

**SECOND  
EDITION**

Walking the

# **BOUNDARIES**

Exploring everyday ethics  
in human services

**BY RUSSELL DEAL  
WITH ANDREW SHIRRES  
AND KAREN BEDFORD**

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Innovative Resources acknowledges the Jaara people of Dja Dja Wurrung country, the traditional custodians of the land upon which our premises are located and where our resources are developed and published. We pay our respects to the elders—past, present and future—for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and other First Nations peoples. We must remember that underneath this earth, upon which we so firmly stand, this is, was and always will be, the traditional land of First Nations peoples.



# Foreword:

## **Celebrating grey areas, building ethical decision-making**

**W**henever we think about the subject of ethics in human services, the word ‘dilemma’ often comes to mind. Consequently, and for me, sadly, when decisions to questions concerning ethics are called for, human service workers can frequently react with confusion, fear or doubt. A loss of confidence can ensue, where workers look elsewhere for direction (colleagues, policies, procedures and manuals) rather than exploring their own strengths and competencies first—and we begin to hear the word ‘burnout’.

In my role as a practice development coach and trainer (and in past roles as worker, team leader and manager of mental health services) I have noticed that anyone who experiences difficulty in reflecting on practice will often try to address ethical dilemmas by looking towards changes of behaviour in the people they work with rather than in themselves. When these changes don’t occur, work gets even more stressful. ‘Grey areas’ can then become places to be avoided.

I don't think it has to be so. Why not celebrate the grey areas? Rather than avoiding questions on ethics, we can embrace them.

*Walking the Boundaries* is a resource that can assist workers to move towards grey areas. These cards engender a sense of enquiry and curiosity; they invite us to reflect on our purpose, values, beliefs, blind spots and stories ... and in so doing, they are a very useful tool for building practice wisdom.

Exploring everyday ethics provides opportunities to build cultures of positive practice development and ethical decision-making. By drawing upon the experiences, skills, creativity and strengths of a group, tools such as *Walking the Boundaries* can help normalise the discussion of ethical dilemmas. In this way we can begin to see these quandaries as everyday ones that human services workers have an ongoing responsibility to question and explore. Ultimately, such a dynamic and interactive practice culture helps create support for clients that is genuine, considered and reflective.

**'Exploring everyday ethics provides opportunities to build cultures of positive practice development and ethical decision-making.'**

A great deal can be learned through the ‘positive interrogation’ of everyday ethics in human services. Each card in the set features a question that begins with ‘Would you ever ... ?’ By asking ourselves or others the question displayed on one or more of the cards, we arrive at a new and perhaps more important question: ‘Why?’

- Do we do what we do to accord with agency codes of conduct or to agree with our own ideas about what is the ‘right thing’ to do?
- Are these paradigms mutually exclusive or does one inform the other?
- Do we do what we do as a response to another action?

The answers to such questions can reveal much. We can discover that what occurs in our work with our clients is as informed by our own assumptions as it is by their actions. We can find that interventions are a combination of multiple sets of values, perceptions of experiences, rich cultures and complex stories.

We can also find that our ethical decision-making process is robust. That we have the values, skills, knowledge and experience to ensure the people we work with have the best support we can provide. We can acknowledge personal agency in decision-making and take responsibility for our actions. We can find a way to both accept and look beyond the essential protocols,

policies and procedures that can either support or inhibit reflective practice.

I would like to congratulate Russell Deal (creative director of Innovative Resources at the time of first publication) and the team for coming together to create one of the most useful contributions to practice reflection yet seen. While this set of cards asks 80 great questions of practitioners, it will be the plethora of responses from people using the cards that will be most important. Thank you, Russell, for inviting us to think, ponder and wonder, ‘Would you ever ... ?’

