**A Valuable Dialogue***By Shannon Warren for the Journal Record,
October, 2012*

When speaking to groups over the past ten years, I often ask participants to raise their hands if they ever discuss principles or values at work. Only a precious few employees signify engagement in conversations about their ideals. It shows that, while many companies embrace ethics training, few businesses understand that a healthy dialogue about values can strengthen their ethical culture.

Talking about ethical issues might expose differences in religion or personal standards, so why risk it? We minimize uncomfortable challenges to our thinking by hanging around people who share the same point of view. This reinforces our beliefs that our standards are right and everyone else is wrong. Too often, we presume that other cultures or generations will not share our same perspectives.

That is a dangerous stance to take. By not examining differences, we are robbed of the ability to test ideas, crystallize our thinking and search for the truth. It fosters confusion and promotes bias. A case in point: I asked a group to guess a source of the following principles: Speak the truth with gentle kindness, do not backbite or slander. Most guessed the Bible. Nobody thought of the Quran, but that was indeed the text used in the example.

In her book, *Giving Voice to Values,* Dr. Mary Gentile cites research by psychologist Martin Seligman who indicates that certain values have transcended time, place and culture. The six core virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence have endured from the days of Confucius and Aristotle, to our country’s own founding fathers.

To arrive at this higher ground, Dr. Gentile has a revolutionary idea – we must talk about our values. She suggests that, rather than begin with a position that we believe to be right and then insisting that others agree, we should ask questions that will allow others to express their values. By doing so, we are better able to evaluate ideas and take steps to reasonably prioritize the right course of action. We desperately need this dialogue to encourage each other to become our best selves. That may involve asking some hard questions from time to time, but seeking the truth must always be our highest aspiration.