



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# **Raising an Issue of Participation in a Professional Society (adapted from NSPE Case No. 82-7)**

## **Year**

1999

## **Description**

This is an open-ended scenario for discussion based on a case from the NSPE Board of Ethical Review. An engineer actively participates in professional and technical societies. This participation accords with the policy of the engineer's employer, but the engineer's immediate supervisor tries to block or prevent some of these activities.

## **Body**

Sara has been employed by a company for over 20 years. At the beginning of her employment, she was encouraged by her superiors to join a professional society. Sara has become quite active in the society and has held several board and committee positions. She even obtained her company's approval before accepting the positions.

Sara's immediate superior, Perry, feels that Sara should participate in this professional society on her own time, despite the fact that the company encourages excused leave for these purposes. Perry feels that participation in a professional society is not employee training and does not benefit the employer. Sara approaches Perry with a written request for leave to attend meetings. Perry refuses

to forward Sara's request to higher level management.

What should Sara do at this point?

Sara gets summoned to meet with the chief executive officer (CEO) on another matter. Should Sara use this as an opportunity to bring up her situation? Would this be whistleblowing? If Sara should say something, how should she approach the subject?

Sara asks for the CEO's opinion of participation in professional societies by company engineers. The CEO reaffirms her encouragement. Sara prepares a travel request that is to go through her supervisor (Perry) to the CEO, but again he refuses to forward the travel request. Perry tells Sara that he does not appreciate her going over his head to discuss this matter with his superior.

What, if anything, should Sara do now? What is your assessment of Sara's taking paid leave in order to attend professional society meetings? Given his beliefs, was it ethical for Perry to hinder Sara's efforts to obtain leave? Is there any additional information that would change your judgment of the scenario?

[NSPE Code of Ethics](#) An earlier version may have been used in this case.

## Notes

See the original NSPE case at: [Ethical Duty of Employer and Employee - Case No. 82-7](#).

## Rights

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