Andrew Shirres

*Co-director  
Unique Outcomes*





# Contents

Foreword by Andrew Shirres .....	iii
Contents .....	vii
Acknowledgments .....	viii
Introduction: A Practitioner’s Life on the Edge.....	10
The Questions: The Array of Cards .....	18
Taking Care .....	23
Two Broad Methods for Distributing Cards .....	26
Deliberate Selection .....	26
Random Choice .....	28
Activities Using the Cards .....	30
Doorways into a Single Card.....	32
Exploring Context .....	33
Supervision .....	34
Job Interviews .....	35
Team Building.....	36
Orientation for New Staff .....	37
Mapping Responses and Measuring Certainty .....	38
Training, Education and Professional Development.....	39
About the Author .....	42
About the Publisher.....	43

# Acknowledgments

The original idea for *Walking the Boundaries* sprang from a conversation in mid-2013 with two longstanding social work colleagues and friends from Brisbane—David Lees and Paul Montgomery. During one of our all-too-rare opportunities to catch up in person the question was asked whether social work students these day were graduating with a different sense of their professional identity than we did in ‘the good old days’!

While the question made us all feel antiquated it led to a rich conversation about the nature of social work and how we all had to think through and embrace certain values. Had these values changed over time? We didn’t reach any conclusions but the conversation led to such topics as ethical decision-making, the variables that shape our decisions, and the ambiguities, dilemmas and conundrums that continue to intrigue and test us.

The idea for *Walking the Boundaries*, a set of cards that posed these ‘everyday’ ethical dilemmas, was born. A growing set of dilemmas emerged during the development stage with additional contributions by Paul and David, and then by Andrew Shirres—the practice development coach at St Luke’s Anglicare at the time, who tested early prototypes of the cards in some of his workshops.



Subsequently, other valued colleagues lent a hand, in particular, John Bonnice and Di O’Neil, before I sat down with Karen Bedford, former managing editor at Innovative Resources, who, as always, brought her critical eye to interrogate each question and design element, and then to edit the booklet of suggestions.

To all these inspiring colleagues: many, many thanks. To all those workshop participants who accepted the invitation to use our rough prototypes to talk about ethical issues in their work lives: many thanks as well.

Finally, thanks to former General Manager, Georgena Stuckenschmidt, for backing the project, and many thanks to the rest of the team at Innovative Resources, especially Mat Jones for his design skills and Chris Cain for print production.

Russell Deal OAM

*Creative Director*

*Innovative Resources (at time of first publication)*

# Introduction:

## A Practitioner's Life on the Edge

**A**nyone who works with people faces a barrage of ethical decisions every day. All decisions by human service practitioners are taken within the context of values and ethics. Professional bodies and human service organisations generally have codes of conduct that may include ethical principles and standards, and policies and principles of professional practice. While many decisions practitioners make will clearly fall within these boundaries, many will be less clear cut. Each profession and workplace will have some significant conflicts of interest that the practitioner has to negotiate. These conflicts of interest give rise to dilemmas for which there may not be any agreed recipes.

Social work, for example, puts high value on self-determination yet it also has a social control function. Client agency at times will conflict with the rights of others in their environment. Wanting the best for a client has to be negotiated within limited budgets and expenditure priorities. Client confidentiality is challenged by assessments of risk. Privacy is also challenged by other things



such as location (for example, privacy is much more difficult to maintain in rural situations than in large cities, but that too is changing with the widespread use of social media).

Codes of conduct are important as are case studies that allow ethical principles to be tested. But there is a multitude of ‘small’ decisions practitioners negotiate every day that are arguable; they sit on the boundary between ethical and non-ethical decisions. And there is not always agreement amongst practitioners about what constitutes the appropriate behaviour or response by the practitioner.

*Walking the Boundaries* simply postulates 80 of these ‘everyday dilemmas’ that rarely have black and white answers. How these dilemmas are viewed depends on understanding the relevant codes of conduct, the role one is in, and numerous other variables including culture and geography.

Our human service professions, employing organisations, professional socialisation, peers and supervisory relationships all provide maps that guide ethical conduct, whether or not these

guidelines are explicitly articulated in codes of conduct. However, to quote one of the maxims of practice in a post-modern world, 'The map is not the territory'. While each map can describe the prominent features of the typography (the clearer dos and don'ts and traps for the unwary), the territory that each of us has to traverse can be riddled with ambiguities and little tests that can trip us up.

