**Bible Query on Business Ethics**

All of these situations have happened except for passing on false information. In every situation, before listening to the advice of others, you should:

Pray that God will guide you and give you wisdom. Proverbs 3:5-6.

Discuss it with other mature Christians, preferably who are in the same field. Proverbs 24:6.

Ask yourself, if I thought God wanted to chose the option that was most painful for me, would I do it out of obedience.

If I do not do an option that is less painful, is that really because of biblical principles, or is it a "martyr" complex that is not from God. Ecc 7:16

If Jesus was in my position, what would He do? 1 John 1:6.

If God and all the angels were watching me, and if everyone later found out about what I did, would I feel comfortable? Proverbs 5:21.

**ILLEGAL SOFTWARE COPYING**

Making multiple copies of computer software for use on multiple computers is illegal and is called "pirating" software. The fines for doing so are a maximum of $50,000 per illegal copy. The company you work for has a policy to obey the law and not illegally copy software. You are a PC coordinator, and you are aware that illegal copying, both for company benefit and employee's personal benefit is very common. Another PC coordinator even is able to break the copy protection on software to permit copying. You tell your department head privately, and he says not to worry about it, he will take care of it. He does absolutely nothing. What do you do?

Advice others might give:

Your boss: forget about it and just do your job. You have only to worry about your own morality, not theirs. (However, see Leviticus 5:1)

The software companies: Just give them the name of the company, your name, and the names of the people so that the software companies can sue.

Refuse to work on computers that have pirated software.

Prepare your resume and look for another job in case you get fired for standing up for what is right.

Nag the people who pirate software, remind them of corporate policy, and ask them if their personal integrity is only worth a few hundred dollars.

**TAKING COMPETITIVE INFORMATION**

A supposedly new computer your company has bought is not really new. The computer hard disk contains information that shows the computer was previously used by someone working for one of the suppliers your company negotiates prices with. If people in your company use the information on the hard disk, they will have an added advantage in negotiating prices with the suppliers.

Advice others might give:

Print the information and give it to your company's negotiators. You will be a hero.

Quietly erase the information that accidentaly fell into your hands.

Ask your department head (The one who did not care about illegal software piracy.)

**TAKE THE BLAME OR NOT**

You left instructions for a chemical operator to put so many pounds of material in a tank. The tank can hold that many pounds of most liquids, but this liquid is lighter and when the operator tries to do this the tank overflows. Since each spill is investigated, the operator has a letter put in his file saying he made this mistake. It is true that he should have watched the tank more carefully, but what should you say?

Advice others might give:

Do not say anything. After all, he should have been more careful.

Take all the blame yourself, since you might have been able to foresee the problem.

**TAKING CREDIT DUE OTHERS**

Someone you work closely with installed a system that was very helpful to one person. You did no work on the system. That person enthusiastically thanks both you and him, thinking that you both worked on it. What should you say?

Advice others might give:

Make a point of saying that the other person should get all the credit.

Just do not say anything, since you were never asked if you did the work or not.

**PASSING ON FALSE INFORMATION**

A customer has a problem. Your boss is aware of it and wants you to pass on to the customer the reason for the problem and that your company is working on the solution. You do so. Later, you find out that your boss was lying about the reasons and your company is not doing anything. Your boss told you to give that answer so that the company could avoid responsibility. Should you tell the customer?

Advice others might give:

You were not lying when you first told the customer the false information, because you believed the information to be true. You should be loyal to your company, and your boss's lies are your boss's problem. Do not tell the customer, but leave that to your boss.

Tell the customer the truth, even though your boss will probably hold a grudge against you for the rest of your career, if you even have a career at that company after that. Let God worry about the consequences, you only have to worry about your obedience. (See James 4:17)

**PLANS TO LEAVE THE COMPANY**

You hire on with a company with plans to work for it only a few years. You do not tell the company this though. Your company likes your performance and invests a lot of time and money in training you. This training will be valuable to you when you switch jobs, but the company only would have trained you if they thought you were going to stay for a long time. Should you tell them?

Advice others might give:

Tell them. You will miss out on the training, you will be open.

Do not tell them. Your plans may change and you may stay a long time.

Do not tell them. You have not lied, since you never stated your plans. Also, they can fire you anytime they choose too.

**TELLING A PATIENT OF A TERMINAL ILLNESS**

You work in the medical field and the patient's diagnosis is terminal. You think the patient will live longer and be happier in his last weeks if he has hope, so you plan not to tell him how slim his chances are. However, when you enter his room, the first question he asks you is. “How good are my chances?” What do you say?

