

Ethics of Interpersonal Relationships

Robert W. Firestone & Joyce Catlett

Foreword

By Jon Carlson

The Ethics of Interpersonal Relationships

“He who is too busy doing good finds no time to be good.” Rabindranath Tagore

Why is it so difficult to do what we think is right? Living ethically should be a common occurrence in all households. I don't know about you, but I feel I should be closer to friends and families, donate more money to the needy, take better care of my body with only good foods and regular exercise, volunteer at the nursing home, and the list goes on. I guess I lack courage?

In graduate school I was fascinated by the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and his theory of moral development. I even attended a training seminar with him at Harvard University in the interest of learning to live by what I consider higher values. When I finished the program I was even more challenged to navigate life's different stages of development and to live a life based on principles.

In *The Ethics of Interpersonal Relationships*, Robert Firestone and Joyce Catlett identify the source of the ethical dilemmas that occur when trying to live a principled life. I am impressed with their candor in describing how we hurt those we love most and keep ourselves from the happiness we seek. This book provides a major shift in understanding why people are mean, unethical and not compassionate. As the authors state, “this work is an attempt to explain the source of human destructive behavior, how it manifests itself in personal relationships and suggests a treatment modality for coping with negative, acting-out behavior.”

Defenses are ways of thinking and acting which we believe will protect us from being hurt. However, they ultimately bring what they were meant to guard against. We can see this in the person who wants love but does not believe people can be trusted. Or the person who wants to get close but is afraid of being taken advantage of. Or even the person who grows up in the alcoholic family, vowing they will never do the same, only to marry an alcoholic or to become an alcohol dependent person.

The basic premise of this book is the theory that is outlined in two of Dr.

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Firestone's earlier works, *The Fantasy Bond* and *Voice Therapy*. The Fantasy Bond and Voice Process are the primary defense mechanisms that interfere with our ability to live by ethical principles, values, and ideals. Because the problem is psychological, this book approaches the subject of ethics from a point of view that is compassionate and understanding rather than one that is judgmental.

Robert Firestone and Joyce Catlett live by the ideals and principles that they put forth. A few years ago I was invited to Bob's home for dinner and I found myself in the midst of a circle of family and friends. Everyone present (men, women and children) actively participated in the evening: hosting, cooking, setting up and serving, and then cleaning up. After dinner, most of them gathered in the living room for an evening discussion, and I was invited to join them. Apparently, they meet often to talk about anything they want--from issues that they are personally struggling with to problems they are having with each other to just reporting how their day was. Participants were urged to speak openly and, when feelings arose, they were encouraged to feel them. As I sat observing, many issues were addressed and resolved in a short period of time. I left the evening I spent amongst Bob and his family and friends with feelings of admiration and respect for these courageous people. I had witnessed them actively involved in the process of living by the ethical principles that they aspired to.

It is my hope that this book receives a wide readership as it offers a major breakthrough as to how to make our lives principled through understanding psychological (not moral) processes. Thank you, Bob and Joyce, for your contribution to humanity.

In closing, remember the wise words of Mark Twain, "Always do right—this will gratify some and astonish the rest."

Jon Carlson, PsyD, EdD, ABPP

Distinguished Professor

Governors State University

Author, *Adlerian Therapy & Inclusive Cultural Empathy*

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