

## **It's Not My Problem!-Ethical Issues at Work Part III**

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Previously, I mentioned the apparent apathy taking place as the crime rate surges and people seem to turn a blind eye to doing the right thing. The news about corporate crime, corruption and greed continues to punctuate the news as well. For most of us the issue of workplace ethics isn't quite sensational enough for the headlines, but exists more subtly nonetheless. Does all this corporate stuff somehow effect our actions or inaction for what we consider petty and not so petty theft?

Last week I posed the issue of accidentally finding the missing computer equipment from work in a co-worker's home closet. What would you do? Would you act differently if your co-worker realized you'd found it, or follow a different course of action if they didn't know you had opened the wrong door and spotted it? Obviously if they know that you know, it may change their behavior, but would it change yours?

Let's say they saw you open the door. They may start to plead with you not to tell, try to coerce you into being an accomplice, offer some story about the reason it's there, promise they'll return it immediately or any other number of scenarios. Perhaps it is that kind of pressure that keeps us from speaking up. Again as in last week's article, the fear of retaliation can be strong. Is it easier to be a "whistle-blower" if you are anonymous? What do you do? I could now be considered an accomplice after the fact. I know I would certainly not respect them or see them in the same light as beforehand, and I would probably judge their actions, but would I tell? My course of action would probably be based on what they did. If they returned it, perhaps I wouldn't say anything. "Sometimes otherwise good people do bad things and use poor judgment." "We all make mistakes." "Maybe they deserve a chance to right the wrong." If I can somehow justify it, maybe it is easier to ignore. Is this line of thinking keeping me from doing the right thing?

I do know that by doing nothing, I am condoning their behavior and possibly making it easier for them to justify their actions and repeat their behavior. They may even think I approve. I also don't think I would be able to rid myself of the guilt by doing nothing for something I know is wrong. Companies lose lots of money due to employee theft, and we all pay the consequences. How about you? What are you going to do?

**Next week:** Two of your married co-workers are having a not so subtle "relationship". Is it any of your business? After all, they are presumably adults. Think about the impact on your workplace's productivity, the morale of the co-workers, and possible violation of the company's policy as you ponder the answer as to **what would you do?**

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