



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Using Company Resources

Author(s)

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Year

1992

Description

XYZ Corporation permits its employees to borrow company tools. Engineer Al House took full advantage of this privilege. He went one step further and ordered tools for his unit that would be useful for his home building projects even though they were of no significant use to his unit at XYZ.

Abstract

This case is one of thirty-two cases which address a wide range of ethical issues that can arise in engineering practice provided by the Center For the Study of Ethics in Society, Western Michigan University.

Body

XYZ Corporation permits its employees to borrow company tools. Engineer Al House took full advantage of this privilege. He went one step further and ordered tools for his unit that would be useful for his home building projects even though they were of no significant use to his unit at XYZ. Engineer Michael Green had suspected for some time that Al was ordering tools for personal rather than company use, but he had no unambiguous evidence until he overheard a revealing conversation between

Al and Bob Deal, a contract salesman from whom Al frequently purchased tools.

Michael was reluctant to directly confront Al. They had never gotten along well, and Al was a senior engineer who wielded a great deal of power over Michael in their unit. Michael was also reluctant to discuss the matter with the chief engineer of their unit, in whom he had little confidence or trust.

Eventually Michael decided to talk with the Contract Procurement Agent, whose immediate response was, "This really stinks." The Contract Procurement Agent agreed not to reveal that Michael had talked with him. He then called the chief engineer, indicating only that a reliable source had informed him about Al House's inappropriate purchases. In turn, the chief engineer confronted Al. Finally, Al House directly confronted each of the engineers in his unit he thought might have "ratted" on him. When Al questioned Michael, Michael denied any knowledge of what took place.

Later Michael explained to his wife, "I was forced to lie. I told Al, 'I don't know anything about this'."

Discuss the ethical issues this case raises.

Notes

Originally titled: "The Borrowed Tools."

Prepared with James Jaksa.

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Hypothetical / Fictional Case

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