

MCO 496  
Senior Seminar  
Ethics in the Workplace – Role Plays

Create a three- to four-minute role play dramatizing your assigned ethical problem. Make sure that you clearly and thoroughly address the ethical issues and possible solutions. You may enlarge the scenario to include other characters and concerns to enhance your production.

Group One:

At a small cable TV station, Jane and Paula, production assistants in their mid-20s, are gossiping in the employee break room about their co-workers. In particular, they are speculating about a rumored romantic relationship between the married executive producer and a new single employee. The attractive young woman was hired full-time after her college graduation, despite a questionable internship performance. Unaware that two other employees have entered the room, they continue the conversation. One employee interrupts them and objects to the gossiping, while the other worker encourages them to continue.

Questions to include: Is such a conversation appropriate at the workplace or anywhere else? Should employees gossip and risk the chance of the boss finding out? How can one avoid getting drawn into such harmful discussions? Or is it okay to gossip in the workplace?

Group Two:

Two young journalists, Tom and Wanda, are collaborating on an investigative cover story at a regional magazine. The story involves several high-placed, credible, but anonymous sources. They are reviewing the story during a meeting with their editor and the magazine's attorney. Shortly after the meeting begins, the editor asks them to name their sources for a particular story point, vital to the piece's integrity. Since Wanda wrote that section, Tom lets her explain, but soon wonders about the truth of her reporting. In a previous conversation, she had indicated getting that information from another source different from the one she names. The editor and attorney leave the room for a few moments, so Tom confronts Wanda. She admits fabricating her portion of the story, as the editor and attorney return to the room. Tom tries to stall, but they have already overheard her admission. Company policy requires immediate suspension pending an investigation for such conduct. The next issue features the story on the cover, and the presses roll tomorrow. No story, no issue.

Questions to include: Is fabrication ever justified in a news story? Should media professionals discuss such ethical issues before collaborating? Should Tom defend Wanda or toss her to the wolves? Should the editor hold the story or rely on Tom's reporting?

### Group Three:

Laura, 24, was delighted when a local dog day camp hired her as a communication manager, having interned there during college. Her first project was to develop a new promotions campaign along with brochures, business cards and print advertisements. One of her ideas, which the owner, Deborah, adopted, was a “Barking Barbecue,” a free, public event, with food for pets and owners, along with games, grooming and training tips. The manager, Cynthia, approved all the promotional materials and the event schedule. A few days before the event, the manager admits she does not have money to pay vendors, so she tells Laura to ask participants for donations and charge extra for the activities to defray costs. Since the promotion material and advertisements state that the event is free, Laura is concerned about possible deception. She asks for a meeting with the manager and owner to discuss her concerns.

Questions to include: Is the event really free if donations are sought and extra fees are charged? Should Laura sacrifice her ethics to keep her job – lose the battle to win the war?

Adapted from: Lee Ann Peck, Guy S. Reel, eds. Media Ethics at Work: True Stories from Young Professionals. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2013, 125-129.

### Group Four:

Ashlee, 24, sells advertising for a local weekly newspaper in a college town. Having interned there and worked part-time before graduation, she has established strong professional relationships with several advertising clients, but the owner of two bars, Brad, 29, has repeatedly declined to buy space. Ashlee and an intern, Jane, 20, make well-prepared sales pitch one Friday afternoon for Brad and his manager, Jim, 23, and they seem to be more interested than before. The men invite the ladies to come back to the bar that evening “with their friends” and enjoy free drinks. Although uncomfortable about mixing business with pleasure, the ladies accept their offer, while planning to continue the sales pitch and close the deal. Around midnight, the men agree to the pitch, but upstairs in Brad’s apartment. The ladies decline the invitation and leave.

Questions to include: How should Ashlee convince Jane that this is not how ad sales work, especially when the intern does not understand “the problem” about going upstairs? Should they have returned to the bar after the original sales pitch or decline the invitation? Should they report the incident to the newspaper’s ad manager?

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