



10 Things Principled People Do in the Face of Unprincipled Practices



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Even people with the best of intentions can engage in unprincipled practices from time to time: to save time, costs, to vent frustrations or in response to a personal belief in self-righteousness or righteous anger.

The vast majority of people are good hearted, value-based human beings. At work and in life, good hearted people can turn off their moral compass. They can be swayed because of fear (i.e., loss of job, status, promotion, ostracizing, etc.), to go along with a crowd, or because they do not think it is their right or role to question the actions or decisions of leaders whom they, assume, know better. They simply go along with decisions, policies, protocols, communications and rules that may be unprincipled.

Still, there are other people in life whose ethics are always situational and wildly flexible to suit their interests, positions, power, acquaintances, or goals. These people may engage in unprincipled practices for profit, power, positional gain, or personal immaturity reasons. They provoke everyone to seriously consider how strongly each person believes in their values, ethics and principles.

When an unprincipled action takes place or is instituted a revolt does not have to happen, but neither does compliance.

10 practices that principled people engage in in the face of unprincipled practices.

1. Hold firm to high ground.

Principled people don't comply automatically without questioning in some way to highlight the action's contradictions to principles or promises. Principled people do not comply just because others are giving in; out of a sense of obligation or fear of being ostracized or feeling different. In the face of unprincipled change, when something that people, companies or countries stood for is turned on end, and leaders who formerly gave lip service to these principles suddenly reverse course for the sake of expediency, profit, compliance or the revelation of their own unprincipled values, principled people stand on the ground vacated by unprincipled people. They stand in small ways or great ways, but they take a stand.

2. Give voice to universal principles.

Every day in casual conversations, state what is *universally* right, *universally* good, *universally* principled, *universally* ethical, and *universally* moral. Principled people do not get into debates or arguments about whether a principle is right according to a certain religion, cultural perspective or social perspective because they know that each of those arguments allows unprincipled people to use escape doors through which they can rationally excuse their unprincipled perspective, belief, behavior or statement. Principled people focus on *universal* principles, *universal* morals, *universal* ethics and *universal* values from which there is no escape.

Principled people are often humble and might say to themselves, ‘but who am I to be the voice of values? Doing so will make me a target if I do one wrong thing.’ This internal voice comes from a combination of humility and fear, but the principles of service to others, confidence and faith that a few others may resonate with the universal, will strengthen a voice.

3. Unabashedly Virtue Name.

Virtue naming asserts a virtue and makes a call for consistency: consistent application of a particular virtue. It may do so by naming inconsistencies. The purpose is not to engage in virtue-shaming: to shame someone, to humiliate and tear down someone (“*You’re a terrible person. You’re not compassionate at all.*”). However, virtue naming does call-out *inconsistencies* in word, behaviors, actions, decisions, and professed beliefs and character.

Virtue naming compares unprincipled objectives, statements and behaviors to the virtues and values that undergird the policy, practices and processes.

When virtue naming occurs people who have engaged in unprincipled acts may experience internal insecurity – self-shame – because virtue inconsistencies are named, but the purpose is not to shame. The purpose is to name so that inconsistencies can be corrected. A principled person may frontload their statements with “I know you’re a compassionate person, but these statements you’re making and these actions you’re taking, are not compassionate.”

4. See the good in everyone.

When someone, especially designated or professed leaders, engage in repeated unprincipled practices it can be difficult to see the actual goodness or the potential of goodness inside of a person who is engaging in unprincipled behaviors. However, principled people always commit to seeing goodness or knowing of the goodness inside of all people, even people who are engaging in unprincipled practices. They know that if they cease seeing or knowing the good inside, gradually principled people become unprincipled: gradually blaming, shaming, denigrating, denying the feelings or humanity of the other. Seeing the good in a person who is engaging in unprincipled behaviors does not mean that one tolerates unprincipled acts. It means that a principled person does not respond the way another person may respond.

5. Speak up and speak out.

Principled people make commitments to always rhetorically counter the actions of unprincipled people and consistently call-out, even in small ways, each time a communication reveals a leader's or colleague's unprincipled action, policy or statement that affects other people. They know that silence equals acquiescence. Silence breeds compliance. When the majority are silent in the face of supposed leaders giving in to unprincipled norms and practices, those who internally waiver, in strength and fortitude, give in. Those who waiver need principled people to always speak up and speak out about shifting norms, statements, reversals of course and direction, negation of principles and distortions of values. Speaking up and speaking out in response to even the smallest comment, seemingly inconsequential behavior, or report, reminds people, who may be wavering in the strength of their convictions or those who are not trained to ethically evaluate the consequences of unprincipled statements, that a statement or behavior is unprincipled. The statement or behavior goes against values and should not be tolerated.

Principled people who fervently believe in the dignity, respect, fairness and equality of all people do not simply abandon inclusionary policy, practices, phrases. They don't change processes because unprincipled people suddenly say that a term is toxic or hurts some people's feelings or is out of date. They don't tolerate unprincipled people trying to create ethical double-standards by asserting that they are truly respectful of and fair to others while also projecting themselves as victims and martyrs. Principled people do not reverse policy, practices or processes that protect the dignity and rights of others because some people feel emotionally insecure and act out, even if the acting out is enmasse.

