

Ethical case study example

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All the sciences and studies relating to social and human problems oftentimes intersect and interrelate tightly. As for social, human, and moral issues are probably the most complex and controversial ones, all the subjects related to them must be observed carefully and attentively in order to avoid any possible mistakes.

For instance, law and ethics were always combined together, especially within cases involved complex human factors like psychological and moral ones. There are numerous indicative examples of cases that soundly touch ethical and moral aspect of human rights. The Paul Cronan case is by right considered one of the most demonstrative cases. The Paul Cronan case took place at 1985. This process became well-known in many countries and aroused numerous discussions all over the world.

The twenty-years-ago period seems very similar to nowadays however there were significant differences in some areas. In the contemporary society every person of any age and origin is aware of what is AIDS and of important facts about it. We know much about this disease as for unfortunately it became very widespread dangerous challenge in our world. Still not so long ago, in the early eighties of twentieth century, most people did not even hear about this illness. Thus, any person that suffered from AIDS turned to be an outcast.

This is what happened to Paul Cronan. There is a great number of details in the present case that show a moral indifference of society towards an individual that suffers from a disaster. The ethical side of the entire story however is a very controversial area that shows how equivocal and

ambiguous may appear to be a grief situation and how difficult it may be to evaluate a wrongness and rightfulness of opposite sides involved in it. From the first day of graduation from his high school and to the period when the case took place Paul Cronan worked for the same company for all his life. He worked as a service representative for New England Telephone (NET) in Needham, Massachusetts, for ten years.

Then Cronan was promoted to a technician and transferred to South Boston where he worked till 1985. Cronan devoted his entire life to the only one company and never planned to leave for another organization although he was a good employee and could do it easily. However Paul Cronan was committed to his company and this fact shows him as a really valuable team-member. In the 1985 Cronan started noticing first strange symptoms and having major problems with health. During a medical observation he found out his positive HIV status. Paul Cronan was shocked with a fact that he had a rare deadly virus.

In that period the major AIDS risk group was homosexuals and Cronin was afraid of possible negative reaction of people surrounded. Besides he did not want NET to get any problems regarded to employing an AIDS-positive worker and did not disclose this fact to anyone. However his absenteeism at work became too frequent and Cronan had to tell his supervisor about his positive HIV status asking him to keep confidence. I think this was the point where the major ethical contradiction of this case began. Cronan's supervisor, Charlie O'Brien, appeared in a difficult situation.

From one hand he was legally obliged to keep privacy of the employee, Paul Cronan. From the other hand O'Brien had to inform upper managers about causes of the worker's behavior. Finally the managers of company and the other workers found out truth about Cronan's health and the reaction followed immediately. The employees of New England Telephone protested against working together with Cronan. They worried about their health and being unaware of AIDS facts were afraid of getting infected from Cronan while contacting him at work.

Most of people in the eighties did not obtain proper information about AIDS-related issues thus the major feeling of most of co-workers was fear for their lives. It is useless to blame the employees for being indifferent and cruel towards the grief of deadly ill person. They considered their health and lives to be in danger hence a concern of their own lives appeared more important than sorrow and complicity to their co-worker. Therefore, an ethical side of this situation included at least three major issues. The interest of the organization, the safety and comfort of employees, and the privacy and rights of Paul Cronan were equally important parts of this educative case. Unfortunately, whatever was the court decision, it was impossible to satisfy all participated sides and to avoid any losses.

Despite Cronan's return to the company it was not the end of problems. Although NET was trying to follow its privacy and equal opportunity policies, it was impossible to control behavior of his co-workers. They demanded the company to keep within the rules and preserve their safety at the workplace. Due to very few information about AIDS and related issues the employees avoided not only to share the room with Cronan, but even to breathe the

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same air with him. After the out-of-court settlement NET conducted educational programs covering AIDS-related issues, but fear did not disappear, it only took different shape. At the beginning people made cruel graffiti in bathrooms, now they expressed a protest through the workers' union.

Most of them recognized that Cronan was a common person who appeared to be so unhappy to get deadly virus. Still their own safety seemed much more significant. It is very hard to assess the degree of ethical validity of this case regarding to Paul Cronan himself. He appeared to be one of the first victims of social consequences of AIDS. He simply wanted to live and work as long as he could, according to his rights. Although he was rehabilitated at work, Cronan did not become the gainer.

It was not possible to observe all of three diverse ethical issues. However I think none of the sides finally won at the result of the present case.

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