

Ethics Test for Local Government Employees

How are your ethics? Take the following test to find out. Test results will be published in the February issue of the PA TIMES.

1. An inspector is asked to ok construction work that does not comply with the city's building codes. In exchange, the contractor offers tickets to an upcoming concert. Should you accept the tickets? **Yes/No**

2. Your relative wants to set up a snow removal business and in addition to other contracts, they want to have a contract with the city. You work for the department that issues this type of contract, but not in the contract section. Should you declare a conflict of interest? **Yes/No**

3. You have a business in addition to your job with the city. You spend time on the telephone arranging business deals, contacting suppliers and potential clients. Your work for the city suffers because of the amount of time spent on your private business. Is this ethical? **Yes/No**

4. You have learned several specialized skills working for the city. Another local government learns of your talent and wants you to work for them, "moonlighting" on the weekends, if you are not called in by your employer to work on an emergency problem. Should you "moonlight" --that is, work part-time for the other city? **Yes/No**

5. A department head or city council member contacts you for information about how a city service is handled. You provide the information to the department head or the city council member who made the request. You then send additional information directly to the citizen who had contacted the director or city council member. Should you have sent the additional information? **Yes/No**

6. You spend several hours during the week using the city supplied computer to download information on a relative's medical condition. Is this ethical?

Yes/No

7. A health inspector arrives at a restaurant during the start of the lunch hour. Several violations are noted during the inspection. The manager offers the employee lunch in exchange for waiting to write up the inspection, asking for time to make the needed corrections after the lunch hour. Should the employee accept the free lunch? **Yes/No**

8. You have inspected a building and find items that do not meet the city's building codes. You write up your inspection and then leave. The contractor contacts you, does not like your answer, and asks to speak to your supervisor. They discuss the situation and find another option that will meet the building codes and not cost the contractor a whole lot of money. Is the supervisor's action ethical? **Yes/No**

9. You inspect a restaurant just after they have had a spill of grease in the kitchen. It has contaminated surfaces and food. The kitchen staff is busy throwing out food and sanitizing surfaces. You tell the manager you will wait until the kitchen order is restored before conducting your inspection. Is this ethical?

Yes/No

10. You are asked to provide a special service to someone, e.g., to just let him or her ride with you, in your city vehicle for a private (not city related) purpose. Is this ethical? **Yes/No**

11. A manager in another department comes to you and asks that you handle a matter outside of the normal process and it is a service that not everyone in the city would get. The manager states that the person needing help is a very important person and the normal rules and procedures don't apply to their request. Should you handle the matter as requested? **Yes/No**

Interested readers are invited to take the "Ethics Quiz". It is online at <http://denzel.pspa.niu.edu/ethicstest/ethics.htm>

Going Along to Get Along?

Helen, the new director of the city's bureau of restaurant inspection services, decides to conduct a few site visits as a

way of learning firsthand about her job. To her surprise, she finds that many of her inspectors are ignoring serious health code violations.

She decides to discuss her findings with her boss, Sally, who is the head of the city's health department. Sally, who has recently proposed a substantial budget increase to a receptive city manager and city council, suggests to Helen that there might be some negative fall out to the department if the problems in the restaurant bureau become public—as they might if an inspector under investigation decides to argue publicly that department brass knew about the situation. Sally urges Helen to handle the situ-

ation with appropriate discretion and regard for the interests of the organizational team.

Should Helen go along to get along with Sally? Should Helen be a good team player and postpone corrective action so as not to upset the financial appletart? Or should Helen launch an investigation and take appropriate disciplinary and site corrective actions to protect the public interest? Has Sally put Helen in an unfair, perhaps compromising position? For instance, if the problem becomes public and Helen postpones corrective action, has Sally set Helen up for a fall?

—submitted by Hank Abrams
(abrams@bostonems.org)



An
Ethics
Moment

Romance in the Office—What's a Manager to Do?

In last month's column, "A Late Night Surprise," a city manager working late at night unexpectedly discovered his two top aides in a passionate romantic embrace. City policy strictly forbids dating between employees, threatening dismissal to those who do. What should the CM do? Should he report Susan and Gary? Should he overlook the situation? Should he speak to each of them and threaten to tell if they don't end the relationship?