6. Educate people in impromptu ways each day

Principled people constantly, steadily, purposefully educate people who may not understand the importance, relevance or ripple effects of

- An unprincipled act, policy, statement, joke
- A reversal of principles, policy, law
- An unprincipled change in process, criteria or rule
- The power of a vote in society or of a stockholder or in a community board
- Listening to opinions versus facts and giving a moral equivalency to opinions and facts
- Listening to and validating influencers and skewed news sources

They work with those who feel insecure by informing, asking them questions, offering new thoughts, challenging possible cognitive dissonances, inviting them to reflect about why they persistently feel a certain way, and understanding their points of view. They do this so other people gradually release unprincipled perspectives.

7. Engage in compassionate mirror medicine moments with others

For a few reasons, people who suffer consequences of unprincipled policy, practices, processes or programs implemented by others, may get angry with principled people instead of directing their frustration towards the unprincipled actors or changes that affect them.

This misdirection of emotions happens for a few reasons

- because of palpable fear from feeling pushed into uncomfortable zones,
- because they feel safe around the person to whom they are venting,
- because they displace the blame for their situation from the person who engaged in unprincipled practices to the principle-centered person
- because for some reason they believe they still need to give the person who engaged in unprincipled behavior trust and credibility

Regardless of the reason, people who suffer from the unprincipled policies, programs, processes and practices of others often blame those who stand up for principled practices, programs, processes and policy. This enables the people who engage in unprincipled behaviors to divide and conquer: retain power, promote their points of view, elevate their perspectives to equal status with universal principles and lessen resistance to unprincipled changes, thereby accepting negative outcomes for principled people.

Principled people calmly turn a mirror back onto a person who is suffering from the effects of unprincipled policies or practices. They point out the displacing, projecting behaviors and ask them to reconsider who shares responsibility for their suffering.

8. Band together with allies and be advocates for one another

Principled people do not allow their own biases or feelings to skew their perception of who a true ally or advocate may be. They do not bash or tear down the credibility, reputation or esteem of an ally or advocate because an ally may have made some mistake in their eyes. In the face of unprincipled policy changes, unprincipled program changes, unprincipled speech, unprincipled behaviors and practices principled people recognize their allies and advocates, and they build strong relationships.

Regardless of what form the ally or advocate appears, regardless of whether they use the perfect words or phrases, allies and advocates can speak to stakeholders that some principled people cannot. Principled people recognize their own biases that have been built up about some allies or advocates. They do their own work to reset themselves because they know that distrust can easily be bred amongst allies. Words that seem commonplace and accepted in small groups of principled people can be hurtful and shaming to allies and advocates, causing division, dissent and distrust in the universal application of principles among one another.

Principled allies and advocates can offer ideas and points of view that are sorely needed. They can provoke each person to be more consistent with their own principles. They can strengthen confidence and courage for when standing up and speaking up alone might be necessary. People who engage in unprincipled practices and push unprincipled policy and programs pit ally against ally and advocate against advocate.

Principled people actively and proactively reach out to kindred spirits to form strong, trust-worthy relationships and alliance pacts. Principled people reach across lines ideology, religion, politics, and culture to validate and reinforce that actions of other principled people who are standing for universal principles in the face of unprincipled forces. They acknowledge them publicly and privately, even if it means encountering blow-back from within their own communities because of the validation of someone who is typically seen as an outsider. They recognize and reinforce the actions of the principled person who is standing alone, across some lines in an organization, family, community, or country, because they know that every principled voice must be backed up by a chorus. Doing so reminds the people who engage in unprincipled actions that principled people do not stand alone. I will always stand up for you, for your rights and for policies or programs that support you.

9. Take administrative, legal or public action

When unprincipled people use their power, position, privilege to push through unprincipled changes or engage in unprincipled practices in a family, business, or societal role, principled people are not afraid to administratively, legally or publicly challenge them. They may file a grievance, lawsuit, or engage in whistleblowing to use some measure of force to call attention to or stop unprincipled actions.

10. Feed their minds with the food of universal positive principles

Principled people nourish their minds each day with the food that will maintain healthy, strong, reliable principles that are ready and steady in all circumstances. They don't feed their minds with news that denies facts, opinions from social media, friends or family that heightens fear and distorts truth, dogma from leaders with skewed views that demonize others or ask for compliance with things that the best interest of others. They don't listen to music that denigrates. They don't roam for hours on social media digesting slander, innuendo and the trolling of or by others. Principled people choose the *food of thought* that that nourishes wholesome principles, values and ethics in their minds so that they can remain clear and compare whatever they hear to principles held in mind.

They fast from mental junk food. They fast from negative, toxic, emotionally exhausting input from people around them. They moderate what they take in from others: spouses, partners, family members, friends, colleagues. They may hear and smile but internally, immediately remind themselves that 'that is not how I'm going to think about this. I love them but that is not principled.' They choose to consciously nourish themselves with universally principled food: positive stories, articles and stories about other principled people and actions to inspire them, calming and peaceful music and readings, and conversations with hopeful individuals.

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