

# Ethics



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Ethical Decision at Work One of the most challenging ethical decisions I have had to make occurred when I was working at a supermarket as a cashier. I had just started my employment at the supermarket when I met an older teller named Joyce. While I had worked in a supermarket before as a bagger, this was my first time working the cash register. The supermarket gave me a day of training and then set me out on my own to take customers. I was able to make it through during the down-hours, but when the supermarket got busy I found that I was greatly in over my head. Running the cash register required knowing the numbers item numbers for grains and produce; the customers were supposed to write them down, but many of them neglected this rule, and as such it was dependent on the cashier to either memorize or run and find the number when the customer forgot. Subsequently, during the busy periods the lines got long, and I had to rely on Joyce to help me with the item numbers. In addition to the item numbers, she helped me out with all the small things about the job that you don't learn in training – which were the important managers, when to pretend you're working hard, and when to slack off. Over the first few weeks we became very close and Joyce introduced me to her family. She had two daughters she was taking care by herself, as her husband had left her a few years earlier. One day Joyce came in visually distressed and wouldn't tell me what was wrong. During our break I ate with her and finally got her to tell me the problem. She told me that she had come on difficult times of late, as her husband had stopped paying child support and she was facing eviction from her apartment. Joyce was considerably older than me and I didn't have much experience in these situations, but I felt very bad for her situation, and consoled her and told her that I'm sure things would be all right.

The next day I worked Joyce was in and she seemed better. I noticed that she was much more standoffish than she had previously been, and I thought that maybe she just didn't want to discuss what she told me before. During one of the busy periods one of Joyce's daughters came through the checkout line, and I noticed Joyce not charging her for a number of items and place them in a bag. I wasn't sure if I had seen the incident accurately, so I chose not to say anything. The next day I worked I watched Joyce closely and noticed that during the same time her daughter came through again, and Joyce similarly didn't charge her for the items. At this point I was facing a considerable ethical dilemma, as Joyce and I had become close and I knew that she was experiencing hard times; however, I was also aware that she was stealing and that it was undeniably wrong. For a week I didn't work with Joyce, and during the entire time I brooded on the decision - should I inform my managers of Joyce's theft? The next time I worked with Joyce, I watched her and noticed her do it for the third time. At this point I realized that the right thing to do is to turn Joyce in for theft. I reasoned that while she was experiencing hard times, this wasn't justification to steal from her employer, as this if everyone who had hard times broke the law, then society would fall apart. I waited until after work and met with my manager and informed them of what I had seen. The manager thanked me and next week Joyce was fired. I believe they checked the cameras and noticed her theft.

I have never spoken to Joyce since the incident and I often wonder how she turned out. A part of me wishes that I had merely asked Joyce to stop stealing, or warned her, but then I realize that she might have just made sure I wasn't around when she did stole. To this day I continue to debate the

decision I made, and sometimes question whether it was truly the right thing to do.