One reader, Dan Dunmire (djd@usaor.net), writes: "Dennis (the city manager) should look outside of the current policy box and analyze all of his alternatives. If legislating morality worked there would be no need for vice squads. In my opinion, you should not come between two people who are in love or are falling in love even if they happen to be public officials. Instead, if he feels he needs to do something about Susan and Gary, he should work to change the policy prohibiting dating between employees. Is an embrace in a public office after hours in the bowels of a government building considered dating or is dating seen as an open affair in public? Either way, who cares? The ethical thing to do is to have the guts to elimi-

nate a staid and outdated policy. Ethics is a matter of judgment of doing the right thing and then having the guts to take responsibility for your actions and standing behind your decision."

Another reader, Ed Daly (ecdcity@shen.tel.net) writes: "The assistant city manager and finance director are key members of the city's executive management team. They and the city council set the tone for city employees and the public's perception of what behavior standards is acceptable for organization.

"The city manager must at a minimum, notify the assistant and the finance director in writing that the behavior will cease immediately and result in termination if it occurs again. The notice and counseling should focus on the employees' excellent work records and value to the city. But, their responsibility for setting behavior standards takes priority over their administrative competencies.

"It is too easy for the city manager to overlook behavior by the executive team that not be tolerated for line employees. Being 'valuable' to the organization should not be a licensee to deviate from behavior standards. If anything, they

should be held to a higher level since they set the standard for other employees and send a message to the employees about what is acceptable. The manager needs to think about what type of message he wants to send down the line!

"The manager's alternative in this case is to officially authorize everyone to play 'Bob and Carol, Ted and Alice.'"

Ok, now we get to the bottom line—what did the city manager do? The CM did not speak to them directly. He used the next staff meeting (with Susan and Gary in attendance) as an opportunity to discuss the policy and

introduced a hypothetical situation for discussion that closely mirrored the one he was in. After discussion about alternative approaches to handling the situation, the staff agreed that they would tell if in the same position. Business went on as usual and he never encountered Susan and Gary in a romantic embrace again. He doesn't know if they understood the veiled warning he was trying to give them or they simply ended the relationship. He's generally happy about the outcome, though

discussion at the staff meeting led to another couple (both supervisor-level city workers) being 'out-ed.' He's struggling with this now.

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An Ethics Moment

A Late Night Surprise!

Dennis, the city manager of a financially strapped municipality, is working uncharacteristically late at night. The offices are empty and quiet and as he is leaving, He notices a sliver of light coming from the door of the new budget director, Susan. He decides to stop in and praise her for her excellent report in which she discovered errors that will save the city millions of dollars, projecting for the first time in many years a budget surplus. As he approaches her office he can see through the few inches the door is open that she is in a passionate embrace with Gary, the assistant city manager. Employment policy strictly forbids dating between employees, threatening dismissal to those who do.

Dennis' code of ethics requires him to enforce this policy, yet at the same time he does not want to lose either or both of his valuable employees. It would be difficult if not impossible to bring in someone else with their experience and credentials for the amount of money the city is able to pay.

What should Dennis do? Should he report Susan and Steve, in accordance with policy? Should he overlook the situation believing the city will be best served in the long run? Should he speak to each of them and threaten to tell if they don't end the relationship?

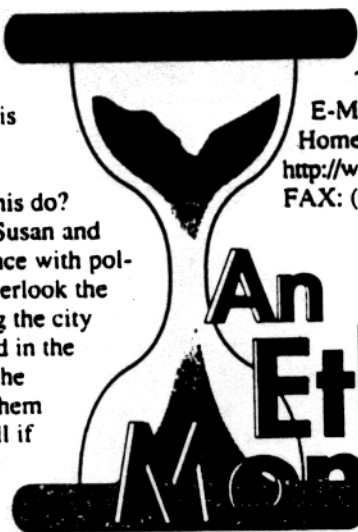
—based on a real case. Submitted by Carole L. Jurkiewicz, University of North Carolina at Charlotte. cljrkwcz@unccvm.uncc.edu

February's Ethics Moment reported a case in which a mayor called downtown business owners idiots or nitwits for allowing their employees to take up customer parking. The mayor's remarks so embarrassed other members of the city commission that they passed a new ordinance that would prevent or discourage such verbal tirades. The city's new ordinance does not allow the mayor or any other city official refer to anyone as an idiot or nitwit.

With this month's issue, the Ethics Moment column enters its second year. All readers of the PA Times are invited to send material for publication consideration.

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