

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

A Question of Ethics

Molly has just been accepted to Stanford Law School and calls her friend Terri to tell her the good news.

MOLLY: Hi Terri! Guess what? I just got accepted to Stanford Law!

TERRI: [Surprised and disappointed]: Oh, cool.

MOLLY: [Sarcastic]: Thanks—you sound so enthusiastic!

TERRI: Oh, I am. Listen, I have to go—I'm late for class.

MOLLY: Oh, OK. See you.

The women hang up, and Terri immediately calls her friend Monica.

TERRI: Monica, it's Terri.

MONICA: Hey, Terri. What's up?

TERRI: I just got some terrible news—Molly got into Stanford!

MONICA: So, what's wrong with that? I think it's great. Aren't you happy for her?

TERRI: No, not at all. I didn't get in, and I have better grades and a higher LSAT score.

MONICA: Maybe Molly had a better application.

TERRI: Or maybe it was what was on her application.

MONICA: What do you mean?

TERRI: You know what I mean. Molly's black.

MONICA: Yes, and . . . ?

TERRI: Don't you see? It's called affirmative action.

MONICA: Terri, give it a rest!

TERRI: Oh, please. You know it, and I know it. She only got in because of her race and because she's poor. Her GPA is really low and so is her LSAT.

MONICA: Did you ever stop to think that maybe she wrote an outstanding essay? Or that they thought the time she spent volunteering in that free legal clinic in her neighborhood was good background?

TERRI: Yes, but we've both read some of her papers, and we know she can't write. Listen, Monica, if you're black, Asian, American Indian, Latino, or any other minority and poor, you've got it made. You can be as stupid as Jessica Simpson and get into any law school you want. It's just not fair at all.

MONICA [Angrily]: No, you know what isn't fair? I'm sitting here listening to my so-called friend insult my intelligence and my ethnic background. How dare you tell me that the only reason I'll ever get into a good medical school is because I'm Latino. Listen, honey, I'll get into medical school just the same way that Molly got into law school—because of my brains, my accomplishments, and my ethical standards. And based on this conversation, it's clear that Molly and I are way ahead of you.

Describe how well each of these women followed the ethical standards for communication discussed in this chapter.

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"There," exclaimed Ryan, "my résumé is done and ready to post on LinkedIn. Will you take a look at it and tell me what you think?"

"Sure," Shara replied. As she began to read, Shara gasped, "Ryan, it says here you have a degree in chemical engineering. But you don't."

"Well, that's my major. I'll have a degree in it eventually. Besides, everybody stretches the truth a little on their resumes."

"And what about this statement about your job responsibilities while working at LexCo," Shara continued. "I know you were a receptionist for two summers. You make it sound like you were a supervisor and that you actually worked there for two years."

"Well," Ryan replied, "remember how Professor Jarman said we need to sell ourselves if we want to get selected for the interview? I'm trying to make myself stand out as a leader."

"I'm not sure that's what he meant, Ryan. You need to be honest," Shara responded.

"Yeah, well I can clarify the details in the interview. I just want to make sure I actually get an interview."

1. What, if any, ethical principles is Ryan violating and how?
2. Some people justify exaggerating, or even lying, on their resumes by saying that everybody does it. In fact, according to CareerBuilder.com, 38 percent of those surveyed admitted to embellishing their job responsibilities on their resumes, and 18 percent admitted to lying about their skill sets. Given these numbers, are the justifications reasonable? Why or why not?
3. If you believe stretching the truth is acceptable in certain circumstances, how far can you go before you cross the line into unacceptable behavior?

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Tyler, Jeannie, Margeaux, and Madhukar were sitting around Margeaux's dining room table working on a group marketing project. It was 2:00 A.M. They had been working since 6:00 P.M. and still had several hours of work remaining.

"Oh, the agony," groaned Tyler, "If I never see another photo of a veggie burger it will be too soon. Why didn't we choose a more 'appetizing' product to base our project on?"

