

### **Interactive Ethics**

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*Editors' Note:* This column is a continuation of one that ran in the *NAEP News* prior to publication of *Environmental Practice*. In each issue, an ethical dilemma presented in a previous issue is addressed, and a new situation is introduced. The dilemmas presented in the final two issues of *NAEP News* will be reprinted as appropriate to provide continuity.

#### **The Situation: *What Did You Do In Seattle?***

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Two employers have sent people to a professional conference. They paid registration, hotels, travel, and meal expenses of almost a thousand dollars so that the two could go to Seattle for a week of whatever it is you do at a conference.

One person went out every night partying with other night owls. He (or she) never got to the conference center before noon and left at four with the next night's party. His expense account report was littered with bar tabs and meals for six at fancy restaurants. He came home with three partnering commitments in his pocket.

The other person attended every event and every session. He (or she) even chose the sessions that were of more interest to the company than to himself. He asked questions, participated in interactive workshops, joined discussion groups, picked up handouts, and took notes. He stayed in the room at night typing these notes into the laptop so he could distribute them to his coworkers upon his return. He came home with a deeper understanding of national policies and applicable solutions to problems.

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### **The Response**

In *What Did You Do in Seattle?* we presented the problem of two people attending the same conference and exhibiting very different behaviors. One was essentially a party animal and the other was extremely diligent in attendance, notes, and collection of information. The intimation that one of these people was

acting unethically was actually a set up. Having heard a number of comments about this topic, it was chosen to expose a nuance of ethics that escapes many of us and has even escaped the exact language of the NAEP code. Only a very few of the respondents spotted this, most taking one side or the other of the question as presented.

The nuance lies in the ethics of expectations. As an employer, you expect your staff to follow directions and achieve goals that you have set out for them. The achievement of these goals is what makes one a good employee but it is also an ethical responsibility of the professional employee. In our situation, neither employee can be said to have been acting ethically unless we were to know what the boss expected that person to accomplish.

If the attendee had received directions to go to the conference, make friends and get new contracts, the studious person would have acted unethically, not the party animal. A conflict would only arise if the boss expected one result and was delivered another. Our code speaks to ethics relating to expectations as well. And here is where the safeguards are most often challenged. If a client expects a result that you cannot provide, the ethics of expectation must take second place to the ethics of the professional performance of your science. Our example deals with business ethics.

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**A New Situation: *My Mother, My Employee***

For our next situation, we will break with format a little and ask for your comments on where ethics plays a role in the following in equity.

I run a small ecological consulting company. We have only three employees and are just getting started. Because of this, my mother has decided to help out by coming in and doing the cleaning for us. The only place she is not allowed to clean is in the small laboratory that we have set up for our water sampling program. That area and all the chemical cleaning of jars and gear is left to my employee.

My employee is a trained professional. She has a degree in chemistry and six years of experience in a laboratory. My employee has rights guaranteed by the federal right to know laws and she has been forced to read every MSDS that comes in the building. We all agree that she should be fully aware of the chemicals to which she is being exposed.

My mother is a wonderful person. She has an Associates degree in Art Appreciation. She handles some of the same chemicals as my employee. She buys them at the corner grocery store where my 17 year old nephew stocks the shelves. She also brings these chemicals home and cleans the house where my children live.

My trained professional is required to read a Material Safety Data Sheet and be briefed on hazards and my mother is offered a label printed with a very small type font.

Send your comments to Tom Cuba, Delta Seven Inc., PO Box 3241, St. Petersburg, FL. 33731.  
E-mail [Delta-Seven@worldnet.att.net](mailto:Delta-Seven@worldnet.att.net). Watch for the response in a future issue of *Environmental Practice*.