

You're Out!

I was in a crouched position as I took a lead at first base. The third base coach had already given me my sign. He gave me the steal sign. I was rearing and ready to go. I could hear the first base coach giving me some encouraging words and subtle indications. I went through the stealing process in my mind. I got the sign from the coach. I took my lead as soon as the pitcher was on the pitching rubber. I watched the pitcher's eyes as he went into his wind up. I watched him carefully as he started his motion. I noticed that he was throwing back to first, so I dove back with plenty of time. Then the process began all over. I got the sign from the coach; he gave me the steal sign again. I took my lead when the pitcher was on the rubber. I watched him get into his wind up. I watched as he started his motion, and he crossed his legs. The crossing of his legs was like the gun that tells the runners in a race to begin.

I took off to second base as fast as my legs could carry me. The pitcher, however, had a strong arm and the ball reached home plate quickly. The catcher in one quick motion leapt up with the ball in his hand and fired to second base. As the ball entered the second shortstop's glove, I began to slide feet first into second base. The field was quite dry, so my slide created a cloud of dust to rise. This cloud however did not obscure my sense of touch. I felt the tag being applied to me just a split second before my foot touched second base.

I stood up at second and saw the umpire running over to second base. I looked around and saw the expectant look on the faces of the people around me. The umpire had not made a call yet. The assistant umpire walked over to the main umpire and they exchanged confused looks. Then they both walked over to me, and the main umpire asked me, "Were you safe?"

I was instantly in shock. The umpire was asking me, a player and a biased party, to say whether I was safe or not. I had never seen this before. I, however, knew what most people in my situation would do. Most people would lie and say, "Yeah. I was safe by a mile." Behind me I could hear the shortstop saying, "Come on, man. You know you were out."

I then thought about all of the things that my coaches had told me about sportsmanship. I remember that they told me to always perform to the best of my ability and to always play the game fairly. They told me that losing honestly was better than winning dishonestly. I took a good look toward the dugout and could see the eager expressions on my teammates' faces and the emotionless look on my coach's face. I then turned back to the umpire and said, "I was tagged out sir." The umpire then said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah. I'm sure." The umpire turned around and lifted his fist, indicating that I was out.

I could hear the shouts of joy coming from the opposing dugout and from their fans. I could also hear the sighs of despair coming from my team's dugout and from our spectators. As I walked into the dugout, I heard a parent yell out, "Take him out of the game! He doesn't care about this team!" I suddenly felt disappointed in myself and sullenly sat on the bench.

I then heard my coach call me aside. I prepared myself, expecting my coach to chew me out for not lying to the umpire. I looked at him and still saw no expression on his face. He then slowly began to speak. "Son," he said, "you sure disappointed those people on the stands." I did not reply. He went on, "Don't beat yourself up about it. Maybe if you had been Johnny or Juan, you would have lied to the umpire, but you aren't and you didn't lie to him." I heard this comparison and grew even more ashamed. Then he said, "You did the right thing. You showed

sportsmanship. You are a great person. Now, get back in that dugout and keep supporting your team.” I was caught off guard at first, but then I felt a huge weight come off of my shoulders. As I walked back to the dugout, I turned back to my coach and said, “Thank you, sir.”

To me, ethics is doing right by a person’s own morals. In baseball ethics and sportsmanship mean the same thing to me. Without ethics, our world would be thrown into chaos. Ethics can come from different places for different people. My main ethics arise from what my family has passed on to me and from my own reason. A person should not be judged based on the ethical standards of others. They should be judged by their own standards, as long as they do not harm anyone else. They should not be judged by what a majority of society deems ethical.

As an older sister, you might assume that I am used to carrying the weight of responsibility, being required to set a moral example for my younger sisters and all. But it's not always easy to do the right thing. In fact, in my experiences it is *rarely* easy. It takes courage to speak up for what you feel is right, and it takes even more when the crowd around you seems to be of the opposite opinion. It's never easy for me to admit when I'm wrong, especially if it's my younger sister who is right. Nonetheless, I try to maintain a functional moral compass and set an honorable example. I accept responsibility for my actions, whether they yield positive or negative consequences, and I do not push the blame onto others. Last December, however, I was faced with a situation that was so beyond anything I'd ever had to deal with before that it completely challenged my integrity and forced me to prove my ethics.

My sisters and I were home alone, and had spent many nights home alone before without incident. Despite what many assume about the mischief unsupervised teenage girls could get up to, we aren't inclined towards reckless behavior and usually spent the nights at home on the computer or watching a movie, talking together in the bathroom while one of us sat in the bath and the others played with makeup. At seventeen, I'm the oldest and though it's never really discussed, my mother expects me to look after my fifteen and fourteen year old sisters when she's not around. But because we'd spent so many nights on our own before, I didn't really think anything of it. This night hadn't seemed any different at the start of the evening, but by the time 10 o'clock rolled around and the flames were leaping into the smoky night sky, our neighbors from several blocks around gathered in front of our burning home as

the firefighters continued to fight the blaze, there was a great and undeniable change I felt in myself. A tragedy had occurred, and I had to answer for and take responsibility for it.

