

## **Teaching to the Mission: Incorporating the Examen into Ethical Decision Making in a Professional Context**

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All public relations and advertising majors are required to take COMM 477 Strategic Communication Ethics and Society, a course in which students contemplate the ethical responsibilities of being persuasive communicators. In PR and advertising, communication has an agenda, usually in service of a client or employer. Though PR and advertising professionals are obligated to communicate truthfully, there are times when a client or employer's self-interest creates ethical conflicts for the professionals they employ. For that reason, we devote a semester to exploring ethical principles that will guide future professionals in ethical decision making and to discussing the professional values and loyalties that influence choices in this work.

I use a textbook — Christians, Clifford G., et al., *Media Ethics: Cases & Moral Reasoning*. 9th ed. (Allyn & Bacon, 2012) — that provides the “Potter Box Model of Moral Reasoning” as a tool for making ethical decisions prior to action; however, there was no tool for evaluation of outcomes after action had been taken, as part of ongoing reflection and discernment. The Ignatian Examen appeared to provide the missing piece, and I developed an assignment that required students to craft a Daily Examen for the job they imagined themselves doing after graduation.

Students loved the exercise. One student who was working part time as an account-based marketer, through which she created campaigns to be marketed directly to consumers based on their IP addresses, wrote me this note: “I wanted to let you know that I presented my examen to the ABM team at work and they loved the assignment so much that they are all taking the time to go through the process as well. I truly enjoyed the assignment and not only find it valuable for the class but for actual everyday work life.”

That was the goal. Below are the assignment distributed to the students and the Examen and essay developed by the student working in account-based marketing.

### **The Assignment:**

Our focus this semester is ethical decision making within professional communication contexts. To that end we've used the Potter Box method of moral reasoning, which asks us to resolve ethical quandaries by applying values, ethical principles, and loyalties. For the third critical analysis essay we each will develop an additional tool, an Ignatian Examen that we, as professional communicators, might use to heighten our ethical consciousness.

Jesuitresource.org defines the Examen as “a method of prayer that Ignatius of Loyola taught in his Spiritual Exercises. He considered it the most important thing a person could do each day.” The Examen’s specific usefulness to professional communicators is in its potential for embedding self-examination into our ongoing, daily ethical process. Whereas the Potter Box asks us to reflect and contemplate prior to a specific action (analogous to the Ignatian process of discernment), we engage the Examen after we act or at the end of the day, reviewing and reflecting upon our moral choices and their impact on others, the world around us, our profession, etc. By routinely using a professional communicator’s Examen, we would strengthen our faithfulness to our ethical commitment and approach our work each day with greater consciousness of the ethical dimensions of our professional decisions.

Please review the entry on Examen on jesuitresource.org, where you will find examples of daily and annual Examen and those already adapted for parents, managers, diversity, and ecology. You will notice that there are five sections to the Examen: thanksgiving, petition, review, response, and the look ahead. You also will notice that an Examen is commonly framed as a prayer. If you are uncomfortable engaging this project within the framework of a prayer, you do not need to incorporate a religious dimension. It also may be useful to read the entry on discernment.

Next, imagine yourself as a decision maker in the communication profession of your choice. As I fully expect each of you to realize your ambitions, please feel free to envision yourself five or ten years into a career. Reflect on the content of this course and others in your major and think about the kinds of ethical quandaries you might confront in your dream job. This will be determined not only by your job title and the work you do, but also by the people you work with, the people you work for, the clients you have, the demands of your industry, and so forth. Although we are laying the foundation for a self-reflective process, the values, ethical principles, and loyalties we’ve encountered in the Potter Box should inform your thinking.

Next draft a set of Examen guidelines, which should be a page long. Then write an essay explaining why you crafted the Examen as you did. Specifically, what are the ethical issues you expect to confront and who are the stakeholders?

### **One Student’s Response: Her Examen and Essay**

#### Examen for Account-based Marketing Specialist<sup>1</sup>

#### **Thanksgiving:**

I am grateful to have a job that I enjoy. Every day I am given the opportunity to collaborate and support a wonderful group of people.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Greg Carpinello, “A Daily Examen for Parents,” jesuitresource.org, <http://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/jesuit-a-z/Examen-for-Parents.cfm>.

