

## Alternate Scenario Resolutions: Chapter 2

Here is the scenario:

John is a project manager in a consumer electronics company. He's responsible for overseeing the development of new products. This includes design, engineering, and production. John focuses on being ethical and always looks to follow the rules.

One day, he had an opportunity to purchase a critical component for a new project at a 20% discount. This was a significant cost saving that had never been offered previously, providing much-needed relief to the project budget. However, John didn't have the financial authority to approve the purchase, and he couldn't reach a manager who did. He knew that if he did not act immediately, the savings opportunity would be lost.

John faced a dilemma. He knew he wasn't supposed to authorize purchases beyond his financial authority. Yet, his job responsibilities clearly required him to save money when executing his projects. He was unsure what to do.

### Aspirational Responsibility Standard

PMI's aspirational standards for responsibility:

- Make decisions in the best interest of society.
- Only accept assignments appropriate for our skills.
- Always do what we say we will do.
- Take ownership of errors or omissions we make.
- Protect confidential information.
- Hold ourselves and others accountable to the code of ethics.

## **Aspirational Responsibility Standard: Solution**

John's biggest concern related to these aspirational standards comes from the "always do what we say we will do" area of responsibility. His competing objectives lie in this point – he is both responsible to save his company money and act only within his financial authority.

A key to resolving this is if John has had discussions with his manager about financial limits. He needs to behave within the construct of the direction he was given, whatever they might have been. Also critical is how his company has behaved in the past toward those limits.

If financial authority is "hard and fast," that is, never to be compromised, John's ethical responsibility is clear – he does not approve the purchase. In other words, he must hold himself accountable to his financial authority. If his company has demonstrated flexibility in extraordinary circumstances, then John may have the latitude to approve the purchase.

## Aspirational Respect Standard

PMI's aspirational standards for respect:

- Understand the norms and customs of others.
- Listen to others' points of view.
- Directly approach someone with whom you have a conflict.
- Conduct yourself in a professional manner.

To bring these standards to life, I posed the following questions.

- Do you avoid behaviors that could be considered disrespectful?
- Do you listen to others and seek to understand their perspective?
- Do you act professionally, even when someone else doesn't?
- Do you avoid engaging in gossip?
- Do you avoid making negative comments to undermine someone else?

## Aspirational Respect Standard: Solution

John has a fairly clear path to behave in a respectful manner, given this scenario. If he behaves in line with the practice his business follows regarding the enforcement of financial authority, he will be behaving respectfully. In other words, he can say "yes" to the questions above. If he doesn't know what the practice is and hasn't had a conversation with his manager about his financial authority, then he needs to seek the perspective of other managers. This would be in line with the second question above.

To summarize, John needs to understand more about his environment, and the perspectives of his manager, or, if he can't reach his manager, other managers in his company who can provide him with the perspective to act in a way that is most respectful.

## Aspirational Fairness Standard

The PMI aspirational standards for fairness:

- Demonstrate transparency in the decision-making process.
- Constantly reexamine our impartiality and objectivity.
- Provide equal access to information to those who are authorized.
- Make opportunities equally available to qualified candidates.

### Aspirational Fairness Standard: Solution

John has a relatively straightforward path to meet these aspiration standards, as long as two things are satisfied. First, he needs to be transparent about the action he takes and his rationale for the decisions he made.

Second, he needs to ensure approving the purchase doesn't compromise his company's procurement management practice which would call for John to work with other qualified vendor candidates and see if they could match the savings offered. So, John has a consideration, beyond just his financial authority, that may need to be evaluated in his ethical decision-making.

## Aspirational Honesty Standard

The PMI aspirational standards for honesty:

- Seek to understand the truth.
- Provide accurate information in a timely manner.
- Be truthful in your communications and conduct.

Some actions that demonstrate honesty include:

- Ensuring information presented is accurate, reliable, and timely
- Courageously sharing bad news, even when it may be poorly received
- Avoid taking credit for other's achievements
- Avoid burying information or shifting blame to others when outcomes are negative

### Aspirational Honesty Standard: Solution

John's actions relative to this scenario are straightforward if he is to meet these aspirational standards. He needs to be transparent and accept ownership about what he did, and what his rationale was for the decision he made relative to his financial authority. Should he be criticized, he needs to accept ownership of his decision and not blame others.