

Diane Gjerstad Leadership & Ethics Interview Questions

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## Abstract

Tomorrow's leaders will need to be flexible and have the ability to incorporate all aspects of quality decision making in an increasingly global and multifaceted organizational environment. Ethical leadership is fundamental to the future of governmental political principles and the American educational environment if we want our students to reflect this behavior. Chief Lobbyist for the Wichita public schools Diane Gjerstad discussed the active role leader's must take within politics and our schools to ensure that current educators and learners are fully prepared for the responsibility and authority they will take on, whether in the classroom, capital or in life.

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## Introduction

The state establishment joins leaders from politics and academia together to renovate and enhance the association connecting ethical behavior and practical application. Over recent years we have seen many failures in ethical governmental leadership with various degrees of consequences. These recent waves of ethical scandals have eroded the trust and high esteem of our countries politicians, and teachers. Human beings have an inherent ethical sense that gives them the ability to make conventional choices. Most people believe that their good decisions and actions are triggered by logic and reason, but the bad decisions stem from spontaneous reaction to unexpected events. These reasons often act as a mechanism to justify these bad choices. With Politicians selling governmental positions, whole school district involved in test cheating scandals, teachers selling drugs, followed by the ultimate betrayal of trusted leaders intimately violating our innocent children.

Even in the midst of this seemingly epidemic of ethically challenged leaders, there are examples of amazing leaders that set the ethical benchmark for us all to emulate. Diane Gjerstad is that person. Partnered with our community she has take action by focusing our law maker's attention on the enhancement of legislative social responsibility policies and applications. These perceived social improprieties and negative stereotyping that Diane is fighting to change has raised interest in my mind as to the insufficiency of the accessible prevailing behavior conceptualizations that our educational system and politicians submit to. I propose that to gain a decisive understanding of governmental ethics it is necessary for me to find ways to comprehend our governmental leadership, management and organization culture that is demonstrated through their ethical practices.

Introducing Diane Gjerstad

Diane A. Gjerstad is the Executive Director of Governmental Relations for the Wichita public schools and is their chief congressional lobbyist for Kansas education. Diane was born and raised in Iowa began her educational tutelage from a rural Iowa school districts. She was active in 4-H, and many school activities which set the foundation for many of the important things she would do during her career. She graduated from Iowa Lakes Community College in 1977 with an AAS in agricultural -marketing program. During the late 70's she worked for Pfizer Genetics (seed corn and soybeans) as a regional salesperson. She went on to attend Wichita State University, graduating in 1985 with a bachelor's degree in Business. Becoming very active in the Student Government Association (SGA), she was elected as their SGA Vice President. Parlaying the experience she gained from her business, agricultural, working with people and governmental participation, she ran and was one of the youngest people elected to the Kansas State House of Representatives, serving from 1986 - 1992. While serving in the House, she was assigned the Labor & Industry; Federal and State Affairs; Insurance; Economic Development committees where she served as the ranking minority member and Chaired the committee in 1990 – 1991. After her congressional tours she came back to the community to work for Cessna Aircraft Company in their human resource department.

Finally answering her calling in 1994 she accepts a position with the Wichita Public School system. Serving as the school system's chief congressional lobbyist and Executive Director of Governmental Relations she has her hands on the pulse of the ethical and leadership insights from the education arena. Not only has Diane championed the importance of education but she has served as presenter on the Kansas Agriculture and Rural Leadership (KARL) program Developing Leadership Experience and has worked with the Kansas Governmental

Ethics Commission. Her intimate insights of both the governmental worlds of education and politics make her a fantastic leader for me to introduce through this interview analysis.

### Why she a great Leader

Secretary Colin Powell said: "Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand" (Leadershipnow, 2010). Diane Gjerdstad is one of those leaders that have the internal fortitude to commit to the organization's educational goal. These objectives are always selfless in her pursuit of doing what is right. Her willingness to persist even in the face of difficulty reminds me of my military combat experiences when we as warriors adopted a working philosophy that failure would not be an option in whatever endeavor we were engaged in. Diane has earned my admiration through her hard work and commitment to ensuring that our youth receive the best education available. She has been able to do this through the trust and respect that I have for her, the multi-level communication network she has at her disposal and the confidence and enthusiasm she displays in all she does.