The worst part wasn't the panic I experienced when we heard sounds in the garage and fled to the back of our home, hiding from an imagined Intruder, nor was it the terrifying realization that our house was on fire and we had to escape. It wasn't even the feeling of numb loss I felt when I stood in front of the house and realized that most, if not all of our possessions were gone and that we would need to find a new place to live. The worst part was when my mother came running down the driveway, held me by my shoulders and cried. "What have you done? What have I told you?" because I knew that even though I wasn't necessarily the one who suggested having a fire or improperly disposed of the ashes, I was the oldest and should have used better judgment.

The details aren't very important but basically, one army sisters wanted to have a fire in our fireplace that evening. I was in the room while she started it, and remained in there the whole twenty minutes it burned before dying down. I was present while she cleaned out the fireplace half an hour later, not thinking anything of it as she swept all the ashes into a paper bag and took it into the garage. I was not directly responsible but I still had my part in the series of actions that led to the unintended destruction of our home. I was there throughout the entire evening and I didn't even think that it might be an unwise idea for us, three teenage girls who were somewhat familiar with fire safety, to have a fire. As the oldest daughter, and as someone who is not far from being an adult, it reflects poor decision-making and an alarming inability to recognize danger that I allowed it to occur.

That night, everyone was asking us questions. The firefighters spoke to me and my sisters, asking us for our names and ages and for us to detail what had happened. The questions from my mother were more specific, for she wanted to know who had done what, how it began, whether the fire was the result of some electric issue or random explosion. We couldn't let her think that, and yet none of us spoke up, I didn't want her to know that it had been one of us, that it was our fault. I didn't want to lose her trust and respect, and I didn't want her to know how careless I had been. But I knew that lying to her would be worse than admitting a mistake, no matter how big of a mistake this had been or how bad the consequences of telling her the truth might be. I finally explained her that one of us had gotten the idea to have a fire, and she listened as I described what exactly had happened. She was very upset but more than that, she was thankful that my sisters and I were all okay, and she reminded us that the important thing was that we had all survived.

It seems like such a small moment in the midst of such a tumultuous night, but that decision I had to make in telling my mother the truth made the most of an impression on me. I've never had a time when I had to stop and really question whether to lie or be honest, when I had to weigh between risking negative consequences and getting out of them by being untruthful. I'm glad I told the truth then though, or else I would have to continue lying to not just my mother, but the rest of my family, and I would be stuck with the miserable truth. One can regret mistakes, but one can never regret doing the right thing. That's what having ethics means; recognizing what the right thing is and having the courage to go through with doing it, even when knowing that it won't be easy on you.

Ethical Dilemma

Imagine this scene: through a dressing room mirror at a local mall, two teenaged girls enter with colorful tops and printed sundresses. As the girls try on the clothes and critique each other, one girl named Stacy slips the dress into her bag. The other girl, Dezi, sees her and looks at her with a confused face. "I can lend you money if you need it, so you don't have to steal," says Dezi. "Oh, I have money. I just don't see the point in buying something I can get for free," says Stacy. Dezi is shocked and on edge, staring at Stacy in disbelief and struggling to hold her position. "I don't want any part of this, so I'm just going to leave," says Dezi. "I can steal something for you, too, if you stay with me," says Stacy, very convincingly. Dezi seems unsure, almost seeming to give in, but she decides to stick with her gut. "No, that's not what I do. I don't want to get involved in something that can end very badly," says Dezi. Stacy knows Dezi isn't going to give in at this point. With much frustration, Stacy takes the expensive sundress out of her purse.

As the girls exit the dressing room, an employee comes up to them. Dezi's heart starts beating frantically. "May I see your garments please?" says the employee. She counts each dress and shirt that Stacy and Dezi had. She looks at them with an odd expression as if she knows how close they were to doing something wrong. She hands them their items and says they are fine. Stacy seems embarrassed and relieved at the same time. The employee had been watching the girls the whole time and was sure that they would steal something. At this point, Dezi is thrilled that she stood her ground and didn't give in.

I am Dezi, and I believe that we are constantly choosing between right and wrong.

Sometimes we make mistakes, but hopefully we can learn and change to do better. What some people don't realize is that every action we take makes a difference; the more we practice, the better we become. My mom always tells me, "Practice makes perfect, so be careful what you practice." Studies say that a person needs at least ten thousand hours to become successful at something, but obviously, we all have to start somewhere. Being a person of integrity starts with small steps that lead to character. Eventually, we can all reach a point at which society can't touch our integrity because we have finally become successful at it.

