental, but it is a choice that callers ultimately need to make. My advice is to do it — it will make a difference!
2. *Who are the callers?* In my experience callers range from newly licensed to seasoned psychologists, with a wide range in between. Callers come from diverse work settings, although my impression is that more often callers are practicing independently. I have also answered calls from psychologists in community mental health, correctional and academic settings.
3. *What are the calls about?* My impression is that there is a wide range of ethical questions, with many often reflecting questions about informed consent, confidentiality and its limitations, concerns about employer policies and more recently calls concerning issues about tele-health and out-of-state delivery of services. Sometimes calls involve concerns about the ethical conduct and behavior of colleagues, supervisors and supervisees.
4. *How soon are calls answered?* We try to respond to calls within 24 hours, although often there is an initial degree of phone tag until the consult occurs.
5. *How can callers prepare for the consult?* The more effective callers are concise about their question and have access to the current APA Ethics code. My style has been to collaboratively conceptualize the ethical issues and assist in a decision-making process. Callers typically arrive at a solution through this process, although sometimes I consulted with the Ethics Committee for additional input for the caller.
6. *Every call matters:* As a caller you may not realize the impact your call might have on the committee and potentially a larger audience. Your call is confidential, but the specific situation might address an issue that can be shared with a wider audience for the benefit of others. Sometimes the question becomes a topic of discussion that might advance our thinking about a complex issue. Sometimes a call becomes a “tipping point” that perhaps inspires a colleague to write a column about that topic. *Whatever its impact for the consultant, the caller or the committee, every call counts and matters.*

These personal observations are consistent with the APA Ethics Code that expects psychologists to maintain their competence in a variety of ways, including proactive endeavors and consultation with colleagues on an ongoing basis. California psychologists are fortunate to have this resource available to them as part of the CPA membership that provides responsible, confidential and usually rapid consultations.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be of service to California psychologists and to have worked with this talented and dedicated Ethics Committee. I feel I have received as much as I may have given in this service, and I encourage others to consider ways to serve our community of psychologists and ultimately the public for the greater good of all.



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