The lived experience of any human service worker is likely to include an awareness of constantly walking the boundaries; having to think through a myriad of potential pitfalls and mineshafts—any one of which has the capacity to cause profound distress to ourselves, our colleagues, and those we walk alongside.

- Do we acknowledge a client when we accidentally meet them in the street or at a social event?
- How do we answer questions about our families such as do we have children?
- What do we say about ourselves on social media?
- Do we publicly advocate for political causes or social movements?

**‘The lived experience of any human service worker is likely to include an awareness of constantly walking the boundaries...’**

Professional codes of conduct attempt to elaborate the vital principle of ‘do no harm’. But any of the above four sample questions could be answered in radically different ways by different individuals in the strongest possible belief that no harm is being done.

Codes of conduct may plot the highways on the maps of ethics but actually walking along the convoluted boundaries where colleagues sometimes take very different paths can be challenging in the extreme.

Different human service professions will have different ethical maps but so will different ‘tribes’ within different professions. Different theoretical orientations will suggest differing interpretations of ethical behaviour. For example, a cognitive behavioural therapist may make different ethical decisions from a solution-focused therapist in terms of deciding which questions are pertinent and which are not.

Sole practitioners in private practice may have greater control over their interpretation of the code of conduct of their particular profession than colleagues practising from within an organisation. But sole practitioners face daily ethical conundrums too, and

they may not have easy access to discussions of these with colleagues and peers. Those working within an organisation of greater than one person may be faced with challenges or compromises to the ethical correctness of their decisions or behaviour. They may feel constrained or even compromised by practices that are embedded within the culture or practice philosophy of the organisation.

- Do we display photos of family members in our offices?
- Do we discuss clients with others?
- Do we touch clients?
- Are we available after hours for emergencies?
- Is it the case that the larger the organisation the more likely there will be diversity of opinion on such questions?

Organisations with multiple programs may well find that each program area has subtly, or even significantly, different ethical cultures. Staff with the same professional allegiance may find themselves in programs and roles that require very different answers. Staff in multi-professional agencies may discover that their colleagues, while bringing a highly valued range of perspectives, may also bring a range of ethical positions on such



everyday things as how one should dress, the use of language, how clients are greeted and what is appropriate to discuss in staff meetings.

What constitutes a 'highway' issue and what constitutes a 'boundary' issue depends on a very wide range of factors. I can remember being shocked in the early 1990s (when Victoria was in the process of adopting Intensive Family Services) to hear of one program in the United States that allowed some staff to carry guns. The thought of any social worker carrying a gun was, and is still, anathema to me. But having never been in a situation where the threat of extreme violence was ever-present, I'm reluctant to pass condemnation.

Living and working in a rural area or small town can feel very different from the relative anonymity of a large metropolitan city. In a small town one's children may play sport with a client's children. Partners and family members may simply not have the option of not doing business with clients who are tradespeople, shop assistants or small business staff. Then there is the ever-present likelihood of the surprise meeting in the supermarket or at a social occasion. Should anticipating such events be the subject of discussion and negotiation in the early stages of engagement with a new client?

Being city-based is no guarantee of avoiding surprise encounters either. Social media itself is profoundly challenging our concepts of rights and privacy.

One person's 'highway' issue (in terms of being black and white, glaringly obvious and straightforward) may well be another person's 'fuzzy-boundary' issue.

- How do we talk about this plethora of ethical issues in our organisations and teams, and within our supervision and professional socialisation settings?
- How do we discuss ethical issues with new arrivals in our organisation such as students and new staff?
- How do we avoid making assumptions about the ethical values people bring when they join our organisation?
- How do we let our clients know the ethical boundaries we subscribe to?
- How do we present ourselves and our values to clients so that they can make informed choices?
- When do we negotiate boundaries with clients regarding privacy, confidentiality, conflicts of interest and interpretations of mutual respect?
- How do we create optimal safe spaces knowing that even inadvertently making clients feel anxious, powerless or vulnerable can be experienced as tantamount to violation?

