

“[The activity] is supposed to be a discussion of ethical problems during the first class. No theory or decision making tools. Then the professor shows the ‘problem’ of not having any framework to make decisions.” 1

MCO 300 A/EA
Fall Semester 2008
Some ethical situations...

Each group should appoint a secretary to record the discussion and a spokesperson to present its findings to the class. *Each group member should sign* the secretary's minutes which will be handed in at the end of class. Using the Potter Box, discuss the general facts of the case, then decide a) what was the ethical issue(s) involved, b) do you agree with the person's actions, c) was the action ethically justified, d) what other course of action could have been taken, and e) what would you have done?

Group One:

During the 1999 World Series, NBC Sports reporter Jim Gray interviewed Pete Rose following the All-Century team celebration. Though currently banned from baseball for alleged gambling on baseball games, Rose received a thunderous ovation from the fans. Rather than dwell on the transcendental moment, Gray confronted Rose about the gambling allegations and whether he should be reinstated and inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Group Two:

A radio reporter for a station in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, aired a detailed story in July that a Dilworth man lost a finger when a cherry bomb exploded in his hand. The story also said that the injured man was ticketed by police, who thought he was trying to throw the explosive into a squad car. The reporter sent his story to the Associated Press, and it was picked up by several news organizations. After police denied the incident took place, the station management realized the story had been made up. The reporter resigned, admitting that "the line between fact and fiction was getting too blurred."

Group Three:

During the 2000 Wimbledon tennis championships, 18-year-old American tennis player Alexandra Stevenson became the first qualifier ever to reach the semifinals. During her sensational run for the title, it was reported that Alexandra's father was NBA Hall of Famer Julius Erving. A Florida newspaper reported that Erving had a relationship with Alexandra's mother, a free-lance writer who wrote about the Philadelphia 76ers when Dr. J. played for them. At first, Erving denied the allegation, but when the newspaper found her birth certificate, he acknowledged being her father.

Group Four:

A reporter for a newspaper in Owensboro, Kentucky, wrote five columns about her battle against terminal brain cancer. The stories included interviews with experts and advice for cancer patients. She later admitted that the stories were fabrications, and she had lied to avoid revealing she had AIDS. But three days after being fired for the fictitious stories, she admitted that the AIDS story was also a lie.

Group Five:

A prominent columnist for the *Boston Globe* published a column that used jokes very similar to those in George Carlin's book *Brain Droppings*. When challenged by his editors, he said that he had not read the book, but got the material from a friend. Previously the columnist had recommended the book on a television show, but later claimed he had not read it. The *Globe* asked for the columnist's resignation, then relented. The paper had earlier dismissed a female columnist who confessed to making up people and quotes.

Group Six:

An advertising firm for Gillette's Foamy shaving cream wants to demonstrate how well the product works on tough beards. A producer suggests using the cream to shave an actual piece of sandpaper. After several takes, the demonstration clearly does not work, so the director orders to prop person to sprinkle sand on plexiglass. As instructed, the actor squirts the cream on the "sandpaper," and pulls the razor across, creating an illusion of shaving actual sandpaper. Filming is concluded, and the commercial later airs.

Group Seven:

A senior public relations accountant executive for a Fortune 500 client is told that the company is about to announce a new revolutionary product. Before writing a press release, he buys a substantial amount of the company's stock. Following the public announcement, the company's stock rises 50 points, and the executive makes a hefty profit. Incidentally, the executive is also president of a national public relations trade association.

Group Eight:

After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, a lobbying group called "Citizens for Free Kuwait," hired Hill & Knowlton, a top Washington PR firm, to help foster Kuwait's image when the US was considering military action against Iraq. Among President Bush's justification for going to war was Saddam Hussein's atrocities, such as removing hundreds of Kuwaiti babies from incubators and leaving them to die on the hospital floors. When the Congressional Human Rights Caucus held hearings, Hill & Knowlton offered a witness, 15-year-old Nayirah al-Sabah, who had escaped from Kuwait after the invasion. She was also the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United States. At her father's request, the girl's name and her relationship to the ambassador were omitted from public testimony for fear of reprisals against their family still there. Later, several news organizations challenged whether she had even been in Kuwait and had witnessed any atrocities, such as the incubator incident.