Advice others might give:

Joseph Fletcher: Ethics are not absolute but situational. Thus almost anything is OK under certain circumstances. In this case lying is OK.

(But see Prov 21:2 and Prov 16:25).

Do not try to soften the blow, just blurt out the truth.

Always tell everything, even if he does not ask.

Tell him it is serious, but ask him if he really wants to know. If he insists on knowing, tell him what he wants to know.

(As a side note, in Japan a man unexpectedly died of cancer, and the family sued the doctor for not telling either the man or the family. The doctor knew of the cancer beforehand, but argued that since it was hopeless and would only make people unhappy to hear it, there was no point in telling anyone. A judge ruled in the doctor’s favor. I do not know if the man had already made a will or not.)

**A TECHNICALLY EXCELLENT COWORKER IS FIRED FOR TECHNICAL INCOMPETANCE**

Someone in your company who has done work for you is very talented in his technical skill. Apparently though, he and his supervisor do not get along for some unknown reason and he is fired for technical incompetence. Should you speak up?

Advice others might give:

Do not speak up. If you spoke up and he did get his job back, with the bad relationship between him and his supervisor, he would be better off working for someone else. You will only make trouble for yourself.

Tell his boss that you valued his skills in a diplomatic way. Perhaps his boss will reconsider.

Boldly tell his boss, and his boss's boss if necessary that he was a valued worker.

Ask the fired coworker what he would like you to do to help him as a friend.

**HIDING THE TRUTH**

Someone who works for you is doing a poor job and you plan to fire him. However, you do not trust his loyalty or honesty. If you ask him to come to your office and tell him the news, you have strong reason to believe that when he cleans out his desk he will take the names and data of you customers, get a job with a competitor, and give your competitor that information. You have a plan. Send him to a training course. At the end of the course, before he flies home, tell him that he is fired. Conveniently clean out his personal things for him, ensuring that when he leaves he takes only the property and information that is his. Is this plan ethical?

Advice others might give:

Sure. It may not be fair to him, but no one said life is fair.

The plan is not ethical. You sent him to the class with an ulterior motive. While you did not explicitly lie, you kept an important piece of truth from him.

Tell him everything, even though you know he will steal the information. Then and only then will you be able to sleep well at night.

The plan if good and ethical. (See 1 Sam 16:1-5) He suffers no loss except the chance to steal from you. He even gains some training. Should he complain, ask him what else he wanted to take and how he has been wronged.

**ENTERTAINING CLIENTS**

A customer buys a large system from you and it is customary for you to take him to dinner. He wants to go to a sexually oriented club. What do you do?

Advice others might give:

Your boss: Do it. You want the repeat business don't you? You want to do well in your job appraisal don't you?

Discuss it with your boss.

Tell your customer it would not be too good for you or him to be seen there, and besides, he has a lovely wife, and you want not want to offend her. Try to humor him out of it.

Explain to your customer that you want him to be satisfied, but that since Jesus is the Lord of your life, He has to come first. There is no way you can take him to one of those places. "So how about Steak and Ale instead?"

Do not take him out, because buying dinner is similar to a bribe.

**HIDING TRUTH FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

Occasionally EPA people come for inspections. The local EPA people are not competent, and do not really care about your plant's efforts to not pollute. They only want to find infractions, no matter how small, so that they can find reason to fine your company and make themselves look good. Should you cooperate with them?

Advice others might give:

Your assistant plant manager: Do not cooperate with those jerks. If they really cared about the environment and were technically competent it would be different. They don't, so do not volunteer any information and give only minimal answers to their questions.

The law: Emissions and spills must be reported to the EPA.

Find a middle ground and say only the minimum you have to say to obey the law.

Ask the EPA people why they do not really care about the environment and your plants cleanup efforts.

**STARTING A BUSINESS WITH A NON-CHRISTIAN PARTNER**

A friend of yours, whom you trust, has asked you to start a business with him. You have respect for his abilities, but he is not a christian. If the business opportunity does look promising what should you do?

Advice others might give:

Start the business with him. Remember, though to give a portion of your profits to God. (But see 2 Cor 6:14-18.)

Politely decline, and do not tell him the reason unless he asks.

Do not start the business. Be sure to tell him that it is because he is a heathen and you cannot be a partner with evil people.

Do not start the business, and gently tell him that if you started the business it would have to be for the glory of God. Since he cannot be expected to work for the glory of Someone he does not believe in, tell him you cannot be his partner, but wish him success in his endeavor.

by Steven M. Morrison, PhD.