Lastly, in thinking about the importance of, and challenges to, consistently applying clear ethical boundaries, there are also

issues of the practitioner's self-protection. We are becoming a more litigious society. Aggrieved clients can make accusations. Idiosyncrasies can be put under a spotlight in a court room. Well-intentioned acts like having a cup of tea with a client on a home visit can be cast as manipulation or ascribed other ulterior motives. Giving a client a hug can be given a range of exploitative or sexual interpretations. Part of clarifying boundary and transparency issues has to be considerations of self-interest and risk management.

*Walking the Boundaries* of ethical dilemmas is not just about protecting practitioners from liability and litigation. Nor is it even just about 'doing no harm' to clients. Interrogating, reflecting, openly sharing, inviting feedback and being able to articulate and defend our values and ethical stances are more than clothing ourselves in professional armour. It is more than an afterthought or an appendix to notions of good practice. It is the essence of respectful practice.

# The Questions:

## The Array of Cards Would you ever ...



- accept a gift from a client?
- accept as a client a person you know in another context?
- acknowledge a client if you see them in public?
- advise or help a client to visit a sex worker?
- advocate for a client without their permission?
- agree to a client's request to keep a secret?
- allow a client to photograph you?
- ask a client to sign a petition?
- attend a client's birthday or other personal event?
- attend a meeting about a client when they are not present?
- be available to clients while on leave?
- borrow money from a client?
- buy alcohol or cigarettes for a client?
- buy anything for a client?
- buy anything from a client?
- comment on a client's appearance?





- conceal a mistake from your supervisor?
- connect with a client on social media?
- cook for a client?
- diagnose a client's mental or physical health?
- disclose personal information about a client to others?
- disclose personal information about you to a client?
- discuss with a client or colleague biological sex, gender or sexual identity?
- discuss your work on social media?
- dress to influence a client?
- drink alcohol or smoke with a client?
- employ, or go into business with, a client or former client?
- encourage a client to attend a religious service?
- encourage a client to lie in order to access a needed service or benefit?
- enter a personal relationship with a client or former client?
- falsify records or statistics?
- give a client a gift?
- give a client your personal contact details?
- give advice to a client based on your own moral or religious beliefs?

- give dietary or other health advice or treatment to a client?
- go against the views of colleagues?
- go against your supervisor's instruction?
- have physical contact with a client?
- have sex with a colleague, student or trainee from your organisation?
- have sex with a former client or with a client's relative or friend?
- clean a client's home?
- inspect a client's home?
- invite a client to your home?
- lend money or personal possessions to a client?
- lie for a client?
- lie for a colleague, supervisor or manager?
- lie to a client?
- lie to a colleague, supervisor or manager?
- make fun of a client?
- object if a client makes offensive remarks?

- object if a colleague makes offensive remarks?
- observe, record or photograph a client without their permission?
- physically restrain a client?
- pray with a client?
- provide a reference or go guarantor for a client?
- refuse a client's request to see information written about them?
- refuse to work with a client?
- refuse to work with a colleague?
- report a client's illegal or abusive behaviour?
- report a colleague's unethical, illegal or abusive behaviour?
- report a criminal offence you have been told about in confidence?
- seek information about a client you have referred?
- share confidential information about a client if you thought they were a danger to themselves or others?
- share information about a client without their permission?
- share personal information on social media knowing a client may access it?
- advise a client to leave their partner?

- take a client to your home?
- take a personal call while with a client?
- take care of a client's children or belongings?
- take confidential records out of the workplace?
- talk about a client in a casual or public setting?
- talk about your political beliefs with a client?
- tell a client that you made a mistake?
- update a friend or family member about a client?
- use tarot cards, astrology or similar tools with a client?
- use workplace resources for personal ends?
- visit a client without their permission?
- warn others about a client?
- write a letter to a client?
- yell at a client?





# Taking Care

**W**alking the Boundaries has been tested in numerous practitioner workshops over the eighteen months leading up to publication. Not all specified dilemmas have equal relevance to any one practitioner. However, through this extensive testing, no one took exception to any of the questions. Some questions may have been surprising or challenging. The most common response was the generation of lots of conversation—at times with laughter and at other times with more serious expressions of views.