### Trust and Respect

In my assessment trust and respect highlights the positives in the relationships that we build, especially as a governmental education proponent or congressional lobbyist for the Wichita Public Schools. Building a level of trust and respect with not only your friends, but your foes can take a time to cultivate, but in Diane's case it has had far-reaching benefits for the public education. She has been able to get to know her colleagues on both a professional and personal level. She makes time in her day to talk to people about their jobs and life outside work,

she tries to really understand what they think about subjects and why. Finally she actually values their points of view even if it is different from her own. This is a trait that everyone should incorporate into their leadership toolboxes and communicate what they gleaned to the people they mentor.

### Communication

The significance of effective communication cannot be over stated because everything a leader does involves some form of communication. In politics and in education Diane's Effective leadership is no more evident than by her ability to effectively communicate. She is able to synchronize her verbal and nonverbal behavior to convey the importance of her topical educational agendas. The confidence she has in her communication skill level enables her to construct a bridges between people while creating a synergistic link within the diverse populist in which she works.

### Confidence

Without a high degree of confidence you will not be able to get anywhere as an effective leader. Diane has the ability to inspire dedication, trust and hard work from her team because of her confidence in her own ability to succeed. She is able to think analytically and is able to view the targeted goal as a whole versus a single component. She is able to delineate between the primary needs and secondary elements that identify the appropriate path she needs to take to reach the organizational goal. Finally, she is one of those leaders that temper her confidence with humility. This combination allows her to engage all people with the truth while delivering the communication with a non-offensive fervent tone.

### Enthusiasm

A leader without real enthusiasm will translate that monotone message to others around them. Enthusiasm can set the tone for any perspective situation. If you go into a situation with a negative tone, then your results will most likely be negative. A positive organization has success because of the leaders that set the optimistic tone. Diane sets the examples for everyone, and exhibit enthusiasm every time I have ever been in contact with her. Her enthusiastic demeanor becomes very contagious and can be felt. I know that with the pressures of dealing the Kansas law makers she's had to endure both highs and lows daily, but it seems that her mechanism to overcoming obstacle is enthusiasm. People respect her because of her hard work, passion and dedication to her purpose. Diane is reached her position because she has an ethical core and can motivate and inspire the people around her.

### Ethics

One of my favorite things to do is to talk to great leaders to see what I can glean from them. During this course I had that opportunity to visit with one. Diane Gjerstad is considered by many in Kansas to be one of the state's most respected and visionary leaders in the fight for education. She is one of the most candid, insightful and humble leader's t that I have the opportunity to visit with. I was able to learn a lot from Diane. For me to find a starting point and develop a leadership philosophy analysis, I asked Diane how she defines ethics. She correlated ethics with the moral practices and actions of an educational leader. Morality is focusing a great amount of attention on the application of principals in practice as well as in academia. A leaders' internal moral and ethical philosophy comes from their individual family dynamic and environmental cultural values. These moral values are able to define a person's life and can

impact all of their interpersonal relationships. This includes a moral dimension with their selected actions that helps their inner-leader consciousness think and act further than their narrowly defined educational and political interests. This ethical leadership philosophy can give meaning and purpose to their work organization. This is also a way leaders will be able to connect with tomorrow's workers to their established vision and goals.

She also believes that ethics involves educator's being role models which are charged with educating the entire child and in the end are able to contribute their part in developing a good responsible citizen. Teachers have to comprehend their fundamental role as educators. The process does not start with their individual educational conquest in a classroom setting; it begins with something that is instilled within them from an early age. They can look up to at their teachers and have respect for them and aspire to emulate their moral practices through actions. Helping educators understand their true role has to start with understanding the value of service and impact they imprint on their learners.

