

# Lesson #2 Paired Examples of Common Good Critical Attributes Guide for Teachers

## Pair #1: High School Orchestra

### Critical Attribute: Inherent Dignity

High School Orchestra A wants to play a Beethoven symphony. Jerry, the music teacher, decides he will accept any student into the orchestra who has basic playing ability.

High School Orchestra B also wants to play a Beethoven symphony. Diane, the music teacher, decides it will be better to audition all players and only allow the best players to play in a smaller ensemble.

1. What are the key differences between these two orchestras?
2. How will the rehearsals of each group proceed differently?
3. Which of the orchestras will play the piece better?
4. What does each conductor value the most?
5. In your own words, what is the critical attribute of the common good?

### These examples demonstrate the critical attribute of inherent dignity.

In this set of examples, there are two different groups of people working together to make music in an orchestra. The big difference between them is their goal or priority. Priorities reflect values and what a person or group thinks is most important.

**Orchestra A** prioritizes involving every student who wants to participate—the orchestra’s organizers recognize each student as equally important regardless of their ability to play music. They value each student as a unique and valuable person—with a special dignity just because they are students. Including all students in the orchestra is important to the music teacher because he believes every student has an equal, built-in, or “inherent” equal right to be a part of the act of making music in a group. He wants every student to benefit from participation so they can learn, grow, have fun, and share an experience together. This is the most important reason for Orchestra A’s existence. They will hopefully learn to make good music, which would be great, but it isn’t the most important thing.

**Orchestra B** has a different goal or priority—making the best and most beautiful music possible. This priority is a good thing—people benefit from listening to beautiful orchestra music. Individual orchestra members also benefit when they become better musicians in pursuit of achieving this goal. But while the priority for beautiful music is not a wrong or a bad goal, it is a different priority than Orchestra A.

## Pair #2: Sports Teams

### Critical Attribute: Interdependence

Team A has very skilled players who feel a sense of connection to each other as a team. Their coach stresses how each individual must strive to be their personal best and achieve their highest individual statistics.

Team B has very skilled players, too, as well as a great sense of connection as a team. Their coach focuses on how the team can score the most points and prevent the other team from scoring points.

1. **What is the key difference between these teams?**
2. **How would you explain its effect on their chances to be the league champion?**
3. **What are particular ways each team might end up playing differently and making different choices?**
4. **In your own words, what is the critical attribute of the common good?**

### **These examples demonstrate the critical attribute of interdependence.**

In this set of examples the difference between the teams is the emphasis of their coach and presumably the players, too. Team A's coach emphasizes the individual performance of each player being at its highest caliber. Team B's coach contextualizes individual excellence within the overall good of the team. The goal of both teams is to win the game. Players on Team A, however, who are only focused on their individual success, may not play as well together as a team, which could impact their chances of winning and becoming the league champion. Team B's players are focused on the team's success. They are more likely to achieve their team goal of winning the league championship because they are working together. Their individual statistics may or may not be as high as those players on Team A. It is important to highlight that working together as a team to win the league championship is ALSO best for the individual players. Their chances of winning are much greater if they work together to achieve their common goal, such that the excellence of an individual player is tied to the team's excellence. Even if, for example, a batter has to make a sacrifice bunt in a baseball game to get a run in or a player must pass the basketball and let a teammate make an easier shot, these are elements of a team sport that allow a team to succeed AND make an individual a more skilled player of their respective sport.

## Pair #3: Budget Crunch

### Critical Attribute: Shared Condition

School A is in a budget crunch. It has to choose between fixing key problems with the school building, such as a potentially unsafe ventilation system and leaks in the roof, or giving much-deserved raises to teachers and purchasing new desks for students. School Board A decides to fix the building because everyone, teachers and students alike, benefit from improvements to the school. They do not want anyone to become ill or injured from unsafe conditions. Teacher salaries and new desks for students, though an important priority, will be funded after the most important and shared safety and environmental conditions are addressed. They are aware that their decision may lead to criticism that they are prioritizing “buildings over people.”

School B is in a budget crunch. It has to choose between fixing key problems with the school building, such as a potentially unsafe ventilation system and leaks in the roof, or giving much-deserved raises to teachers and purchasing new desks for students. School Board B fears criticism from teachers and students so they decide to listen to the requests for raises and new desks. They are less concerned that the conditions will be unhealthy or unsafe for those in the building.

1. **What decision does School Board A make and what priorities lead to this decision?**
2. **What decision does School Board B make and what priorities lead to this decision?**
3. **Do you find one decision and set of priorities more convincing? Why?**
4. **In your own words, what is the critical attribute of the common good?**

#### **These examples demonstrate the critical attribute of shared conditions.**

These examples consider different priorities for school board decision-makers. School Board A recognizes that there are shared conditions that everyone benefits from and that these are a priority that are more important than others—priorities that might only affect one group, such as higher pay for teachers. Although teachers might want higher pay and students want new desks, EVERYONE will benefit from a safer and healthier environment, especially those who might be most vulnerable to illness (e.g., those with allergies from mold in the HVAC system) or injury (those who are more likely to slip on puddles from dripping air conditioners).