My own definition of ethics has been shaped by the many sources of guidance in my life: family, friends, and church. These forces have taught me love, which is a foundation of ethics. When others love us, they treat us with compassion, honesty and respect. This teaches us to carry those values into all that we love, our friendships, our communities and ourselves. When we live ethical lives, we make decisions based on compassion, honesty and respect for ourselves and for others.

Although I've had ethical dilemmas in the past, I have never let them cause me to second guess my own principles, but only make me a more honest person. I believe being ethical is staying true to the positive values with which we are raised and surrounding ourselves with people who have similar standards. I know I have much to learn, and I still have much to overcome. I'm thankful to have first learned to love because that's the main ingredient in building good ethics.

Ethics: a word often used, but seldom truly understood. It is a concept that exists in every culture and religion, but is rarely appreciated or accepted. A region's system of morals stems from its religious foundation and social standards established specifically to that particular time and place. No two places share the exact set of ethics at the exact time. Thus, an ever-changing moral code is created by the diversity of ethics existing at anyone point in time. The ethics we abide by today will not be the same as the next generation's code of morals, just as our morals are not the same as our elders' ethics. However, all ethics originate from more or less the same basic rules. Thus, ethics are a highly significant component in the development of any society. Without a set of morals, a society can neither grow nor flourish due to constant moral dilemma and setbacks.

In my own personal life, I have discovered the importance of ethics in building and maintaining relationships. Even the strongest friendship can be harmed by a moment of ethical weakness in one person. Even a righteous person can be affected by a temporary lapse of ethical behavior.

When I began high school four years ago, I was anxious to make new friends and fit in right away. So when a sophomore student quickly befriended me, I was ecstatic. Not only would I continue my friendships with my freshmen class, but now I would meet a lot of his friends in the sophomore class. I immediately noticed his intelligence, intense motivation, and enthusiasm. It was flattering and exciting that he wanted to include me. As if that wasn't enough, he soon invited me to join a service club he had founded the year prior. The club was an off-campus, student-run group of friends who volunteered in the community in a variety of

ways. For example, we restored a house in Pasadena, volunteered at Union Station, cleaned up litter from our local park, worked at Foothill Unity, and made gift donations to Hillsides. Since I was a Boy Scout, I was already in the early stages of my Eagle Project and the club offered to add my project to the calendar. Everything about the club seemed right; it was a lot of fun and it was benefiting our community at the same time. What more could I ask for?

At the end of sophomore year, I was offered the task of maintaining the website with the promise that I would in turn be given an officer position when the upperclassmen graduated. But something seemed to change over the following summer. Maybe since I was documenting all of our activities on a timeline with lots of photos and all the project details, including which members participated, I started to notice discrepancies. For instance, we decided to gather used clothing and shoes to donate to a local collection bin. We took photos with members holding bags full of clothes. Strangely, the clothes were not deposited in the bins. We left with bags of clothes and shoes still in the car. As it turns out, the bags were only for the purpose of publicity and contained clothes that were not intended to be given away. I didn't say anything, but posted as little as I could about the project hoping it was an isolated incident or perhaps even an accident. But this dishonesty continued. When we cleaned up a city park for another service activity, again I felt uneasy. The officers removed the garbage bags from the metal cans stationed in the park and staged the photo so it appeared that we had collected far more trash than we did. I wasn't sure about it since we did, in fact, clean up a lot of the park. Still uncertain, I compromised and made a post without the false photos. I was immediately commanded to add the fake photos. I reluctantly obeyed.

The most difficult situation was when the club offered to help with my Eagle project. I was glad to have their help until I realized I did not need it. I had finished the project ahead of schedule and no longer needed the help of the members who had eagerly signed up. Since the members were never actually involved, I removed the event post for my project from the club website as I felt it was no longer relevant. I was asked to repost the project and report that all the officers had attended and participated. Although none of the officers considered it outright lying, I felt strongly that it was deceitful and misleading to post activities in a way that was not truthful. The officers tried to convince me that we were not lying since we completed a portion of the tasks. I struggled with *this* decision for awhile and ultimately decided I would step down from my position instead of continuing this unethical practice. In addition, my friend informed me that I would not be getting an officer's position since he didn't believe I was ready to support the club's philosophy. Needless to say, I left the club and never looked back.

I have no regrets and would make the same decision again even if it jeopardized a great friendship. Throughout this ordeal, I lost faith in a good friend who misconstrued the bigger picture and put our relationship aside so that he might advance himself. His deceit cost me little, but it cost him my trust. Our friendship remains, but never to be as strong as it once was, permanently marred by his error in judgment. However, my morals instruct me to forgive and so forgive I have. Simply stated, ethics help guide us in deciding right from wrong. Ethics direct us in choosing how to act and what to say. Simply put, ethics are the guiding force which preserves our integrity, morals, and character, but the practice of ethics is never that simple.