A Personal Code of Ethics

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Values point a direction. A code is a concrete path.

I was educated in the Jesuit tradition at Bellarmine Prep, spent four years in speech and debate, and earned a degree in speech communications, earned a degree in speech communications (effectively a rhetoric degree) before earning an MBA in '08. That training taught me how persuasion works, and which philosopher to cite to justify whatever action is in my best interest. In the end, I had to make some hard rules for myself.

A code makes behavior more predictable than values alone. It tells you what I will do when options conflict, and it is the same in every role, paid or unpaid, whether I am advising a family, investing alongside one, or simply a friend or mentor.

What follows is a working draft, built on the principles that were impressed on me daily growing up, and it will not be the last version. It covers how I hope to live, not only how I work. I welcome your feedback at marcus@atlasstventures.com.

Code of Ethics

Marcus Charles. Working draft.

DISCRETIO

Discernment and Detachment

1. **Before I act, I know which position I am playing:** unpaid concerned friend or mentor, neutral paid advisor, investing advisor, or principal, with full transparency for all.
2. **When I am a paid, neutral advisor,** I never get paid just to get a deal done.
3. **When I am a principal, I negotiate hard for my side and build for a win-win.** Life is not a zero-sum game, and a deal that does not work for everyone in it will fail. I count the good of all in what I do.
4. **I am transparent with everyone about where my interests land, paid or unpaid.** I keep no secret about what I stand to gain or lose from any situation, and I say so the moment it arises, in conversation and in writing when paid.
5. **I have agency.** I can pause or exit when a situation stops serving the people in it, or when good faith has dissipated. A hard season alone is not a reason. If I leave a situation, I share my reasons without breaking confidences.

6. **I build consensus with the other advisors involved.** I do my part and they do theirs. In a professional engagement, every advisor gets paid for their work.

CURA PERSONALIS ET MAGIS

Care for the Whole Person and the Greater Good

7. **Before I advise anyone, I help them define what their best interest really means, so we all understand the goals.** It always includes family, friends, employees, customers, and community, and it is never only about the dollars.
8. **I look out for the people in a situation with the least power to protect themselves.**
9. **What is defined as confidential, I keep confidential, with no end date.** For everything else I ask whether sharing a particular lesson or situation could harm the person it came from, and whether it helps the next person in their time of need. I keep it anonymous when warranted.
10. **I assume good faith in all people** until they show me otherwise**.**
11. **I stay with people through the hard seasons,** not only the good ones**.**
12. **My wife and son come before any deal.** I protect time for them.

AGE QUOD AGIS

Do What You Are Doing

13. **When I take something on,** I commit to it fully**.**
14. **I keep my word to everyone.**
15. **When someone needs more expertise than I have, I say so.** We get the right help, or they proceed without me.

AGERE CONTRA

To Act Against What Holds Me Back

16. **I am clear about whose side I am on.** When I advise, I advise toward the best outcome for the client, even against my own financial interest. If I want an outcome for myself, I say so and act as a principal.
17. **I say what needs saying,** even when it is unpopular or costs me a friend, partner or client**.**

CASUS

Principles Applied to Cases

18. **I do not help mislead anyone involved in a deal.** If a confidence stops me from telling the truth, I step away.
19. **If I invest capital alongside someone I am advising, I only do so with four safeguards in place:** written disclosure, their own counsel, an independent fairness check, and their right to say no without losing the advice.

20. **I consider all of a client's constraints when I advise.** I tell them plainly how I see it, even when I think an offer is too low. When asked whether I would take it with all things considered, I answer based on how I view their global perspective.

EXAMEN

The Review

21. **My nature is hypervigilant.** I review my own advice regularly and recalibrate when I learn something new.
22. **Each year I review how I lived, not only how I worked.** I decide what to keep and what to change.
23. **When I get something wrong,** I admit it freely, and to the people it matters to.