

# BOOK REVIEW

## Advanced Ethics for Addiction Professionals

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The treatment of substance use disorders is a large undertaking in the United States with thousands of treatment facilities throughout the country. Most of the treatment is provided by substance abuse counselors. This relatively new profession has only modest education requirements, which often include as little as 6 hours of ethics training (Yalisove, 2006). Bissel and Royce's (1987) *Ethics for addiction professionals* written over 20 years ago has been the only available book resource for this topic. Thus, I was quite interested to review Taleff's new book *Advanced ethics for addiction professionals*.

The book is intended to help substance abuse counselors think clearly about ethical considerations that arise in clinical practice and use critical thinking solve ethical problems and dilemmas. Rather than using the traditional format of professional ethics texts, Taleff focusses most of the book on moral decisions, actions, and arguments rather than describing and explaining professional ethics.

Taleff's book comprises 14 chapters divided into two parts. In part 1, he begins by discussing ethical decisions and arguments and introduces a number of non-standard ethical terms (i.e. judging). In the following two chapters he discusses elements in making an ethical decision and how emotion can be helpful in making ethical decisions as well as cloud judgment. In the second part, he reviews a large number of ethical theories including utilitarianism, deontology and social contract theory; he discusses how common thinking practices can interfere with good ethical decision making. In Chapter 9 he summarizes critical thinking principles. Ethical fallacies are discussed in the next chapter. In chapter 11, he introduces the "addiction ethics judgment kit." In Chapter 12, He sets forth an idiosyncratic list of professional ethics principles (He lists 10 while most professional ethics texts list 5). In chapter 13, he discusses common ethical violations made by substance abuse counselors. In the last chapter, he discusses caveats in ethical thinking.

A large part of the book focuses on the many difficulties that are encountered in making an ethical decision (Four full chapters

as well as many sections of others). The two chapters on ethical theories discuss moral behavior rather than professional ethics. A large number of examples are about moral problems in general rather than professional ethical problems and dilemmas. As a consequence insufficient attention is paid to professional ethics and the important content areas including providing a rationale for professional ethics, reviewing the Association of Addiction Professionals (NAADAC) Code of Ethics, reviewing of relevant laws, regulations, and other legal considerations (i.e., reporting requirements when child abuse is suspected), informed consent, confidentiality both from an ethical standpoint and legal statutes, competence and scope of practice, dual relationships, how to deal with ethical misconduct, ethical components of multicultural counseling, and special issues for substance abuse counseling and ethics including client or counselor impairment, harm reduction as a treatment goal, and coerced treatment and the principle of autonomy. While most of these topics are touched upon, they are not carefully presented in an organized manner.

Additionally, stylistic problems plague the book. The style of writing is informal, chatty, and imprecise. For example, Taleff uses the too colloquial and not respectful expression "Bullshit detection kit for educational material" (p. 116). Concepts are often not explained clearly. Discussions and rationales are often incomplete and casual. For example, Taleff states "To be careless about record keeping is unprofessional and way to close for comfort." (p. 172) Though one of the main goals of the book is to help the counselor use critical thinking to make moral decisions, Taleff often uses casual, incomplete, and often trivial arguments to support a position. For example, he states that counselors should keep abreast of new, effective treatments (part of the the dimension of competence, which he does not mention) by arguing that by not doing so is risks doing harm; "...in addiction treatment to risk harm is unethical. Therefore, not staying current with clinical practices in addiction treatment settings is unethical." (p. 171). First, the ethical principle that should be invoked in beneficence not malfesance. Secondly, his argument supporting the statement is trivial. Finally Taleff fails to mention that the clinician has the obligation not only to be aware of better treatments, but to learn

them and become proficient in using them.

When I have taught ethics courses for substance abuse counseling students, I have used a standard counseling professional ethics book (Welfel, 2006) and added material germane to substance abuse counseling (Yalisove, 2006). I had hoped that Taleff's book would have fully discussed these topics with consideration given to special issues for substance abuse counseling and thus provide addiction studies educators with a stand-alone text. Regrettably, this is not the case. Nor do I believe that book will help substance abuse counselors solve the many thorny ethical problems that arise in their professional work.

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### References:

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