"I think it had something to do with someone wanting to promote a healthy alternative to greasy hamburgers," Jeannie replied sarcastically.

"Right," Tyler answered. "I don't know what I could have been thinking. Speaking of greasy hamburgers, is anyone else starving? Anyone up for ordering a pizza or something?"

"Sorry, but no one will deliver up here so late," Margeaux apologized. "But I have a quiche that I could heat up."

"Oh, oui, oui," Tyler quipped.

"You wish," Margeaux said. "It came out of a box."

"Sure, it sounds great, thanks," Jeannie said. "I'm hungry too."

"It doesn't have any meat in it, does it?" asked Madhukar. "I don't eat meat."

"Nope, it's a cheese and spinach quiche," Margeaux answered.

Tyler and Margeaux went off to the kitchen to prepare the food. Tyler took the quiche, which was still in its box, from the refrigerator. "Uh-oh," he said. "My roommate is a vegetarian, and he won't buy this brand because it has lard in the crust. Better warn Madhukar."

"Shhh!" said Margeaux. "I don't have anything else to offer him, and he'll never know the difference anyway. Just pretend you didn't notice."

1. What ethical principles are involved in this case?
2. What exactly are Margeaux's ethical obligations to Madhukar in this situation?
3. What should Tyler do now?

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As Abbie was adding sweetener to her latte, she spied her friends Ethan and Nate sitting at a table in a corner of the coffee shop. She popped a top on her drink and strolled over to join them.

"Hi guys. What are you doing?" Abbie asked.

"Not much. Ethan and I were just comparing our biology notes. How about you?"

"I'm just heading over to my philosophy class," Abbie replied. "But, I've got to say I don't know why I even bother going."

"Why not? What's up?" asked Nate.

"Well," responded Abbie, "Professor Miller is so mean. The other day, I offered my opinion and she told me I was wrong. Can you believe it? I mean, she could have praised me for offering my opinion. What makes her opinion so 'right' anyway? She is so narrow-minded and *obviously* doesn't care about her students."

Ethan asked, "Well, were you?"

"Was I what?" Abbie asked.

"Wrong."

"Well, I guess so. But that's not the point," Abbie contested.

"Actually, I think it *is*," Ethan replied. "Maybe she said you were wrong because she *does* care about her students and wants you to learn. Maybe she sets high standards and wants to help you achieve them."

"Whatever. That's *your* opinion. I bet you'd feel differently if she embarrassed *you* in front of the other students," Abbie retorted.

"Maybe you should go talk to her about it during her office hours," suggested Nate. "She probably doesn't even realize she embarrassed you."

"Oh, she knows," replied Abbie. "And there is *no* way am I going to talk to her about it. I'm just going to get through the semester and then tell her *exactly* what I think on the end-of-semester evaluations. See you later!"

1. What ethical principles if any are at issue in this case?
2. What do you think about the issues Abbie raises and why?
3. Based on what you have learned about language in this chapter, what could you say to Abbie that might help her?

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After the intramural mixed-doubles volleyball games on Tuesday evening, most of the players went to the campus grill for a drink and a chat. Marquez and Lisa sat down with their competitors Brad and Elana, to whom they had lost due to Elana's ability to land killer spikes. Although Marquez and Lisa were only friends through volleyball, Brad and Elana had been going out together for much of the year.

After some general conversation about the game, Marquez said, "Elana, your spikes today were awesome!"

"Yeah, I was really impressed," Lisa added.

"And you're getting so high at the net," Marquez added.

"Thanks, guys," Elana said in a tone of gratitude, "I've really been working on it."

"Well, aren't we getting the compliments today?" sneered Brad in a sarcastic tone. Then after a pause, he said, "Oh, Elana, would you get my sweater? I left it on that chair by the other table."

"Come on, Brad. You're closer than I am," Elana replied.

Brad moved slightly closer to Elana and looked at her sternly with piercing eye contact.

Elana quickly backed away from Brad as she said, "OK, Brad. It's cool." She then quickly got the sweater for him.