While we have no knowledge of anyone being offended by any of the questions presented on the cards during the developmental phase, it is certainly possible that a card may hit a raw nerve or open up a traumatic memory. Someone facing such a dilemma in their work may not want to talk about it. Or perhaps more likely is the possibility that different views may be strongly expressed particularly if a real life situation is used as a case example. Responses that are strong, forthright and judgmental may emerge and alternative views ignored, dismissed or condemned.

What appears to be gentle and innocuous to one person, may unleash a flood of emotions for another. This, of course, may

not be in any way negative or inappropriate but it does require facilitators to be mindful of the possibility that the conversation may take some unexpected twists and turns.

For these reasons it is important to set up some ground rules upon introducing the cards such as the right to pass, to insist that confidentiality be maintained and viewpoints expressed without condemnation. As with the use of all conversation-building tools it is important that the facilitator have a 'Plan B' in case there are hurtful or negative responses to the activity.

Here are some questions we invite facilitators to consider before using the cards with others:

- Do I know the cards well enough to believe they are appropriate?
- Do I know the people I am using the cards with sufficiently to be comfortable taking the risk of introducing the cards?
- Is the timing right?
- Have I done all I can to create a 'safe space'?
- Have I allocated enough time to adequately deal with whatever arises?
- Am I personally prepared to deal with the expression of strong emotions?
- Are the cards appropriate to the literacy levels of the participants using them?

- Are the cards culturally appropriate?
- Will I use all the cards or make a selection?
- How will I give participants the right to 'pass' or opt out?
- If I am using the cards in a group, how will I ensure people's privacy is respected after the group?
- How will I make sure that everyone gets equal time to share their stories or responses to the cards?
- How will I ensure people don't interrupt or talk over each other?
- If it is decided that the cards are not appropriate, what is my 'Plan B'?
- How will I know when to wind up the activity?
- How will I evaluate the success of the activity?
- Will I follow up with participants after I have used of the cards, and if so, how?
- Will I use the cards only once with a particular person, or will I create a series of conversations?

# Two Broad Methods for Distributing Cards

**W**hile there are endless creative activities using cards, they all fall into two broad methods of getting them into participants' hands—deliberate or random selection.

## **Deliberate Selection**

Firstly, there is the method known as 'Spread, Scan and Select'. Using this method, all or some of the cards are spread out, face up on a surface—often a table, desk or floor—and participants are invited to look over the cards and make a deliberate selection based on a particular question or prompt. The prompt can be as simple as, 'Pick a card that catches your attention for some reason.' Of course, you can invite participants to pick more than one card—or even a series of cards. (Later in this booklet, you will find lots of suggestions for activities you can use or adapt.)

Spreading the cards out on the floor can create a different dynamic from spreading them out on a table where everyone is seated. Participants get a bird's eye view of the cards, and they can be invited to walk around the cards or follow a line (or



meandering path) of cards. Getting participants to move around the cards can also be achieved by placing the cards around the walls of a room, or on one or more tables that people then walk around while viewing the cards and making their selection.

Studies indicate that the human brain functions differently when our bodies are in motion compared to when our bodies are at rest. Therefore, activities that involve significant movement can open up different pathways to learning and reflecting. Notions of ‘multiple intelligence’ contained in the work of such education pioneers as Howard Gardner, also indicate that for those who may have a kinesthetic learning style, movement is a critical factor in being able to concentrate or absorb information. It is useful to keep in mind that in any group of people there will most likely be kinesthetic learners who don’t seem to learn as well when stationary. Plus, most people find it refreshing and fun to get up out of their seats—especially if they have been sitting for some time. For these reasons facilitators are often looking to include activities that get participants moving, as well as those that create stillness and quiet.

Whether the cards are displayed on a table, wall or floor, the amount of time needed for looking over the cards can vary enormously depending on several factors. Generally, the larger the number of cards or the more complex the cards, the more time is needed for looking over the cards and making a selection.

As always, it is preferable to move at a pace that suits most of the participants. As in any therapeutic conversation, managing the available time well is an important skill, and many facilitators find that more time is needed for an activity than they anticipated.

