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Integrity Insights

Office of Professional Responsibility

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A Note from Don Smith

Interacting with difficult people challenges leaders who merely want to get the work done. Often instead of utilizing the skills required to work through the challenges difficult people present, many leaders take the path of least resistance and search for ways to make the difficult person go away. But is taking this path an ethical response to this problem?

The next time a difficult student or staff member pushes your buttons, practice tailoring your reaction to the situation. It might be possible to coach the person in order to get the desired behaviors. Communicate with them and provide both positive and corrective feedback. Help the student or staff member develop a plan for correcting the negative behavior and preventing it in the future. Many times, using coaching allows all the involved parties to win. However, if coaching doesn't work, move to the next level.

As you work with challenging people remember to be ethical. Don't abuse the disciplinary processes and procedures the district has put in place as easy ways out.

Remember, student referrals are a tool for reporting serious or persistent misbehavior that has a negative impact on the classroom or school environment. The emergency removal process for staff members was designed to provide a cooling off period for situations that present a clear and present danger to children or the workplace. If you find yourself using either of these tools as a quick way to refashion the classroom or office instead of taking the necessary steps to manage and redirect inappropriate behavior, you might stop to consider that your ethics are showing.

Ethics, Integrity and You

You asked me, "How did it happen?" You asked me how I could have done such a thing. As I look back, I admit to myself that I wasn't tricked, seduced, or corrupted at the very moment, at that precise instant when I signed the false grade change form. There had been a slow and gentle erosion of what had been my ethics. There were other less significant incidents...when I turned a blind eye and ignored his inappropriate behavior in other areas...like sexual harassment of females.

I was standing in the hall talking with one of my students between classes. As I listened to her express her concerns about an assignment she was struggling with, I saw the principal walking fast toward us with a piece of paper in his right hand. I had seen that walk before, purposeful, aggressive, fueled by anger. I couldn't help but tune out the student and wonder, "What have I done now?" The last time I got "the walk and the talk" was when my failure rate for seniors was too high. The student must have noticed the big man coming at us too, because she stopped talking to me and we both watched him. You couldn't help but watch.

He walked, talked and did just about everything with a dramatic flair that masked his dark side.

He came up to us in a rush and smiled big at the student. The happy face went mean when he turned to me and said, "We have to talk." He gave me a big head nod toward my empty classroom. My student scuttled away. He closed the door behind us and shoved the paper in my face, his hand shaking. "I need you on my team!" He slammed the paper down on my desk and said, "Get on board...fix this now!"

I recognized the student's name on the grade change form. The student was a talented athlete who had seldom attended my class during the school's very successful volleyball season. I failed her for lack of attendance and for failure to complete the required assignments.

I argued with the principal. Somehow I knew I would lose. He told me I needed to be more of a team player. I told myself I had no choice. I thought about my young family and what it would be like to lose my job. I felt isolated. He was relentless and made it sound like I owed it to the school to change the grade to passing. He said we were in this together and that it was for the good of the community.

He said, "Just say it was teacher error." I said, "I can't just change the grade without any records to back it up." He told me what to do, and I did it. I sat down with him over my shoulder and I entered the attendance and grades into my attendance record and grade book to average a 70. I put teacher error for the reason for the change.

Afterward, as I sat in the empty classroom by myself, I felt violated. The only "teacher error" I made was not living up to my own convictions and ethics. I wish I had it to do over again. I would reach out to someone.

Are you faced with an ethical dilemma? Do you feel like a victim? You may discuss ethical matters confidentially with the Office of Professional Responsibility.

Past and Present Ethical Thinking

"It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently."

Attributed to Warren Buffett

Dallas ISD Policy You Need to Know

Policy CHE (Local) outlines the limitations for school visits by vendors, solicitors, and representatives of collection agencies. The policy says, "Solicitors and representatives from collection agencies shall not be permitted to see school personnel in the buildings at any time."

Additionally, the policy says, "Salespersons of educational products shall be permitted to interview teachers during their planning periods or before or after school. An appointment shall be necessary, and the visitation must be approved by the teacher(s) and the principal."

A Look at Our Work

As of this month, OPR has closed 494 cases. Investigations of these incidents has resulted in 119 cases in which the individual was cleared of the charges or for which no further action was required.

Integrity in the Headlines

Mountain Home, Arkansas

The first written code of ethics for Arkansas educators will go into effect September 1. Complaints about violations of ethical standards will be investigated by a 15-member Professional Licensure Standards Board.

From the Baxter Bulletin

New York

Three Harvard Medical School psychiatrists who helped pioneer the use of attention deficit drugs in children violated government and school rules by failing to properly disclose at least \$3.2 million they received from drugmakers including Johnson & Johnson and Eli Lilly & Co.

From the Wall Street Journal

Embodying Ethics

When she returned from lunch, Marianne realized her supervisor, Rich, was meeting with Arthur Velars, a furniture vendor. The door to Rich's office was open and Marianne was able to hear the entire conversation. Rich was trying to persuade Arthur to hire his 15-year-old son for the summer.

As she continued to listen to the conversation, she heard Rich assure the vendor that he would find a way to repay the favor. He suggested Arthur pad all the invoices for the department's orders next year. After all, Rich was the one who would make sure all the invoices were paid.

Marianne returned her focus to the work that was on her desk and decided to keep her mouth shut about what she heard. However, when Arthur left Rich's office, he signaled to Marianne to let her know he would be calling.

Arthur called from the parking lot and advised Marianne of Rich's offer. He explained he saw her return from lunch and that since he was able to see her expression as Rich spoke, he knows she heard the offer. Arthur plans to report Rich and name her as a witness. However, since he doesn't want to cause problems for Marianne, he wants her permission. What should Marianne do?

- Tell Rich that Arthur is planning to report him.
- Let Arthur know that she needs to work. Ask him not to involve her.
- Take control of the situation. Tell Arthur that she will report Rich but fail to follow through.
- Work out a time to go with Arthur when he files the report.

See the bottom of the page for the answer

Making Ethical Decisions



People make ethical decisions every day. However, at times, a situation presents itself that poses a decision-making dilemma. This section will feature common ethical decision-making models that may prove useful to readers when trying to address an ethical dilemma.

Below you will find 10 questions to ask when making ethical decisions

- What do I know? What do I need to know?
- How does this situation fit into the purpose of the organization?
- What are my ethical concerns?
- What organizational policies and professional guidelines should I consider?
- How can I include other people, with different perspectives and diverse ideas, in the decision-making process?
- Who are the stakeholders affected by my decision? What are their motivations? Which are legitimate?
- What if the roles were reversed? How would I feel if I were in the shoes of one of the stakeholders?
- What are the possible consequences of my actions? Short term? Long term?
- What are my alternatives to maximize my professional responsibility and minimize harm?
- Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?

From Poynter Online

Report Fraud, Waste, or Abuse

There are several ways to report fraud, waste, or abuse:

To file a report in person, visit the Office of Professional Responsibility in Room 804 of the Buckner Building which is located at 2909 N. Buckner Boulevard, Dallas, TX.

You may also:

Call: (972) 925-8850 or 800-530-1608

Fax: (972) 794-3568

Email: opr@dallasisd.org

Write us at P.O. Box 181509, Dallas, TX 75218-8509

Visit: <http://www.dallasisd.org/about/integrity>.

The correct answer is D. Rich is required to keep accurate and reliable financial reports to comply with CAA (Local). His padded expenses constitute making a false entry to financial records.
The same policy requires Marianne to report her suspicions to OPR or Police and Security.



Dallas Independent School District