

# Compliance & Ethics Professional

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SCCE and HCCA  
interview their 10,000th  
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Compliance & Privacy  
Analyst for the University  
of Virginia Health System

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# Rock in the pond ethics

- » Don't let emotions dictate your behavior or decisions
- » Always consider the "price to pay" *before* making a decision
- » Discernment is the key to effective decision making
- » Your values are the basis for decisions: know what they are
- » Be ready to take responsibility for unintended consequences after the decision has been made

Over the years as an ethics expert and speaker, I have tried to find an analogy that would help my clients understand the importance of discernment before making those tough decisions. It was while watching some kids throw rocks in a pond that I finally came to a realization.



Bucaro

Decision making is like throwing a rock in a pond. No matter how big or small the rock is, water is displaced. Likewise, no matter how "big" or "small" the decision is, people are affected. The key question here is: When is the time to think about those "ripples"—after you've thrown the rock, or while it is still in your hands? (For more on the decision-making process, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decision\\_making](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decision_making).)

Haven't we all been in the position where a decision needed to be made and we thought about it, and thought that we had all our bases covered? And after making the decision, there were ripples (i.e., consequences) that appeared that we didn't even think of, but now we're accountable for?

Another reality is if the rock is big enough and you throw it, it may splash up, back on you. Hasn't this been the story of the recession? Company executives in many different industries made decisions that have adversely affected the entire financial world, especially the 14 million unemployed in this country.

There are a few lessons here.

1. **When a decision needs to be made, hold the rock, hold, hold, hold**, until you are certain that
  - ▶ you know what the obvious ripples are; and
  - ▶ you can and will deal with any unforeseen ripples that occur based on your analysis.
2. **Don't let emotions dictate when to throw the rock.** Ask trusted colleagues who can be objective for their communal wisdom about the situation. Reason must always control emotions in decision making.
3. **Sometimes you just need to put the rock down** and gather more information, etc., before picking it up again for a toss. The danger here is that you think too long on it, or it stays in committee too long to be really effective.
4. **The bigger the rock (decision), the bigger the ripples (consequences).** Go slowly, choose well! Ask yourself: What does my gut (i.e., conscience, intuition, etc.) tell me about this? Then do it.
5. **Know what your values are before a decision is made**, so as to minimize any regret after a decision is made or the rock is thrown. Will these points save you from making tough decisions? No, but they will decrease the odds of making a seriously flawed or outright wrong decision. It's all about odds. So what are you willing to gamble? \*

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