"Gee, isn't she sweet?" Brad said to Marquez and Lisa as he grabbed the sweater from Elana.

Lisa and Marquez both looked down at the floor. Then Lisa glanced at Marquez and said, "Well, I'm out of here. I've got a lot to do this evening."

"Let me walk you to your car," Marquez said as he quickly stood up and grabbed her jacket for her.

"See you next week," they both said in unison as they hurried out the door, leaving Brad and Elana alone at the table.

1. What do you think Brad's nonverbal messages were attempting to achieve?
2. How would you interpret Lisa's and Marquez's nonverbal reactions to Brad?
3. Do you think Brad's nonverbal communication was ethical? Explain.

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Janeen always disliked talking on the phone—she thought it was an impersonal form of communication. Thus, college was a wonderful respite. When friends called her, instead of staying on the phone, she could quickly meet them in a dorm room or a café.

One day while studying for final exams, Janeen received a phone call from Barbara, an out-of-town friend. When she answered, she found herself bombarded with information about old high school friends and their whereabouts. Not wanting to disappoint Barbara, who seemed eager to talk, Janeen tucked her phone under her chin and returned to studying her notes, answering Barbara with the occasional “uh-huh,” “hmm,” or “wow, that’s cool!” After a few minutes, she realized Barbara was no longer talking. Suddenly very ashamed, she said, “I’m sorry, what did you say? The phone . . . uh, there was just a lot of static.”

Barbara replied with obvious hurt in her voice, “I’m sorry I bothered you. You must be terribly busy.”

Embarrassed, Janeen muttered, “I’m just really stressed, you know, with exams coming up and everything. I guess I wasn’t listening very well; you didn’t seem to be saying anything really important. I’m sorry. What were you saying?”

“Nothing ‘important,’” Barbara answered. “I was just trying to figure out a way to tell you. I know that you are friends with my brother Billy, and you see, we just found out yesterday that he’s terminal with a rare form of leukemia. But you’re right; it obviously isn’t really important.” With that, she hung up.

1. Which of the ethical principles did Janeen violate by how she listened to Barbara? Explain how each of these principles apply specifically to active listening.
2. Although Barbara was hurt by Janeen’s comment about the “importance” of the call, did she violate any ethical principles in how she ended the call?
3. How has this case influenced the way you view ethical listening, if at all, and why?

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Jeff and Magda, seniors at a small rural college, had been dating each other since they were freshmen. Jeff loved Magda, and he planned to propose to her after they graduated in the spring. At the same time, though, he reluctantly recognized that their relationship had fallen into a bit of a rut over the previous six months, and he missed the excitement and romance of their first year together. Although he was troubled by these conflicting feelings, Jeff was unsure what to do about them.

One day while he was surfing MySpace.com, Jeff decided, on a whim, to create a fake user profile for the person he wanted to be in his fantasies. He spent quite a bit of time researching and designing the profile of his imaginary persona, a rap singer/flamenco guitarist/snowboarder/kung fu expert who went by the user name "MoonDog13." Jeff inserted photos of an obscure young Romanian actor he found online into MoonDog13's user profile. He posted lyrics to rap songs he wrote on MoonDog13's page and joined online user groups for those interested in flamenco

guitar, snowboarding, and kung fu. In very little time, MoonDog13 had made a number of online friends, many of whom were admiring young women. MoonDog13 loved to flirt with these girls.

Jeff told Magda nothing about MoonDog13, even when the time he spent online managing the fictitious life of his alter ego began to interfere in his relationship with her. He justified this decision with the belief that MoonDog13 was an imaginary figure who existed only in cyberspace. As long as fantasy didn't cross into reality, there was no reason Jeff had to feel guilty about anything MoonDog13 said online.

1. How is Jeff acting ethically or unethically in this situation?
2. Like Jeff, most people act differently in cyberspace than they do in the real world. Are the ethics of cyberspace any different from those of the real world? What about fantasy—are the ethics of our private desires different from the real world? Are we ethically obliged to disclose our fantasies to our loved ones?

