



SEAC Ethics Case Study #1

Road Rage

Bruce has been the County’s public works director for 25 years and by all accounts does an excellent job. However, some employees are intimidated by his style. He is loud and brusque. While he praises employees for work well done, he also likes to embarrass employees at staff meetings for falling short. Some employees feel uncomfortable when they are called into his office, not only because of his mannerisms but also because he has a large Playboy calendar prominently displayed on his wall.

Lately, he has been taken to expressing his frustrations on his personal Facebook page. He’s particularly upset with the “ridiculous and one-sided #Me Too Movement,” Muslims moving into the rural parts of the county, especially if they complain about the condition of the county roads, and “all those foreigners coming here who can’t speak English and are taking our jobs.” Occasionally, he also strongly expresses disagreement with actions of the County Council or Commissioners.

Should Bruce cool it?

SEAC Ethics Case Study #2

Workday Ethics

Joan was originally hired by the county when her late father was mayor of one of the county's cities. She and her mother continue to be active in politics, both being precinct committeemen.

She knows her job and is solely responsible for a small but vital function, but in recent years, she has convinced her supervisor that she should be scheduled to work only to 4:00 p.m. (normal office hours are until 5:00 p.m.) with no adjustment in salary. In return, she agreed to skip lunch break though she often leaves the building at lunch time. She frequently comes in a half hour to 45 minutes late. Recently, she has been allowed to work from home one day a week, but she freely admits to her co-workers that she does little work on those days and her social media posts brazenly report all the non-work activities she engages in on her "free day."

Even when she is at work, she does the minimum required and often waits for her co-workers to pick up the slack. Office morale is suffering, but the elected official who heads the office seems indifferent to the problem. He has convinced the county's new HR director that Joan is in a special category with special skills (though no professional certification), and does not have to keep time like everyone else.

Is Joan's time up?

SEAC Ethics Case Study #3

Getting the Job

The Town Council is struggling with balancing its budget because of newly imposed tax caps, yet many important projects are clamoring for attention. The town has a long-time relationship with the same engineering firm but is disappointed that the firm is not willing to cut its fee as much as the Council asked. They decide to see who else might be available.

At a work-study session one Council member (Bernie) strongly endorses a particular engineer, noting: “She’s a one-person firm, but from everything I’ve heard, she has the required skills, does good work and would be affordable.” Actually, he has never met her, but his brother, who is the public works director for a community in a neighboring county, has suggested her to Bernie. Unknown to Bernie, his brother recently entered a romantic relationship with this engineer. He learns of the relationship after making his recommendation but before the scheduled Council vote.

Bernie’s brother has also recommended her to his community, but that Council declined to hire her based on her lack of experience in municipal work and the fact she has no backup professional staff. Her resume shows she has worked on private sector projects when she was employed by larger firms and has positive recommendations from her supervisors at those firms.

What questions should the Council ask?

What role should Bernie play in the process going forward?

SEAC Ethics Case Study #4

Field of Dreams

Alex is the Assistant Superintendent of the Parks Department and a long-time coach of a local youth soccer team. The team has been using a field rent-free with the permission of the owner who has been trying to sell the property for a couple of years. Alex is deeply committed to the team, has coached it for 20 years, devotes countless volunteer hours and even mows the field every Thursday night, using the Parks Department's mower which he returns early each Friday morning.

The City has identified that field as the desired location to connect the two ends of a regional bike trail. Alex opposes this plan, has strongly encouraged his superior, the Parks Board and individual council members to connect the trail using a smaller site half mile away that the city already owns.

The consultant hired by the city prefers the soccer field as the more direct, safer and esthetically pleasing location. While the landowner is willing to sell at a reasonable price, the consultant concedes that purchasing the soccer field will add to the cost of the project. The City Council accepts the consultant's recommendation and votes to purchase the property.

Alex is deeply upset. He is heard to say after the Council vote that "this decision is wasting taxpayer dollars." He and the soccer league set up a "Go-Fund Me" account to compete against the City for purchasing the land, stating, "we seek to reverse the ill-conceived and rushed decision to buy that land and push the kids out."

Has Alex committed any fouls?