

RIGHT AND WRONG - YOUR LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY

By Rick Williams

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Harvard President Claudine Gay, University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill, and MIT President Sally Kornbluth testified before Congress and gave what appeared to be evasive answers when asked whether advocating for the genocide of Jews conflicted with university policy. Moments come when a simple statement of what is Right and what is Wrong is required. Speaking about Right and Wrong is both OK and is required.



Claudine Gay

Harvard President Claudine Gay, University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill, and MIT President Sally Kornbluth testified before Congress last week and gave what appeared to be evasive answers when asked whether advocating for the genocide of Jews conflicted with university policy.

Their testimony followed statements they made following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel that seemed ambivalent about whether the massacre of 1,200 civilians was Right or Wrong.

These comments have been widely condemned as at least being tone deaf if not offensive and threatening. The presidents talked about tolerance of different points of view - a value not widely shared on campuses today. Yes, tolerance of different points of view is important, and the Palestinian people have well-founded grievances that need to be heard and understood.

But simply asking for tolerance was not enough when we face an important moral question.

Your job as a leader is to clearly express the values of the organization you lead by what you say and what you do. Values are a shared understanding of what your organization is trying to achieve and how it operates. Values are an aspiration in an imperfect world. But you are best positioned to express these values and establish expectations for your community, company, university, or country.

Leading any organization is hard work. When we join a company as an employee, we bring different interests, goals, styles, life experiences, and values. But we come together as a "community" to achieve something important - food to eat, transportation, education, toys for kids, global communication, Etc. We come together with shared expectations about how we will work with each other and the values our work will express.

The highest priority values at ice cream maker Ben and Jerry's, Amazon, and defense contractor Lockheed Martin are different. Still, the job of their leaders is to express the top priority values and, when needed, to speak about what is Right and what is Wrong within the culture of these companies.

Moments come when a simple statement of what is Right and what is Wrong is required. Speaking on behalf of their university communities, these leaders were asked whether advocating genocide is acceptable in the university community. That was a moment when moral clarity about values was required. The leaders of Harvard, Penn, and MIT should have spoken about Right and Wrong. Purposely killing 1,200 civilians one by one is Wrong. Celebrating killing 1,200 civilians is Wrong. Shouting hatred of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, or Christians is Wrong - particularly Wrong on a university campus.

Preserving open expressions of ideas and sympathy for everyone involved are also relevant values, but a clear condemnation of genocide and large-scale civilian massacres was missing. I am a proud alumnus of both Harvard and Penn, and I believe these presidents failed in their responsibilities to their communities by not saying clearly that massacring civilians was Wrong and advocating for genocide is Wrong.

I hope we can use this moment as a learning experience for ourselves as leaders. Too often, we hesitate to talk about Right and Wrong because someone might be hurt or offended. Speaking about Right and Wrong is both OK and is required. Sexual harassment is Wrong.



Liz Magill

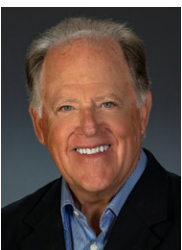
Aspiring to achieve something great, even if you might fail, is Right. Silence is Wrong when you know something wrong is being done. Because we could get away with it is not a reason for doing something Wrong. Working to be the best at doing your job is

Right. Setting low expectations for yourself and for others is Wrong.

Think about what is Right and Wrong in the values of your organization. What expectations for shared values must you keep before your community? When are the moments when you must be clear about Right and Wrong?

About the Author

Author | Corporate Leader | Board Member



Rick Williams is an inspiring writer and speaker sharing his experience as a company founder, CEO, scientist, management consultant, and board member. His new book *Create the Future* is a guidebook for making more creative and better decisions for your company and yourself.

Williams engages with an international audience through his newsletter, published thought leadership articles, and speaking engagements for leadership audiences.

He also brings his insights and experience to his service on boards of directors. He has served as board chair of a medical device company and a bank/VC firm. Williams started his career as a physicist followed by Harvard Business School, management consulting with Arthur D. Little, Inc., and then founding and leading a real estate investment and development company.

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Rick Williams brilliantly delivers a leadership compass for high-performing companies. With his wealth of experience, Williams provides a clear playbook that's indispensable for leaders seeking a practical approach to shaping their organization's destiny. Packed with structured team exercises, this book empowers leaders to make choices that resonate with their goals and values. Like an in-house management consultant, *Create the Future* is your invaluable resource for decision-making in turbulent times.

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