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# 2024 Ethics Summit CASE STUDIES



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## **No Good Deed...**

Lucercia is a long-time and well-respected county employee in the Recorder's Office. Over the years, she has successfully mentored many of her co-workers.

When her best friend Pam learns that there is an open position in the office, she asks Lucercia to help get her daughter Linda that position. Linda has made some poor life choices and has limited skills. Even so, out of friendship for Pam, Lucercia pushes hard to get Linda hired.

It becomes obvious very quickly that Linda is struggling and "is in over her head." Along with her work results issues, Linda started taking extended breaks and lunch hours. To protect her, Lucercia starts doing a substantial amount of Linda's work, which requires Lucercia to skip breaks, have lunch at her desk and stay over after normal office hours.

After a few months, the pressure of that extra workload is wearing Lucercia out. She's become abrupt and not very helpful to the public, sometimes loudly arguing with them. Meanwhile, office morale is slipping because of the obvious issues with Linda and the fact that Lucercia is becoming less helpful and even short with her co-workers. And, to make matters worse the staff is ignoring Linda, and some are playing "dirty tricks" seemingly to encourage her to leave.

When asked about all this by the office manager, Lucercia dismisses the complaints from the public ("just a few loud mouths") and co-worker complaints ("they don't like anyone a little different and are acting unprofessionally"). Perhaps because Lucercia's family is politically active, he takes no further action.

**What ethical issues do you see?**



## **Summer Fun**

Every summer a local service club hosts a community festival. This is one of the town's largest summer activities. For many years, the Water Department's office manager has been very active in planning the festival and each year he uses his office email to encourage his staff to attend. In addition to sending the festival marketing flyer, his cover email says, "I look forward to seeing you there."

This year, he is chair of the festival, and he discovers there is a shortage of volunteers for several weekend time slots. At a staff meeting, he again encourages the staff to attend the festival, adding, "We need help at various times over the weekend and I think it would be a very good idea if you signed up for one or more of the open time slots. I may even consider giving you an extra half day off." He then passes around a sign-up sheet.

He also talks to vendors urging them to sign up as event sponsors. All these vendors provide services small enough that competitive bidding is not necessary. The manager is known as being blunt, so they are not surprised when he says, "If it's up to me, any company that doesn't step up and show support for the festival might as well not bother seeking further business from the water department."

Sometime after the festival, nothing more is said about the half day off. When asked about it at a staff meeting, he responds, "I said, 'I may consider' and I'm still considering." Later the staff learns that two of their colleagues were given time off after agreeing not to talk about it. Human Resources was not notified.

**Do you see any ethical issues?**



## **Cheers**

The city is planning a major construction project and a request for bids has been published. After the bids were submitted but before the contract was awarded, the council president was having dinner at a popular restaurant with a group of his political supporters and one other council member. At the next booth were employees of Edifice, one of the bidders. They were also having dinner and bragging about their bid; how they padded it and why there is no worry about bidding too high. The Edifice CEO was heard to say, "I'm not worried about our inflated pricing because we've analyzed how our competitors have bid on other municipal jobs. We just pad less than they do."

On their way out the Edifice CEO noticed that the council president was at the next booth, so he stopped to say "hello" and after some small talk continued on his way. Before leaving, he told the restaurant manager to give everybody at the council president's table a round of drinks. "Just add it to my tab," he said.

The drinks were served and consumed. Two weeks later, the bids were opened, and Edifice was in fact the low bidder. Neither the council president nor the other councilor who was present disclosed what they had overheard at the restaurant. Both of them voted to accept the Edifice bid and warmly endorsed the company, even though two other council members questioned the quality and timeliness of Edifice's work the last time they did a project for the city.

**Do you see any ethical issues?**