School Board B prioritizes pleasing their students and teachers by meeting the needs these individuals think is most important. Teachers will benefit from higher salaries; they will be better able to provide for themselves and their families. Students may benefit from new desks. While these are good, the teachers and students will both continue to share the poor condition of the school building. Teachers will potentially risk their health to work in the school, and students, likewise, will risk their health and potentially have their new desks ruined from dripping air conditioners or leaks in the roof. School Board B, in its leadership role, should prioritize shared conditions conducive to learning and work even if doing something else would be more popular.

## Pair #4: Restaurant Owners

### Critical Attribute: Individual Duties and Responsibilities

Restaurant owner A wants to open her restaurant after COVID-19. She works hard to space her tables out, use disposable menus, keep a very clean kitchen, and have her employees wear masks. She also decides that if any customer seems visibly sick or refuses to wear a mask and stay in place, she is going to ask them to leave. She doesn't like to have to ask her diners to leave but thinks it is the right thing to do.

Restaurant owner B also wants to open her restaurant after COVID-19. She works hard to space her tables out, use disposable menus, keep a very clean kitchen, and have her employees wear masks. She decides that it is too harsh to ask diners to leave if they are not following the rules about masking and staying in place.

1. **What are the key difficulties each restaurant owner faces?**
2. **Is there a “right” decision here? Why?**
3. **How would you respond to a criticism that it is not the restaurant owner's job to control people's behavior?**
4. **In your own words, what is the critical attribute of the common good?**

**These examples demonstrate the critical attribute of individual duties and responsibilities.**

In these examples, there are different individuals involved—those who eat at restaurants and those who run them. There are differences in how well these individuals live up to their duties and responsibilities in these different examples. Both restaurant owners want to open their restaurants and presumably keep both their employees and customers healthy. They both have adjusted table spacing, use disposable menus, and require all employees to wear a mask.

In Restaurant A, everyone follows the rules and guidelines or they can't stay in the restaurant. By refusing to serve customers who are sick or don't wear a mask, the owner of Restaurant A will hopefully keep her employees and other customers healthy and be able to remain open. (She does risk the danger of other customers not coming to her restaurant if they hear negative feedback about her refusing to serve some patrons.)

In Restaurant B, if someone doesn't follow the rules or guidelines they CAN stay in the restaurant. By not turning people away who are not wearing masks, there is the potential for COVID-19 to spread within Restaurant B, to both employees or other customers. The owner may have to shut down her restaurant for a while or risk losing future customers who hear of people getting sick at her restaurant.

These examples highlight the reality that in order for everyone to thrive and stay healthy, individuals have responsibilities, or duties, they need to live up to. Diners at the restaurant need to follow rules, and if they don't, the owner has the responsibility to enforce the rules for the good of all, though his or her business may suffer.

## Pair #5: Families

### Critical Attribute: Historical Variability and Structural Consistency

In past societies, the typical household was largely based around the family farm. At very young ages parents had their children begin to work on the farm—feeding animals, tending to the growing fruits and vegetables, and learning other important skills that would be necessary for children to eventually run their own farms as adults. The family worked together to sustain a farming lifestyle.

In today's society, there are rules against children working at young ages. Instead parents send their children to school so that they can learn how to read and write, necessary skills for children as they grow up and learn how to become members of society. While children are at school, many parents are out of the house at work.

1. **In past societies, what did children learn? What were their parents doing while they learned these skills?**
2. **In today's society, what do children learn? What are the majority of parents doing while they learn these skills?**
3. **In both examples, what do parents want for their children? For their family?**
4. **What do these two families have in common regardless of their different historical periods?**
5. **In your own words, what is the critical attribute of the common good?**

**These examples demonstrate the critical attribute of historical variability and structural consistency.**

In these examples there are two different families from two different time periods in history—one from the past and one from the present. In both families, the parents want to prepare their children for a path to success in society, but the necessary skills are different for different time periods in history. In the past, many children grew up on farms, learned farming skills, and then inherited some and to start their own farm. Today, children are sent to school to learn how to read and write to prepare them for high school, potentially college, and a career. Today, fewer children grow up on a farm than in the past, and even more rarely inherit the family farm when they grow up. These changing skills and changing societal structures illustrate historical differences or “variability.”

Yet, even within such variability, there is still a consistent understanding of the common good. Parents and families make decisions to help educate their children so that they can grow up and be successful while also working to protect and provide for their children and the entire family. In the past, children not only learned valuable skills working alongside their parents, but they also contributed to the successful functioning (and many times survival) of the family. It was for the common good of the family for everyone to work together to run the household and farm. Likewise, now it is part of the common good of the family for children to attend school. While students are at school learning important skills such as reading and writing, a majority of parents are also out of the house working. In this way, parents can provide for their children while also knowing that their children are safe and in the care of adults. While the particular skills and particular daily activities vary across time and across cultures, the fundamental goals of the family remain consistent.