

5 quandaries to reveal your team's ethical compass



Get together with your team and try to sort through these brain-burners. Want an extra challenge? Have each person write down their responses to the questions in 5 words or less, forcing everyone to concentrate their thoughts on a complex issue into the simplest terms possible.

- 1. Your company sells a high-end subscription service that automatically renews each month,** with the customer's credit card being charged until they specifically request that the service be cancelled. One day while speaking to a customer about an unrelated, low-priced product they've purchased on their company's behalf, it becomes obvious that they don't realize they're still signed up for the subscription service—and haven't realized it for two years, with their corporate credit card being charged every 30 days for a substantial sum. You figure that no one in their Accounting department is questioning the charge. Their organization is only a very occasional customer otherwise; this subscription service easily represents the bulk of their payments to your company. Do you mention the oversight to the customer?
- 2. Everyone in your office has their own reasons for disliking Charles**—he's often mean, underhanded, uncooperative and plays by his own rules. Everyone would frankly be much happier without him. One day he's accused of a transgression against a company policy that may very well finally get him fired. But you happen to have personal information that in this particular case, he actually did nothing wrong. If you say nothing, it's very likely Charles will be gone tomorrow, with no one realizing what you knew. Do you speak up in Charles's defense?
- 3. You're up against the deadline on an important project and you realize you absolutely need a file that a co-worker has been working on;** it's likely sitting in her computer. She's away for the weekend and unreachable. You happen to know she always leaves her computer on and you've seen her sometimes silently consult an index card with passwords written on it when she needs to get back into it. Waiting until Monday for the file means you'll be rushing insanely to wrap up this project in time. Do you see if that password list is still in her desk drawer, and then try to get into her computer?
- 4. Your best friend from your youth, who you haven't seen for 10 years, calls you out of the blue one morning** and says he happens to be passing through town on a layover and has a few free hours. Leaving work now would mean missing an important meeting and pushing some of your critical work onto a colleague who is pressed for time herself. But this might be your only chance to reconnect with your friend in person before life pushes you apart again outside of occasional emails and calls for perhaps years to come, and maybe forever. Do you leave work on the spur of the moment?

5. A co-worker, Barney, has found a way to match the quality and price of your company's products and, unsatisfied with their slow response to consumer demand, has just split off to form his own company. He calls you six months after leaving and tells you it's all going incredibly well and he can raise your current salary by 50 percent if you leave and go to work for him. You decide to take the job and now have to give your notice. You know your boss, and the entire executive team, despises Barney for having left to challenge the company directly, and you're expecting quite the tense confrontation. What reason do you offer for quitting?