

When Identity Gets Before Duty

The Decision Students Learn to Notice

This talk supports the Professional Responsibility course you already teach. Students arrive knowing the rules. What they don't yet have is the applied judgment to use them under pressure — the ability to recognize, in the moment, when a decision is drifting away from a duty they already know. This session builds that judgment directly on top of the rules unit you are teaching, through three connected pieces: applying the rule, an alarm system for the moment it's under pressure, and the ability to catch the pattern before it costs anything.

FOR PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FACULTY

This session slots next to the unit you are already teaching — candor, conflicts, or misconduct — and gives students the mechanism behind the rule: why identity, not intent, or knowledge of the rules, decides in the moment a duty gets bent. Built from the speaker's own disciplinary case and anonymized patterns across attorney misconduct records. It also contributes to the Standard 303(b)(3) professional-identity requirement now built into your accreditation standards — a documentable touchpoint, not just a guest lecture.

1. Applying the Rule

Bridges the gap between knowing a rule and recognizing the moment it's under pressure — ties directly into whatever unit is already being taught.

- Emotion sets the conditions — the background state a decision gets made inside of, not the cause of it.
- Identity makes the call — the decision comes from who the attorney believes they are.
- Logic justifies afterward — it's the story identity tells about a decision that was already made, and it arrives fast enough to feel solid before the attorney notices it came after.
- Students distinguish emotional self-regulation from ethical self-regulation, and explain — in their own words, by the end of the session — why passing the MPRE does not predict compliance under pressure.

2. The Alarm System

Ethical self-regulation is meant to catch identity in real time, before duty is overridden — and it asks a different question than emotional self-regulation does, and most professionals were never trained to see it or use it. Students build their own version of it during the session.

- Students apply a three-question decision architecture to a live hypothetical, in real time, and use it to set up their own Ethical Self-Regulation Alarm system.
- Students leave with a short written decision-architecture document, completed during the session, that they keep — built now, while nothing is wrong, so it exists before they need it.

3. Catching the Pattern

A pattern is easiest to interrupt while it's still small. Students learn to recognize it before it costs anything.

- Students identify, by name, the six validated psychological triggers behind a first professional compromise — status, belonging, fear of irrelevance, financial pressure, proximity to power, threat to professional self-image — and name which one is most active for them personally.
- Students map a composite disciplinary pattern — drawn from multiple real attorney misconduct cases — onto the five-stage Erosion Sequence™ mechanism and identify the exact stage at which intervention would have changed the outcome.

Format

EMBEDDED SESSION

60–75 minutes, delivered as a guest session inside an existing Professional Responsibility course — designed to slot in alongside a rules unit without displacing it. This talk does not teach rules — it teaches how to keep applying them once identity tries to make the call instead.

STANDALONE SESSION

75–90 minutes, for LL.M., JD, graduate, or incoming-cohort programming.

Both include Q&A and can run as one session or split across two shorter class periods.

Speaker

Andreea Parc, LL.M.

Former New York attorney, author, and speaker on the psychology of ethical failure — why professionals cross lines they knew were there, and how to build the decision architecture that stops the sequence before it starts. Ms. Parc is the creator of The Erosion Sequence™ and the Erosion Profile™. She is a presenter of the professional responsibility/ethics CLE program “When the Attorney Becomes the Defendant: The Psychology of How Ethical Lines Are Crossed.”

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