Deontology

How to use Kant’s theory to make a decision in business:

1. **What is the ethical dilemma?**
2. **Who is the agent**: The agent is the decision-maker. For this method you should only have one person in the decision-making position. A “company” cannot make a collective decision based on Kant’s methodology in the aggregate. Additionally, there are people within a company whose job descriptions and responsibilities may make their “duty” in a situation differ from another person’s job within the same company.
3. **What is the agent’s role in the situation?**: For Kant, the intrinsic nature of things relates to the required duty. In order to figure out the “nature” of what is going on, you need to be very specific about what the agent’s role is.
4. **What is the nature of the role?**: In Sandel, with the case of a murderer chasing someone hiding in your home, the issue relates to you being asked a question—in that situation you have to decide what to respond, which makes you a communicator—your role is a communicator. The “nature” of the act of communication is truth telling.
5. **What is the duty associated with the role?** This is related to the “nature” of the act and the role of the agent.
6. **What is the categorical imperative?** A categorical imperative is something that you believe could be a binding command on everyone contemplating this same act. For Kant, things are intrinsically right or wrong—they are always and everywhere right or wrong. There are no exceptions to a rule. For this step, you want to think about the two possible (but opposite) “rules” that you are proposing for the ethical dilemma. One of them will end up being the morally worthy thing to do according to Kant and one will not be morally worthy.
7. **Is this categorical imperative universalizable?** The purpose of this particular question is to consider the opinion of vastly different people across generations, historical circumstances, genders, religions, etc. Kant believes that objective universal truths exist. However, our own personal emotions, goals, self-interest, social-economic-historical circumstances could lead us in the wrong direction. So we need to try to figure out if other people, who are reasonable people thinking rationally, would agree with our proposal. You don’t want to ask your mom or your best friend because they probably think very similarly to you. This is a difficult one to settle on your own—you have to ask others if you were really using this process in a situation.
8. **Would I be willing to switch places with everyone in the scenario?** You want to place yourself in the situation that everyone else involved in the scenario would be in. A typical example of this relates to bias in hiring. If a hiring manager has a bias against people nearing retirement, no matter how qualified that person may be for the position, even maybe being the best possible candidate, deciding not hire them would go against the “nature” of the decision to hire the “best possible” candidate and the hiring manager would not want to switch places with someone who is older but perfectly qualified.
9. **Am I using someone MERELY as a means to an end?** Kant believes that people need to be treated with a deep respect and as an “end” in and of themselves, not JUST a means to an end. An example of this—when I was an adjunct professor at another university, I taught a 15 week course, was paid $1500 for the entire course, had no office, received no benefits, received no review so I could later get a letter of recommendation for a full time job, and no one ever even checked up on me or my class. I was simply a means to that course being taught and nothing more. As a tenure-track professor, I receive a fair salary, benefits, have an office, am constantly reviewed so I know how I’m doing, have access to all sorts of faculty development opportunities, have access to resources that I need to do well in the classroom and in my other responsibilities, etc. I am certainly a means to getting CSR and ethics courses taught…but I’m not MERELY that. I am treated with respect and Dominican cares about my personal and professional situation. Prostitution is another example—one person is seeking sex and the other is seeking money and there is no relationship—each is using the other MERELY as a means to the end of money or sex.

When using Kant’s theory, you want to go through ALL of the steps to thoroughly think through the questions.