## **Random Choice**

The second broad method for using the cards is 'Random Choice'. Sometimes interesting learning occurs when a touch of random choice is introduced into a conversation using cards or other prompts. This method includes such activities as shuffling and dealing the cards, placing the cards face down on a surface, fanning the cards and having participants randomly select a card, playing a range of games that involve hiding and finding cards, lucky dips, random cards on chairs, selecting a card with eyes closed, and so on.

It is amazing how fruitful and meaningful random selections can be for people. Time and again they see connections between randomly selected cards, and they find useful and significant next steps and prompts in cards that come to them through a random method of selection. Often an element of whimsy and serendipity enters the conversation, which is welcomed and appreciated by participants.

Questions built around random choice can include:

- Even though the cards you now have in your hand were not deliberately selected, do they have any particular meaning for you?
- Can you think of times when one or more of the cards in your hand have been particularly relevant in your life?
- Do these cards have any significance or special relevance for you at the moment?
- Would you have deliberately chosen these cards in relation to an aspect of your life such as your career?
- Looking at all the cards you have in your hand, do you think they relate to each other? Are they complementary in any way?
- Of all the cards you have randomly selected, which question is the most interesting to you?

**‘It is amazing how fruitful and meaningful random selections can be for people.’**

# Activities Using the Cards

The questions on the *Walking the Boundaries* cards were tested on numerous individuals and groups over an 18-month period before settling on 80 questions that were relevant and applicable across a wide range of human service professions and roles.

We aimed for questions that did not necessarily have a single clear-cut answer, but that were likely to elicit different responses from different practitioners. While to some practitioners there might be an obvious, preferred answer to a particular question, other practitioners are likely to be more equivocal and may want to oscillate, sit on the fence or propose alternative answers to the dominant narrative.

We believe that all questions in the *Walking the Boundaries* set are reasonable and worth asking. However, we recognise that not all are going to be relevant to a single practitioner or group, at least at face value. For this reason, facilitators may want to consider reducing the size of the pack by eliminating those questions deemed to have less direct relevance. The remaining cards in the deck will still provide ample prompts for rich conversation.





If working with an individual practitioner or student, say in supervision, the number of cards can be reduced to as few as half a dozen or even less. (There are ideas for using the cards in supervision later in this section).

As mentioned in the previous section of this booklet, sometimes it can be both amusing and enlightening to choose cards randomly through blind selection. Not knowing which cards are going to be chosen can lead to surprising self-discoveries, as well as generating a sense of fun. The cards can be spread out face down on a table or any flat surface and the practitioner/student asked to pick a number of cards one at a time and answer the question as honestly as possible. This can be set up as a light-hearted activity but can be particularly revealing if responses are both off-the-cuff and honest.

As with all our resources, no special training is required to use *Walking the Boundaries*. We encourage facilitators, trainers, team leaders, supervisors and other users of the cards to invent their own creative ways of using them with individuals and groups. Just pick them up, have a look at them and think about how you might like to get the conversation started! From long experience in producing cards sets, we know that once a facilitator begins to use the cards—even in the most simple way—creative ideas often come flooding in. Innovative Resources loves to hear about these

ideas, and we often share them with others via our free online newsletter, our website, and our interactive tools workshops.

In this section of the booklet, we offer a variety of suggestions for using the cards to help spark your imagination. Please feel free to use or adapt these suggestions in any way you feel is appropriate to the participants and the purpose of the session.

### **Doorways into a Single Card**

Spread the cards out on a table or other surface and invite participants to choose a card that catches their attention for any reason. It may be a question they have been wondering about or is important to them for any reason. Participants can use ‘their’ card in a variety of ways including to:

- introduce themselves
- tell a story about their own experience
- practise giving two different answers—see what it feels like to jump the fence!
- say why the question is important to them
- speak about how their response to this question may have changed over time.

## Exploring Context

Sometimes a practitioner might respond to a question or dilemma differently according to varying contexts. Invite participants to choose 3 or more cards (either deliberately or randomly) and then discuss such questions as:

- Would your response to these questions always be the same in every situation?
- If not, when might it be different?
- Would it change with different clients—for example, with children, adults, teens or people with various disabilities?
- Would it change according to the community in which you work? For example, would there need to be different responses to the questions depending on rural, regional and urban settings?
- Would it change according to the type of service offered?
- Would it change according to the organisation you are working for?
- Would it change if you had a different supervisor or worked in a different team?
- Are there questions that you would have answered differently in the past? Why did you change your view?