Finally Diane's feels that there is also a business side of ethical responsibility that requires governmental accountability to reflect a principled approach to financial management of its resources. In essence we need to be good stewards of tax payer dollars. Governmental accounting emphasizes the idea of financial accountability by reporting organizational activities that outlines the need for transparency while identifying the relevant ethical behavior. Those leaders who are accountable for its operational development and performance have to have an ethical platform from which they can implement appropriate measures and reporting techniques that keeps the organization answerable to their ultimate employer the tax payer.

#### Leadership Values and Characteristics

Values are an important component of a person make up. I was able to ask Diane what values and characteristics she felt were important to her leadership philosophy. Simply stated, she felt that honesty and integrity are the foundational principals that define her leadership philosophy. Values and characteristics of leadership are the concepts to which we as leaders give weight, worth, or merit to. These provide the framework through which we make reasoned decisions. There are values which are sustained in all applications and these values are the ones that help shape and define who we are. These values give content to our character, and a bearing to our own ethical foundation. Therefore, when we choose our values they should reflect the principals that you truly believe in. To be really effective, there are significant qualities that a leader should have. A leader must be a visionary and a person of integrity and honesty. Trust has to be at the foundation of a person's philosophy and is ingrained as an inherit part of their leadership make-up. The team members of an organizational have to also be able to trust that their leader is serving the best interest of the team and will do that if they believe the leader possesses honesty and integrity as a working philosophy.

#### Importance of ethical behavior

Diane was asked about the usefulness of ethics in a diverse operating forum. She talked on this subject from the political side, saying that she did not think the ethical structure has change, but felt the moral expediency that people want to work has changed. She said that people are looking for the final outcome versus the path to get there. This is especially true when their desire is tied to particular philosophy. These leaders adapt or employ a means to expedite the process to get to their desired outcome. She claims that it is seen all the time when people operate in the political arena. These leaders would not normally operate in an unethical fashion,

but will twist the rules to get to that end goal. The ethical obligation has not changed but the framework, rules and morals get all mixed together so that they can circumvent the traditional rules of ethics and expedite to that end goal.

This topic of discussion spawned me to ask another question about the level of importance our political leaders put into if they believe the result serves a greater good. She agreed and we named it the Robin Hood philosophy. I interjected with an example of what I thought the Robin Hood scenario would be, touting; it's alright if I cheat on my taxes because the money is going to starving kids. Does that justify my perceived unethical action? Diane talked about how some would operate under those conditions. She thinks these leaders believe that what they are doing is just fine if it fit into their end goal justification. Saying that they actually don't believe they have changed their ethics, but in fact are serving the greater good. Even if it involves not tell the whole picture, not shoot straight with someone, not fully explaining something in order to get to their end goal it alright nor have they violated their version of a shifting ethical standard, basically it is solution by omission.

### Operating with ethics

It has been a long road to finding how these politicians and educational leaders justify their operating methodology. Diane was asked what she has seen that changed in the governmental industry that makes operating with ethics more imperative. She was emphatic that the size and scope has changed in the governmental industry. It's the complexity of how we operate and the rules that we are under that keeps us focused on our principals. The other thing is technology; web information travels so fast and is so widely available it provides our critics with tools to damage creditability by pushing information out without regard for truth.

Information technology (IT) has become so pervasive in today world that provide many opportunities to abuse trusted entities. Ethics within the computer world has taken on increasing importance as IT issues continue to grow. This web based technology and organizational generated pressure exerts a powerful influence on leaders either as individuals, employee or a member of a governmental agency. The ethical issue raised by computers puts the broader context of ethics versus technological development into question. Our society exists in an information abundant age. Most leaders live and work within the framework of informational technology. Researcher J. Moore suggested that the research of information technological ethics is required because there is a void of established policies involving computer based ethics (McCarthy, 2005). He says that “computer ethics is the analysis of the nature and social impact of computer technology and the corresponding formulation and justification of policies for the ethical use of such a technology” (McCarthy, 2005). This technology can be the catalyst of promoting and exposing situations that involve trusted governmental workers.

