

## **Class 1 Practice**

### ***Narrative***

Professional ethics with financial aspects were not considered in Class 1. Accepting money from anyone other than your employer can often raise ethical questions. In the extreme, such as accepting a bribe to act contrary to the law or your professional obligations, accepting money is clearly unethical and often illegal. Other situations may be more subtle.

Suppose that as part of your job, you are responsible for ordering a piece of equipment. You have determined a number of minimum specifications that the equipment must satisfy. You have spoken with several vendors and identified three who offer a product that meets the minimum specifications. One of those vendors is a family relative who in the past, has invited you to vacation with them and has fully paid for your vacation.

You may add assumptions to the situation described above, if you wish to do so. Then write a brief analysis of your potential courses of action, any dilemmas they present, their consequences, and the ethical course of action.

### ***Response***

Case 1: Assume that the equipment sold by your relative has the best specifications of all of the vendors, and it costs less.

This is an example of an apparent conflict of interest. While recommending that the equipment be purchased from your relative is the correct professional course of action, it may seem to others who do not know all of the facts that you are acting unethically. Most companies have policies regarding conflicts of interest, and if yours does, you should follow that policy. At the minimum, you should disclose your family relation to the vendor to your management and to the procurement department and provide written justification for your recommendation that the equipment be purchased from your relative.

Case 2: Assume that while the equipment sold by your relative meets the minimum specifications, either it costs considerably more than that sold by others or that the equipment sold by others is superior in significant ways to that sold by your relative.

In this scenario there are two courses of action: recommend purchase of the equipment from your relative or from the other vendor. The dilemmas you face are alienating your relative, possibly losing out on free vacations in the future, and possible scorn from other relatives versus making what you know to be the better recommendation. They are complicated by the fact that your relative's equipment does meet the minimum specifications, so you wouldn't be putting others in danger. You likely could rationalize recommending purchase from your relative and ease your conscience with sentiments like "my company can afford it," "family comes first," etc.

In my opinion, the best course of action would be to disclose your family relation to the vendor as in Case 1, and recommend purchase from the other vendor, providing written justification. Personally, I'd also reach out to my relative and explain why I recommended purchase from the other vendor. Finally I'd prepare myself mentally for other family-related consequences like no more free vacations and scorn from other relatives.