## Supervision

During supervision or coaching a practitioner or student can be asked to make a selection of cards they would most like to discuss in the present or next session, or over the course of the whole supervision contract. Questions such as the following can then be used as prompts for discussion:

- Are there any questions in this card set you find easy to answer with a definite yes or no? Why do you think that is?
- Which questions give you the most dilemmas? Why?
- Are there questions that you want to 'sit on the fence' with?
- Are there questions that you believe you would answer differently from most of your colleagues? Why?
- Are there any questions that trigger particular emotions? Why do you think this is?
- Which of the questions or dilemmas described on the cards would you discuss with your supervisor if they were happening in your workplace?
- Are there any dilemmas you would never discuss with another person? Why?
- Which cards show dilemmas you think are clearly outlined in policies and procedures of your organisation? Are there any that are not but you think should be?

- Are there any dilemmas you think are more/less prevalent now than in years past?
- Pick 3 or more cards at random and discuss what you would do when faced with those dilemmas.
- Pick 3 or more cards at random and discuss different possible actions that a practitioner might take. What would be the likely outcomes of the different actions? Which action do you think is the most appropriate?

## **Job Interviews**

You may wish to consider using the cards with an applicant as part of a job interview process. This is not to try and trick the applicant but to prompt answers that will highlight their values and thinking processes when confronted with genuine everyday dilemmas. Again cards can be pre-chosen or opened to random selection. Choose 1-3 cards and ask the interviewee:

- Have you ever faced these dilemmas before and what was your response?
- How did you reach the conclusions you did?
- What was the outcome? Did it work ok to do what you did?
- Would you still respond in the same way now or would you change your response?

- Which cards do you think might pose the biggest dilemmas for you in this job?
- Do you find yourself having a different opinion from most of your colleagues on any of the questions raised in the cards?
- If you could change commonly accepted policy or current opinion regarding one of the questions raised on the cards, which one would you choose and why?

## **Team Building**

Some of the most telling applications using *Walking the Boundaries* cards are when they are introduced into groups and teams. As long as participants feel safe to answer honestly, *Walking the Boundaries* can a great team-building and professional development tool. Introduce them at your next team meeting or planning day and keep an eye on the volume control in the room!

- Which questions do you think your team would agree on?
- Which questions do you think your team members would not agree on?
- Can your team agree which 3 cards are likely to be the most important to keep in mind over the next period of time or during the next project?
- Invite each member of the team to pick a card, reflect on it and report on their reflections at your next meeting.

- Invite each member of your team to introduce an activity using the card set
- What card(s) is missing? Can you think of any more questions or dilemmas you would add to the card set? Invite team members to create their own *Walking the Boundaries* card and introduce it to the rest of the team.

## **Orientation for New Staff**

The cards may be particularly useful to help welcome and orient new staff to the culture and practice values of the organisation or team they are joining. Examining responses to everyday dilemmas can be a good way of exploring the different understandings of practice that new staff members bring with them from their previous experience as practitioners. In addition to adapting the many and varied suggestions above, here are some ideas to get the conversation rolling with new staff:

- Pick 1-3 cards and speak about a related experience you have had in your work before joining this organisation.
- Was it easy to decide what to do, or did it pose a difficult dilemma for you?
- What did you decide to do in the end and how did you make the decision?
- Did your actions work out well for you and the client?

- Would you do it differently next time?
- Were the actions you took in line with your past organisation's values or standard practice?
- From what you can tell so far, do you think the actions you took are in accord with the values or standard practice of the organisation you have just joined?
- In your new role, is there a question (or more) you would like to seek clarification about from your new team members or supervisor?
- In your new role, do you know what to do if you have a strong discomfort or disagreement with the work practices of your colleagues, supervisor or the organisation's leadership?

