

Shared Ethics

ADVISORY COMMISSION

BRINGING ETHICS AWARENESS AND TRAINING TO OUR COMMUNITIES

2023 ETHICS SUMMIT

Case Studies

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2023 SEAC Ethics Case Study #1

Keep on Truckin’

Every year large manufacturers of a wide variety of machinery host a national convention. This year the convention is scheduled for Chicago’s McCormick Place, an easy drive from Northwest Indiana.

The town will be making several major purchases this year so the town council decided to pay the registration fee for the two employees who will be involved in designing the bids for the largest purchases.

Each registrant is automatically eligible for prizes awarded randomly on the convention’s last day. As it happened, both of the town’s employees were winners.

One employee won a wrench set. The other employee won the grand prize, a Ford F-150 pickup truck. Both employees were delighted, one more than the other.

When they returned to work, the employee who won the truck was proud to show it off and announced, “This is just what I needed. My old Silverado has had it.”

Questions:

- Can these employees keep their prizes or do these items belong to the town?
- Is there any other ethical concern present?

2023 SEAC Ethics Case Study #2

Thanks So Much

Jane is the office manager at a satellite office of one of the County's elected officials. The elected official visits the office from time to time and carefully reviews reports Jane submits on the operation of that office. Even so, Jane pretty much runs the office as she pleases.

Jane is very flexible about employee start and finish times and lets employees have time off when they say they need it for medical and other appointments. These "perks" are extended to her entire office staff, but two staff members Bobbie and Carol have added perks. For example, they frequently join Jane for lengthy lunch breaks. These two also encourage – strongly encourage – their co-workers to contribute generously to what they call "Jane's Appreciation Fund." Whatever is collected, which is a significant amount, is presented to Jane at the office's end of year party.

Bobbie and Carol are encouraging the whole staff to urge Jane to run for the elected position which will be opening next election because the incumbent is term limited. As Carol says, "Let's keep a good thing going."

Office morale is high, and the staff often mentions on their social media sites how much they enjoy Jane's flexible management style. Meanwhile, these posts are causing some backlash from other county employees who are complaining on their sites about these special benefits.

Questions:

- Any ethical issues here?

2023 SEAC Ethics Case Study #3

Tools and Wheels

It has been common practice for at least the past 20 years for employees to make personal use of the city’s large stock of hand tools. The then supervisor had a simple rule: Bring it back the next morning undamaged. Occasionally an employee forgot to return the tool the next day or there was some damage to the device. The supervisor usually overlooked what he considered minor infractions.

Upon the supervisor’s retirement, a replacement was hired from a larger city who introduced himself to the staff as a “no nonsense” kind of guy. In that vein, he announced that personal use of city equipment would no longer be permitted. But old habits die hard. While less frequent than before, some employees continued to “borrow” tools.

When caught, they were berated by the supervisor at all-staff meetings and a notation was added to their personnel file. Employees became increasingly disgruntled, considering their new boss to be inflexible and not very nice. Even as morale slipped, he stood his ground.

The supervisor had a town-owned car that he parked in front of his house each night. One morning he found that one of his tires had been slashed. He reported the vandalism to the police chief who noted that there had been a rash of cases city-wide where air had been let out of tires, but he thought maybe only one other case of tire slashing.

Convinced that one of his employees was responsible, the supervisor called an all-staff meeting and announced that if vandalism was committed against him again, he would find that employee and dismiss him on the spot, “no HR niceties; you’ll be out the door just like that,” snapping his fingers.

Questions:

- Do you see any ethical issues in this situation?

2023 SEAC Ethics Case Study #4

All in the Family

Steve, the manager of a small town, is faced with multiple post-COVID vacancies all happening in a brief period of time. He also has two brothers and a sister, who are unemployed or underemployed.

The manager asks the Clerk Treasurer if his sister could be considered for the open accounting position. The Clerk Treasurer interviews her, finds that she has some of the skills required and believes she can be brought up to speed with a minimum of training. The sister is hired.

The town needs a part-time plumbing inspector. One of Steve's brothers is a plumber by trade and has recently started his own plumbing business. Steve asks if he would consider taking the town job at least temporarily. He eagerly accepts the offer feeling that he can use the additional income plus "this gives me an opportunity to be better known in the community."

The other brother has general maintenance skills and Steve needs someone like that, too, but he is concerned how it might look if three of his relatives were on the Town's payroll. So, he contacts the manager in a neighboring town and asks if he would consider hiring his brother. The other manager has an opening, but that job requires a few additional skills that Steve's brother lacks. Steve has an idea. The boundary between the two towns is a street with a landscaped median. Steve says he would be willing to take over the maintenance of that area. Steve's brother is hired.

Questions:

- Do you see any ethical issues here?