**Petition:**

Before I review my day, I ask for honesty in my response that I did all possible to make this a productive work day.

**Review:**

- Did I wake up with an enthusiastic and positive outlook on my life?
- Did I take the opportunity to learn something new about my field of work?
- Did I actively work to complete projects?
- Did I take the time to review not only my work, but also my teammates' work?
- Was I openly collaborative with teammates?
- Did I take critique with grace and open my mind to all suggestions?
- Did I assume that all whom I encountered were well intentioned?
- How did I respond to challenges and frustration?
- Did I take the opportunity to share my ideas and opinions?
- Did I take a moment to break and breathe?
- Did I do all that was possible to be helpful and productive in the workplace?

**Response:**

- Do the responses highlight my strengths and weaknesses?
- Do any responses lead to the thought of change in how I work?

**Looking Ahead:**

- What changes will I make to ensure effectiveness and happiness in the work place?

The Examen for Account-based Marketing Specialist is an adapted version of the Jesuit Daily Examen for Parents. It explores the five points of thanksgiving, petition, review, response and looking ahead in the account-based marketing industry. It gives the opportunity for an account-based marketing specialist to reflect on his/her workday. The main focus of this Examen is to offer reflection of collaboration, productivity and above all, happiness in every day work life. Overall, an account-based marketing specialist will take the time to value collaboration, transparency, and strong relationships. He/she will be loyal to the company and its targeted accounts, and abide by Aristotle's golden mean ethical principle.

An account-based marketing specialist is faced with the task of creating campaigns targeted at specific companies, chosen by the sales team as "must win." Due to the necessity of working with others, an account-based marketing specialist must value collaboration, transparency, and strong relationships. Every day the specialist is in charge of viewing not only his/her work but also the work of his/her teammates. He/she must consistently be available to act as an advisor and facilitator to the account-based marketing team. When there are concerns or barriers to project completion, one must identify and resolve issues, mediate between parties and generally help to clear away the obstacles to success. It is important to collaborate with the team, be transparent about ideas and opinions, and build strong relationships so that each person is comfortable with

working with one another. These values will then transfer into the campaigns that are being built and will ultimately create a better-designed path to success.

An account-based marketing specialist must be loyal to the company he/she is working for and its targeted accounts. The goal of an account-based marketer is to attract the loyalty and advocacy of “must win” accounts through directly targeted campaigns. All campaigns that are run must be in accordance with all of the company guidelines and abide by company playbooks/recipes of execution. This is why the value of collaboration is so important. The more people who review a campaign, the less likely it is to have a mistake. Not following company guidelines could lead to misrepresentation of the company and hurt the overall brand. Due to each campaign being specifically targeted (i.e. it is created for one specific company and targeted to them by IP address), the specialist must also be loyal to the targeted accounts. The campaigns are not just made in one day. Each one requires thorough research of the account it is targeting so that it is sure to resonate and make an impact. Being loyal to the account means taking time to know exactly what the account is looking for and then creating a campaign that highlights that what it is looking for can be found at this company. In this industry, it is not enough to just be loyal to the company one is working for, but he/she must also be loyal to those they are approaching.

Lastly, an account-based marketing specialist will abide by the ethical principle Aristotle’s golden mean. It is always possible to do too much or to do too little. In the case of collaborating, it is important to have a middle way. It is easy to become caught up in one’s own ideas instead of listening to others. One must find a middle when it comes to working as a team. The reflection process becomes important because it gives time to review whether or not what is going on is working. It is important to listen to all of the people on the team after inputting one’s own opinion. It is harder to then open one’s mind to others ideas when they are not actively listening what others are saying. A middle ground must be determined so that working as a team is an easy process. This means not one person is always in control, it is an overall team effort with constant communication and collaboration. Remembering that it is possible to do too much or do too little is important to create a path of success.

In conclusion, the Examen for Account-based Marketing Specialist offers a way to reflect on the overall productivity in the workday. It is important to start the day with the reminder that not every person has the same opportunities one may have. It is also important to end the day with a reflection of how things could have been done better. The Examen focuses on happiness and productivity because happiness leads to productivity and positive thinking leads to happiness. This Examen gives one the opportunity to decide whether or not the daily routine is working for him/her. It also gives the opportunity for him/her to figure out how to change the routine to create a better overall work life experience.