### Ethics Scandals

Cheating allegations are becoming alarmingly more common across the country. Schools are required to incrementally raise education standards over the next few years or face No Child Left Behind sanctions. Cheating charges have surfaced in Florida, California, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania and Georgia, among others. According to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation they reported that 178 teachers and principals in 44 Atlanta schools cheated on standardized tests that were used to reach federal educational guidelines. These Educators informed the investigators that they were pressured by school administrators to improve test

scores in order to meet the minimum standard (Huffington post, 2011). On the heels of the Atlanta cheating scandal Philadelphia's schools have found evidence of cheating. The New York Times report that 89 schools in the district were identified by significant gains in math and reading scores that prompted state officials to investigate. During the investigation that found that there were an improbable number of high erasures on the test (New York Times, 2011).

In the light of so many recent scandals in the news, it seems that most people are severely disappointed in the ethics displayed by our politicians and educators. When Diane was asked about these ethical situations she first said that the overwhelming majority of politicians and educators are good hard working honest people. She then confessed that she did not feel comfortable answering this type of question especially since she actually knows one of the superintendents involved in the Atlanta case. After a little restructuring Diane decided to answer the basics premise behind the question without attaching her answer directly to the involved cities. She did not believe that a district superintendent would encourage her people to cheat. She suspects that all of these issues roll down hill. It starts with the state putting unrealistic exaptiation on the schools that involve absolutes in it that have some sort of exaptiation that require a particular score. That coupled with outside stressors such as pressure from the Board of Education, community and superintendent that end up creating a new cultural norm. The atmosphere causes people to decide that the cultural goal is more important that their own personal ethics.

I believe similar to Diane that this widespread, institutionalized cheating is causing some educators to connect the systems preoccupation with test scores coupled with ever rising pressure on administrators and educators to engage in the unethical act of cheating. The negative impact

to our community is that thousands of district school children largely poor under privileged are being told they had received academic skills when in fact they were actually cheated out of the education. Which is more unethical the cheating on the test or the cheating of our kids?

Even in my own Wichita Public schools district we had a 32 year teacher that was involved in an intricate marijuana distribution ring. This Wichita social studies teacher now faces felony charges after he was caught with over a pound of pot while moving it from Oklahoma to Kansas. After a search of his home investigators found more marijuana, methamphetamine, \$1,700 in cash and 17 firearms (KSN, 2011). Over the years there has been a flood of ethical improprieties involving teachers. Many of the educators who have been highlighted have had sexual relations with their students. It seems new cases are constantly being uncovered in the news every day, underage female students sleeping with their older male educator, and underage males with older female educators. It seems that the ethics these educators swore to abide by have been obviously violated without prejudice. Another veteran teacher at one of the Wichita schools was convicted of one count of unlawful sexual relations by a teacher (Wichita Eagle, 2011). This choir teacher went on a field trip and had intimate relations with a student. It's illegal for an educator to engage in any form of sex with a student of any age in Kansas. Even the Wichita Public School System is not immune from scandals evolving unethical behavior.

I ask Diane to comment about a 32 year Wichita teacher who was involved in a drug sting and another district educator who was involved in an intimate relationship with underage student. She responded with that this is the type of people that are supposed to be the role models for our children and are held to a different standard. When asked about this situation Diane only said that educators need to be role models not only for the learners, but for our community too. I was

discussing Diane' interview another district administrator Jim McNeice, a Principal for one of our largest high schools, commented that this type of behavior is not the norm and that the breach in ethics in his opinion is a physiological one not a case of a free willed choice, these teacher need professional help and need to have some sort of ethical guidance.

#### Holding Leaders to a minimum standard

Many people believe that having a published ethics policy in their organization results in a cost, versus a benefit. The purpose of an ethical standard within the teaching profession is to inspire educators to reflect and maintain the reputation and dignity of the teaching profession as an honored institution. The leaders and educators within the community have to identify the professions ethical responsibilities and commitments. These standards are meant to guide the ethical decisions and actions within the profession and promote the highest level of public trust and confidence in the ability of our educators to help develop a responsible citizen.

