ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN PUBLIC SERVICE

STARTING POINT

The LIGHT of God surrounds us,
The LOVE of God unfolds us,
The POWER of God protects us; and
The PRESENCE of God watches over us.”
“ I slept and dreamt that LIFE WAS JOY,
I woke up and saw LIFE WAS SERVICE,
I acted and behold, SERVICE WAS JOY. ”

Rabinder Nath Tagore
To begin with, the Starting Premise is that Public Service is a PUBLIC TRUST.

Citizens expect Public Servants to serve the ‘Public-Interest’, with FAIRNESS, and Manage Public RESOURCES, properly on a daily basis. FAIR AND RELIABLE PUBLIC SERVICE INSPIRES PUBLIC-TRUST.”
Public Servants usually understand ETHICS to be a ‘prescribed’ and commonly shared ‘Values and Standards’ relating to:-

• **TRUSTWORTHINESS** (in the form of) honesty, Integrity, reliability and Loyalty;

• **RESPONSIBILITY** (in the form of) Accountability, Pursuit of Excellence and Self Restraint;

• **FAIRNESS** (in the Form of) Open and unbiased process, impartiality and equity; and

• **RESPECT** ( in the form of) Civility, courtesy, decency, tolerance and compassion; and

Thus ETHICS could be said to be ‘MORAL PRINCIPLES” and VALUES, that Govern the Behaviour of a PERSON or a GROUP , with regard to What is RIGHT or WRONG? Ethics sets STANDARDS , as to WHAT IS GOOD or BAD CONDUCT and DECISION-MAKING.
SIX ETHICS Of LIFE

i. Before you Pray- BELIEVE,
ii. Before you Speak- LISTEN,
iii. Before you Spend- Earn,
iv. Before you write- Think,
v. Before you Quit – Try, and
vi. Before you die- Live.
For Public Servants ESSENTIAL OF ETHICS, are depicted in the word – WATCH

Watch your WORDS,
Watch your ACTIONS,
Watch your THOUGHTS,
Watch your CHARACTER,
Watch your HEART.
An ETHICAL DILEMMA is a COMPLEX SITUATION, that often involves CONFLICT BETWEEN MORAL IMPERATIVES.

“ If there is a conflict between Intellect and the Heart, ALWAYS FOLLOW HEART. ”

Swami Vivekanand.
Late Sh. Shekhawat, the then Vice President of India, while delivering Lecture on Ethical Governance said:-

“Let me begin by stating that Reputation and Success of Governance depends upon, the conduct of Public Functionaries and what the Public believe about their conduct. It is therefore of Fundamental importance that Public Functionaries act justly and fairly to all, and not only paying lip service to Ethical conduct, but ensuring that these are manifestly and undoubtedly seen to be done. It is imperative that all Public Functionaries, upon accepting Government Employment recognize that they have a special DUTY, to be open, fair and impartial in their dealings with society. Personal self-interest should be subordinate to the Public- Good, in all circumstances, especially if circumstances arise, where possibility of a Conflict of interest may become an Ethical Dilemma.”
Personal Cost Ethical Dilemmas

Right – Versus-RIGHT Ethical Dilemmas and Conjoint Ethical dilemmas.
Ethical Dilemmas tend to arise from three critical Relationships:

- Civil Servants and Political Office Holders;
- Civil Servant and Citizens; and
- Intra-Civil Service (Ministries, Departments, and Agencies, that make up the Country’s or State Civil Service.)
Sometimes, in arriving at the RIGHT-THING–TO–DO, Public Servant may face a perplexing Question:

- Would refusal to oblige the Minter’s Directive not displease him, thereby straining the relation between the two?
- Would succumbing to Pressure of the Minister, with a view to pleasing him, not lead to violation of the acceptable ‘Accounting Standards and Practices’?
- Would such an Act not be inimical to overall Image of Public Service?
Facing such a Situation leads the Public Servant to ETHICAL DILEMMAS, wherein he has to consider:-

- Striking a ‘Balance’ between his ‘responsibilities as a Senior Executive’, and that of the Minister, as a Ministry’s Political Head;
- Up-hold the RULE –of – Law, due process and Fairness;
- Uphold the Highest Administrative, Financial, ethical and Moral Standards in the Public Service.
Speaking TRUTH TO THE POWER can be considered as an Important – INGREDIENT of PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND MORAL INTEGRITY of Public Servants.
Fundamental – Principles/Criteria to deal with Ethical Dilemmas in Public Service:–
Democratic ACCOUNTABILITY of Administration;
The Rule of Law and Principle of LEGALITY; and Professional INTEGRITY.

This is called the ALI model of ETHICAL REASONING IN PUBLIC SERVICE.
It is important to note there is no MAGICAL FORMULA, which TRANSFERS our PRESENT GOVERNMENT into ETHICAL GOVERNMENT, unless ALL OF US FOLLOW ETHICAL, MORAL and SPIRITUAL VALUES and SERVICE TO HUMANITY AS CARDINAL PRINCIPLE OF LIFE.
“You may suffer the Consequences for sometime, but as they say, when you ‘live' your ‘second innings’, you can than look back with Great Satisfaction, as to what you did.”

"When people hurt you, you just think of them as SANDPAPER. They may rub and scratch you painfully, but you end up SMOOTH and POLISHED, while they end up 'worn-out' and of no further use."
Thank you