## **Mapping Responses and Measuring Certainty**

The cards can be a great tool for trainers and educators to use with students to help them reflect on how standards of good practice have changed over time. It can also be used to invite practitioners to reflect on how their own personal practice has changed, or to identify which dilemmas pose more uncertainty than others.

- Is there a card you would answer differently now? Can you trace the factors that brought about this change in you?



- How has practice wisdom in general changed? Which cards do you think would be answered very differently 10, 20, 30, 40 or more years ago?
- Which questions do you think have would generally elicit the same response now as in the past?
- Can you select a few cards and on a scale of one to five, rate them on the level of sureness or certainty you feel about the issue?
- Can you sort the cards into 2 piles marked 'sure' and 'unsure'?

## **Training, Education and Professional Development**

This card set is an ideal tool for educators, trainers and workshop facilitators. It is through discussion with peers as well as with mentors and role models that students can learn more about the dilemmas they may face in practice and be involved in identifying their values and setting their own moral compass. Many would argue that this setting of the moral compass is something that all practitioners, no matter how experienced, have a responsibility to keep revisiting. As well as adapting any of the activities listed above, facilitators and trainers may want to select specific cards and frame specific questions around them, such as:

- How much personal information do we impart to those with whom we work? Do we share our work mobile number? Family details? Home address?

- Is there ever a 'right' time to receive a gift from a client? Do we base our decision on the perceived intent of the gift-giving?
- Do we accept invites from a client to attend a special event (like a wedding)? Why?
- How do we judge what is the 'defensible risk' when a client participates in what is considered illegal behaviours in the practitioner's presence or venue? What if they speak about something illegal they have done to another person? Do you report it?

These kinds of questions can be used to thrash out not only which dilemmas cause us to question the judgments or decisions we make, but also the criteria we might use to take action.

In the 'Café Conversations' we had during the development of the *Walking the Boundaries* cards, these questions led to conversations about what underpins our normal decision-making models for working through ethical dilemmas. These are the kinds of questions that emerged:

- Do we base our judgment on the possible risks involved?
- Is this based on risk to us or to the client?
- Can we think about other frameworks for decision-making?
- What would a strengths-based framework for decision-making look like?
- Would it be based on assumptions of respect?
- Is our practice truly client-centred?
- Do we make positive assumptions based on good intentions and shared purpose?
- Do we trust that we can learn from our mistakes?

Whew! Big questions to answer, but all grist for the mill in developing respectful, aware practice.

## About the Author

**R**ussell Deal is the founder and former creative director of St Luke's Innovative Resources. Since 1992 he has attempted to bring alive key concepts and issues from his profession, social work. He has done this with the support of his wife Annie and their family, and the creativity and expertise of the team at Innovative Resources, the array of illustrators and graphic artists who have given these ideas life, and the keenly dedicated and skillful practitioners at St Luke's Anglicare (now Anglicare Victoria).

Russell was awarded an Order of Australia medal in 2013 for his service to social work education and the community.



## About the Publisher

Innovative Resources is part of Anglicare Victoria, a community services organisation providing child, youth and family services in Victoria and New South Wales, Australia. We publish card sets, stickers, books, and digital and tactile materials to enrich conversations about feelings, strengths, relationships, values and goals. Our resources are for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, ability or age. They are used by counsellors, educators, social workers, mentors, managers and parents. We also offer ‘strengths approach’ training and ‘tools’ workshops, both online and in-person. For more information about our in-person and online training please email:

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For more information visit:  
[www.innovativeresources.org](http://www.innovativeresources.org)

**‘Innovative Resources produces original conversation-building tools that can be used by diverse human service professionals across many different cultures.’**







# Walking the **BOUNDARIES**

‘Would you ever ...’

80 intriguing, challenging or surprising questions  
to create dynamic discussions in your teams,  
workshops, planning days, supervision sessions  
... and even job interviews!

*Walking the Boundaries* is a unique conversation-building tool that counsellors, therapists, social workers, psychologists, supervisors and all human service professionals can use to reflect on their practice, values and ethical positions. While there may be codes of conduct in your profession or organisation, *Walking the Boundaries* opens up everyday ethical dilemmas where there are often no clear-cut answers. Introduce these cards and watch the reflective learning and engagement unfold!