I asked Diane how she feels about holding people to a minimum ethical standard. She believes that our nation's educators should be held to a different standard. She thinks that these educators' standards consist of acceptance, compassion and insight, so that they can unlock a students' potential. Educators convey their commitment to their learner's well-being through a living example, a positive professional influence, profound judgment and empathy. The intrinsic value to a collective ethical standard is conviction, trust and sincerity. Educational Leaders respect dignity, emotional stability and cognitive development. These teaching professionals model respect for cultural values and normalcy. Diane thinks that the ethical standard of integrity is built around sincerity and truthfulness. The professional relationships with students, parents and the public are spawned from a foundation that is based simply on trust. She said that teachers

have a calling and the desire to develop our youth is something that drives them to give to others. They know that they are developing our kids to be good responsible citizens and that these young people will have to operate effectively within our accepted social norms that includes inherent ethics.

### Ethical considerations that develop people into responsible citizen leaders

Frequently ethics is talked about in the news when somebody makes an unethical decision. I think that people have to remember that just because something is not illegal it still may be considered unethical. Ethics is a personal system of belief that encompasses the knowledge of right and wrong. Varying levels of ethics exist between different people. I see ethics as a methodology to analyzing decisions, beliefs, and actions and acting on that or not to fit within social normalcy. Within the educational context, educators are expected to have a decent foundation for ethical values and act socially responsible. The issue becomes cloudy when the accepted ethics of an organization is combined with an individual's perspective on ethics. This challenge represents the importance of finding and vetting decent individuals to represent your district. But it is equally important for the person to feel like they share the same level of values of those they might work with and for. Ethics is not just vocalizing what you think is the right thing, it is actually doing right thing with every decision that is made. While discussing areas within a universal context where ethical considerations can actually help develop their people at all levels into responsible citizen leaders, Diane mentioned that the schools system incorporates a foundational education that is embedded into different types of learning. She says they accomplish this on many levels; one way is through our character education program that also builds in behavior norms for a safe and civil schools program. The

second way is through what has been addressed before by way of example through of a professional educator, administrator or student leader.

Dian has been able to achieve a lot of thing during her life, when asked what she would like to accomplish next, she said that she would like to convey the needs and dreams of 50,000 kids in the Wichita public schools to legislators who do not live in their world, understand or know their world yet make decision that, so greatly impact these amazing students. These leaders tout that they got to where they are today by pulled themselves up by their boot straps, and think that their life challenge parallel the needs of today's learner.

### Future Goals

Diane's primary challenge in today's educational system is informing State legislators that the quality of instruction has to continue to improve according to the provision stated within the Kansas State constitution. Public education in America is traditionally different from that of other countries in that the state and its city have the responsibility of providing education to the kids. When Kansas became a state in 1861, it included article 6 an education provision in its state constitution.

“1: Schools and related institutions and activities. The legislature shall provide for intellectual, educational, vocational and scientific improvement by establishing and maintaining public schools, educational institutions and related activities which may be organized and changed in such manner as may be provided by law.

(b) The legislature shall make suitable provision for finance of the educational interests of the state. No tuition shall be charged for attendance at any public school to pupils

required by law to attend such school, except such fees or supplemental charges as may be authorized by law. The legislature may authorize the state board of regents to establish tuition, fees and charges at institutions under its supervision.”(KSlib, nd)

Education is indisputably one of the most important public functions that our state government has the responsibility to uphold. From the earliest times of our sate’s creation our founders knew the benefit of providing formal education to our kids in order to propel the country forward. It is Diane’s job to ensure that these legislators do not forget about the profound influence that school positively impacts our students and builds the path that bolsters their leadership spirit.

A lot of time has been spent delineating about the differences between a leader and a manager. When this was posed to Diane, she responded with manager’s plan, organize and coordinate while leaders inspire and motivate. Jack Welch one said “Strong managers who make tough decisions to cut jobs provide the only true job security in today's world. Weak managers are the problem. Weak managers destroy jobs” (thinkexist, nd). This quote seems fitting that what the state politicians of the Kansas legislator is trying to do with school funding is in fact killing the jobs of educators. This correlates with the principals of just because it is not illegal does not mean it doesn’t skirt the lines of an unethical beliefs. Leader’s posses an intrinsic set of talents that inspire loyalty and motivate people to follow and be productive.

