

Ethical Behavior in the Workplace Part II

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Last week the question was posed as to how we would handle the knowledge of a co-worker planning to call in sick a week in advance because they wanted a day off, but had no accrued vacation time left.

There are as many ways to respond to this as there are individuals faced with these types of dilemmas. The answers are not always clear-cut. Depending on our work place culture and experiences we may choose different ways of handling this. Our choices can range from just ignoring it, to becoming resentful and angry. Sometimes we don't address it because we fear we will be labeled as a tattletale or that there may be some type of retaliation. Perhaps we don't speak up because we don't want to become the focus of scrutiny because we too have done similar things we have justified.

Some possible thoughts on dealing with the situation include, an individual who would do that is really not being respectful to their co-workers. When an employee chooses to do this, it often forces someone else to have to cover, and "It's not fair". Not being fair however isn't really the issue though. Deceit and lying are the focus of unethical, and possibly illegal behavior. Not considering and respecting the schedules of our co-workers can lead to resentment and friction within the work group.

"Everybody does it. They call it a mental health day." This rationalization or excuse is sometimes a response that is given because it appears to others that when these things happen, nobody does anything about it anyway. Why get involved and cause trouble when there appear to be no consequences? It may not always appear that there are consequences, but there may also be a private issue between that employee and their supervisor. We need to trust that the confidentiality of all employees is respected, including disciplinary actions.

The bottom line is that as an employee, we have a commitment and obligation to the company that has hired us and is paying for our services. They hired us in good faith with the expectation that if they provide us with certain benefits and privileges, then we are to live up to that trust, and use the time off appropriately.

Not all of us feel we have the assertiveness skills to approach that person and let them know that we heard the conversation and confront them. Some of us don't want to be tattletales and go to the boss. Some of us are afraid they will know who told, and then we will be scrutinized at work. One way to help answer the question is by putting yourself in a different position. Imagine that you own the company, and this is your employee and you are paying for their time. Is your response still the same? What would you like your other employees to do about it?

The counselors at Solutions EAP can have a confidential phone consult with you to troubleshoot responding to these types of situations. Sometimes talking to an objective person helps to put things in perspective and make the right decision.

Question for this week: (I got this one from a prime time crime show.) You happen to be over a co-worker's home that is also a "friend". You open the closet thinking it is the bathroom door and discover all the stolen computer equipment. You are both shocked and disappointed. What do you do?

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