

Group organizational ethics



Question My company became publicly traded a few years ago. Since then the emphasis on revenue and profit growth has become intense. The need for the company to reassure shareholders that it represents a sound investment has led to some quite aggressive growth targets, and extreme pressure on employees to put up the numbers to substantiate those projections year-after-year. This has caused ethical dilemmas on more than one occasion, where the right thing to do did not necessarily comport with the most profitable thing to do for the company.

In one case, a customer was paying far beyond the market value for our services; and the company expected us to renew their contract at an even higher rate. In the interest of keeping a good customer happy and committed to us over the long haul, I determined that the correct business course of action would be to actually reduce the price for this customer, rather than try to increase it. This was also the ethically correct thing to do because we were ripping off this particular customer as evidenced by the fact that the other customers were paying far less. After some serious arm twisting, I was able to convince the company that there is greater potential long-term profit if we reduce this customer's price in order to shore up the business relationship. Fortunately, we were able to do this, and the customer now feels like they are treated fairly. I did not need to compromise my values or beliefs.

Question 2

Yes, I would have an obligation to stay connected, because I would be unlikely to suffer any harm. Under a deontological ethical approach, it is simply the right thing to do to sacrifice one's time in order to save the life of another person. If the facts were a little bit different, and there was some

risk to my own life, or I would be putting the life of another person at risk due to my lack of availability, it would be a reason to reconsider. But taking the facts of this scenario at face value, and not adding in assumptions that are not already stated, it seems like a fairly straightforward ethical decision to stay connected to the person in order to save his life. By the way, the fact that he is a virtuoso musician has little to do with it. The same decision should be made if this were a drug addict or beggar from the street. Those people would have just as much potential to do good in their future lives as the violinist has to do evil in his.

Question 3

The simulation was very enlightening, particularly the part about the mechanic offering to commit insurance fraud for the customer. I was left thinking how prevalent it must be for customers to not even give it a second thought and go ahead and do it. Certainly, the prevalence of insurance fraud reports would seem to substantiate that assumption.

If an ethical decision at work would result in being fired and causing one's family to suffer, I would still think a duty-based approach such as deontological would be the correct approach to take. That being said, there are degrees of appropriateness for this type of reasoning. Someone who refuses to tell a lie that would save the life of a child simply because lying is wrong is not acting ethically. However, refusing to compromise one's core principles, even at the risk of having to tighten one's belt and ask one's family to sacrifice, is generally admirable and ethical.

If a supervisor asked me to do something unethical, it would depend on the degree of inappropriateness, which in turn would depend on the severity and nature of the repercussions. If saying no would risk great harm to an

innocent person, then I would likely go along. However, if agreeing to the unethical act has little benefit and could do great potential harm then I would refuse. Although this is a more utilitarian approach based on consequences, a deontological duty based approach is the general rule, while the utilitarian approach would influence the decision. Ultimately, it is hard to take a black-and-white approach to nearly anything, as most ethical dilemmas are complex and leave much room for doubt.