## Summary

Many organizational experts believe that ethical leadership is just leader’s possessing good moral fiber. By a leader possessing the right values and having s strong character can construct a foundation that can set the ethical tone for others and create a barrier to withstand

temptations that may occur in the prosecution of tasks. All Americans are tempted by unethical situations every day. These are things like keeping found money, failure to reporting unethical behavior at work, telling little white lies. The key to unethical behavior resides within the person, not on the environmental social climate as a whole. While it seems like an honorable proposition to regulate and control each entities code of ethics, the problem actually resides with the individual who chooses not to follow any code personal or established. The educational climate emphasizes organizational learning and educator empowerment through honesty and trust. This type of educational condition promotes mutual respect and open dialogue for emerging issues. However, even in this type of trusting environment educators can unwittingly enact subtle ethical abuses.

One of the great leaders from within the Kansas legislature and now an executive Director for Governmental affairs and Chief Congressional Lobbyist for the Wichita Public school system honored me with a few borrowed minutes of her time to convey her perspective on ethics. Although our time was very limited, I was able to hear about her amazing insights. Diane was able to translate her desire to create an environment where our kids will see their teacher's a suitable role models and will one day emulate the positives behaviors that were demonstrated in the educational environment. I learned from Diane Gjerstad that ethical leadership requires a positive attitude of humility versus a holier-than-thou concept that will be dispelled later. She also showed me her commitment to her principles, and at the same time seeing her willingness to learn something new. It was enlightening to see her ability to sit down and talk to others with differing philosophy yet finding a common core concept to seeing the world. The position of ethics to me is best observed through open conversation that involves the basic values and issues that are important to us to operate and succeed in a civilized society. It is through constant

innovation and reaffirmation of our personal principles and values that we can improve our moral well being by being open to new ideas.

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## Appendix A

### Diane Gjerstad Leadership & Ethics Interview Questions

1. Simply, what is your definition of ethics in how it is involved in education?
2. What are your most important values and characteristics that define your moral leadership philosophy?
3. In these times, in particular, people are skeptical about the meaning or even the usefulness of ethics. As a leader in education and politics:
  - a. What is your principal message about the importance of ethical behavior when working with diverse thinking?
4. What has changed in the governmental industry that makes operating with ethics more imperative?
  - a. Do you have any examples of that?
5. In the light of so many recent scandals, most people are severely disappointed in the ethics of many educators:
  - a. What is your feeling about the testing scandals in Houston Texas and Atlanta Georgia and how could have that been prevented?
  - b. What is your feeling on the 35 year local (Wichita) teacher selling drugs?
  - c. What is your feeling about educators engaging in intimate relationships with underage students?
6. Many people believe that having a published ethics policy in their organization results in a cost, not a benefit:
  - a. How do you feel about holding people to a minimum standard?
7. Leaders in many organizations have tried very hard to build ethical commitment into the functioning of their organization, not through a specific ethics program, but through how they actually manage the organization:
  - a. What expectation would they have of workers? and
  - b. How do they build it in?
8. Are there areas where ethical considerations can actually help organizations develop people into responsible citizen leaders?

9. We hear a lot about the situation involving the lack of ethics do you know of situations that demonstrate the positives effects of having ethics?
10. What would you like to or have accomplished with your leadership celebrity?
11. What is your key principles, leadership practices and recommended actions you would take in developing a strong ethics program that would create an inspiring vision of the future for tomorrow's educators, administrators and political leaders?
12. Focusing on organizational success rather than on personalities can you articulate the purpose and values of organization that will lead to development and growth?
13. How do you find the best people and develop them knowing that everyone comes from different developmental environments?
14. What is the difference between leaders and Managers?
15. Finally, what's new on the education front at the Kansas capital?