

### **Case 6.3: A Harmless Prank**

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(1) The description for this case involves a student at Riverview State College who is a very intelligent computer science student who knows how to hack. The ethical dilemma faced in this case is when Steven, the previously mentioned student breaches the security of the faculty payroll files and gained unauthorized access to these files. This action is considered unethical since Steven breach the faculty's security systems and could have further breached their privacy. However, Steven did not look through any of the payroll files. (2) This case is possible because of the security put in place for these files and the algorithms Steven uses to crack the codes.

(3) There are many stakeholders involved in this case. Steven is a stakeholder and has a right to know if it is possible to breach the security system. After all, this whole case is done because Steven saw that system as a challenge. The faculty are all stakeholders in this case as well. They all have the right to privacy. The student deans are stakeholders in this case who have a duty to work for the school. Any future students are stakeholders in this case too because they all have a right to free speech.

(4) The deans have many options for how to approach this case. First, the deans could do nothing, which would result in:

- Steven leaving this case unaffected
- The deans getting a warning for letting this issue slide
- The faults in the system could be left unsolved, leaving room for this to happen again
- Future students might be let off the hook if a similar situation happens again

Second, the deans could give Steven a warning only, which would result in:

- Steven leaving this case nearly unaffected
- The deans complied with their duties
- The faculty will strengthen the system so that future hackers cannot access these files
- Future students could attempt to breach this system now that the possibility of it is now proven

Third, the deans could suspend Steven for a semester, which would result in:

- Steven is suspended and loses his right to an education
- The deans complied with their duties
- The faculty will strengthen their system so that future hackers cannot access these files
- There will be less of a chance of future hackers attempting to breach the system

Finally, the deans could expel Steven because of his actions, which would result in:

- Steven is expelled, loses his right to an education, and now has this on his record permanently
- The deans complied with their duties
- The faculty will strengthen their system so that future hackers cannot access these files
- There will be a very low number of future hackers attempting to breach the system, possibly none

(5) By the possible results for each of these four actions the deans could take, the best possible action they could do, from a teleological perspective, would be to let Steven off with a warning. This action would lead to the least amount of negatives for every stakeholder involved. The only true negative of this action is the chance that future hackers can strike now that others know that breaching the system is possible. However, this chance is present throughout each possible choice the deans could make. Along with that, with Steven finding a way to breach the system, the staff would be prompted to make the security of the system stronger to prevent future hackers. Therefore, the faculty will be more prepared to deal with future hackers and can punish those as they see fit. Furthermore, this leaves Steven with all his rights intact; his right to know if breaching the security system is given to him and he still keeps his right to an education. Due to all these reasons, the best action the deans could take is to leave Steven with a warning.

(6) From a deontological perspective, the deans would most likely suspend Steven for his actions. Compared to the other options, this would leave the school in the best spot without having to take any huge risk. If the deans did nothing, they would be failing their duties. If the deans expelled Steven, this could lead to other consequences for the school's reputation in the future. By this logic, the deans would be less likely to pick these options. This leaves the

decision to a warning or a suspension. Due to Steven's action being a threat to the school, the deans would likely fulfill their duties by giving Steven a suspension so that it lowers the chance of future hackers that attempt to breach the security. In this case, the school would be focusing more on sending a message in order to prevent this issue in the future. But, they could also attempt to strengthen the system so that future hackers can further be prevented. This decision is most likely to be picked due to the amount that it benefits the school and leaves the least amount of risk.

(7) My recommendations for how to approach this ethical dilemma would be to leave Steven off with a warning. As stated previously, this action will prevent most of the negatives that could take place for each stakeholder. Because this is a very different case than most are used to, the use of technology here must be evaluated. With that said, Steven technically didn't do any harm behind his actions. All he did was breach the security and log off. No looking through the payroll files was done. Therefore, there was no real harm done by Steven and the faculty have methods to check that these files were not accessed. By using this logic, you should only take major action if any files are shown to have unauthorized access, leaving Steven to just be left with a warning.

Leaving Steven off with a warning also will help with the only problem that could come up in the future, more hackers. With Steven proving that it is possible to breach the security system, future hackers could try and breach the system for themselves as well. However, this should get countered by the faculty improving their security system to make it more secure. Furthermore, this can be done more effectively if they are still on good terms with Steven. If Steven was able to breach their security system, the faculty would be able to figure out how Steven accomplished this challenge. With this knowledge given, the faculty could figure out how to prevent these methods to make them unusable in the future, making the system even more secure. Steven would be obligated to help the school with this issue since he could face repercussions if he declines. Although, it is shown that Steven is very honest about what he did. With that in mind, it becomes very likely that Steven would help give the faculty the information they need for them to make the system more secure. Making the system stronger will lessen the effect of the main negative of this choice, which was already not 100%.

Overall, this proves that the best course of action for the school to take is to leave Steven off with a warning and have him help the faculty in making the system much more secure. This action outweighs all other possible actions due to all possible negatives being solved. Steven gets to stay at school, the deans fulfill their duties, the faculty updates the system, and future hackers are lowered due to the more secure system. Therefore, it leaves behind the most benefits and the least risk.