Understanding Work Ethic

*Steps to Solving Ethical Dilemmas: Sample Responses*

(“Workplace Ethics Case Studies” can be found on page 103, and “Steps to Solving Ethical Dilemmas” can be found on page 104, of [Soft Skills to Pay the Bills — Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success](https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/) [<https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/>].)

Case 1: LaKeisha is an administrative assistant in the Human Resources Department. Her good friend Michael is applying for a job with the company and LaKeisha has agreed to be a reference for him. Michael asks for advice on preparing for the interview. LaKeisha has the actual interview questions asked of all applicants and considers making him a copy of the list so he can prepare.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:

***It is not fair for one applicant to have the interview questions ahead of time when the others do not.***

What are the facts?

***LaKeisha is a company employee. It is against company policy, and definitely an ethics violation, for her to share internal information, such as interview questions, with someone outside the company.***

What are some possible solutions?

***LaKeisha could offer to talk about the company in general (without giving away confidential or proprietary information) with Michael so that he goes into the interview prepared and with some background knowledge.***

What are you going to do?

***LaKeisha should give Michael some common-sense advice based upon her own interview experience, and some general background knowledge about the company. She should not share interview questions with Michael, as that would not be an ethical choice.***

Also consider….how will you know if your decision was the right one?

***LaKeisha will know that Michael has her support as he interviews, but she hasn’t divulged information that would put him at an unfair advantage or jeopardize her employment.***

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Case 2: Emily works in the Quality Control Department. Once a year, her supervisor gives away the company’s used computers to the local elementary school. The company does not keep records of these computer donations. Emily really needs a computer. Her supervisor asks her to deliver 12 computers to the school.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:

***Emily is tempted to take one of the computer donations for herself; the computers are intended to be used by the local elementary school.***

What are the facts?

***Emily is a company employee who has been entrusted with the transport of computer donations. Taking one of those computers for herself is theft.***

What are some possible solutions?

***Emily should deliver the computers as she is asked to do. Emily might consider asking her employer whether the company has an agreement with a technology provider to offer employee discounts on computers.***

What are you going to do?

***Emily delivers the 12 computers to the elementary school.***

Also consider….how will you know if your decision was the right one?

***Emily did not take something that was not rightfully hers and that was intended as a donation to a local elementary school.***

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Case 3: Marvin is an assistant in the Building Services Department. He has just received a new work computer and is excited to try it out. His supervisor has a strict policy about computer usage (for business purposes only), but Marvin wants to learn the email software. He figures one good way to do this is to send emails to his friends and relatives until he gets the hang of it. He has finished all of his work for the day and has 30 minutes left until his shift is over. His supervisor left early.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:

***Marvin is tempted to use his new work computer for personal email. This is against his supervisor’s policy.***

What are the facts?

***Marvin’s supervisor has a strict policy. Marvin has a new computer. Marvin wants to practice.***

What are some possible solutions?

***Marvin should send a business correspondence to his colleagues via email to practice with his new computer.***

What are you going to do?

***Marvin should only use his computer in accordance with his supervisor’s policy.***

Also consider….how will you know if your decision was the right one?

***If Marvin adheres to company policy, he will not be in violation and will not need to worry about a reprimand from his supervisor.***

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Case 4: Jennie was recently hired to work as a receptionist for the front lobby. As receptionist, she is responsible for making copies for the people in her office. Her son, Jason, comes in and needs some copies for a school project. He brought his own paper and needs 300 copies for his class. If he doesn’t bring the copies with him, he will fail the project. The company copier does not require a security key, nor do they keep track of copies made by departments.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:

***Jennie is tempted to make copies for personal use at her workplace.***

What are the facts?

***Jennie is a company employee entrusted with the use of office equipment and supplies. The copier is for office use.***

What are some possible solutions?

***Jennie can suggest that her son use a copy provider such as FedEx Kinkos to make copies for his class.***

What are you going to do?

***Jennie should not use her office printer for personal use.***

Also consider….how will you know if your decision was the right one?

***Jennie will not need to worry about a co-worker finding out she is making copies for her son or about a reprimand from her supervisor for using office equipment for personal use.***

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Case 5: Nonye works in the Customer Service Support Department and spends a lot of his day responding to email. One day he received a message from an email address he didn’t recognize. It said, “I’d like to get to know you better, outside of work.” Nonye had no idea who sent it, so he deleted it. A few days later, he received another message from the same source. Nonye ignored the message again, thinking they would stop. He mentioned these emails to a co-worker, who responded, “You’re lucky to have a fan.” The messages continue to come every few days and he’s feeling pretty weirded out.

Identify the problem or ethical issue:

***Someone at work is harassing Nonye via email.***

What are the facts?

***The emails seem to be coming from inside the workplace, but Nonye doesn’t recognize the email address. Nonye is deleting the emails. They are continuing.***

What are some possible solutions?

***Rather than simply mentioning the emails to a co-worker, Nonye should discuss the online harassment with his immediate supervisor and the company’s human resources (HR) department. Nonye should print each email to show his supervisor and HR.***

What are you going to do?

***Nonye should formally report the email harassment.***

Also consider….how will you know if your decision was the right one?

***Nonye’s supervisor and the company’s HR department should be able to determine the origin of the email, address that individual, and remind all employees about the company’s acceptable use policy (AUP).***