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Ronaldo sat in the study hall cramming for a final examination when two of his classmates, Chauncey and Doug, walked up to his table.

"Studying hard?" Chauncey asked.

"Yeah. I'm really stressing over this final," said Ronaldo. "What about you guys?"

"Hardly studying," said Chauncey.

Doug laughed.

Ronaldo looked at the two and saw that they both seemed relaxed and confident. "Something's not right with this picture," he said. "You're not going to tell me you guys are ready for this thing, are you?"

"Yep," said Chauncey.

Doug nodded.

"I don't get it," said Ronaldo. "You mean you've already gone back and studied everything we've covered this semester?"

"Hey, you only need to study what's actually on the test," said Chauncey.

"And how would you know that when McAllister didn't even give us a study guide?"

asked Ronaldo. He was beginning to put the puzzle together.

Doug placed his hand on Chauncey's arm and said, "Don't tell him anything else, man."

"No, it's all right. Ronaldo's cool," said Chauncey. "He knows how to keep a secret. Don't you?"

"I guess," Ronaldo said uneasily.

"It's like this," said Chauncey. "Doug's little brother hacked into McAllister's system and downloaded a copy of the final exam. You interested in getting a head start?"

1. Assuming that Ronaldo declines Chauncey's offer to cheat, what other ethical issues must he grapple with? Which would be more ethically compromising: letting Chauncey and Doug get away with cheating, or betraying their trust by notifying the professor?
2. When, if ever, is it ethically acceptable to divulge information that you have sworn not to share with others?

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The community service and outreach committee of Students in Communication was meeting to determine what cause should benefit from their annual fund-raiser, a talent contest.

"So," said Mark, "does anyone have any ideas about whose cause we should sponsor?"

"Well," replied Glenna, "I think we should give it to a group that's doing literacy work."

"Sounds good to me," replied Mark.

"My aunt works at the Boardman Center as the literacy coordinator, so why don't we just adopt them?" asked Glenna.

"Gee, I don't know much about the group," said Reed.

"Come on, you know, they help people learn how to read," replied Glenna sarcastically.

"Well, I was kind of hoping we'd take a look at sponsoring the local teen runaway center," offered Angelo.

"Listen, if your aunt works at the Boardman Center," commented Leticia, "let's go with it."

"Right," said Pablo, "that's good enough for me."

"Yeah," replied Heather, "let's do it and get out of here."

"I hear what you're saying, Heather," Mark responded, "I've got plenty of other stuff to do."

"No disrespect meant to Glenna, but wasn't the Boardman Center in the news because of questionable use of funds?" countered Angelo. "Do we really know enough about them?"

"OK," said Mark, "enough discussion. I've got to get to class. All in favor of the literacy program at the Boardman Center indicate by saying aye. I think we've got a majority. Sorry, Angelo—you can't win them all."

"I wish all meetings went this smoothly," Heather said to Glenna as they left the room. "I mean, that was really a good meeting."

1. What did the group really know about the Boardman Center? Is it good group discussion practice to rely on a passing comment of one member?
2. Regardless of whether the meeting went smoothly, is there any ethical problem with this process? Explain.

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"You know, Sue, we're going to be in deep trouble if the group doesn't support McGowan's resolution about dues reform."

"Well, we'll just have to see to it that all the arguments in favor of that resolution are heard, but in the end it's the group's decision."

"That's very democratic of you, Sue, but you know that if it doesn't pass, you're likely to be out on your tail."

"That may be, Heather, but I don't see what I can do about it."

"You don't want to see. First, right now the group respects you. If you would just apply a little

pressure on a couple of the members, you'd get what you want."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, this is a good cause. You've got something on just about every member of the group. Take a couple of members aside and let them know that this is payoff time. I think you'll see that some key folks will see it your way."

1. Should Sue follow Heather's advice? Why or why not?
2. Is it appropriate to use personal influence to affect the outcome of group decisions? Why or why not?

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Alessandra decided to do her speech on the limited educational opportunities for women in the developing world. This topic was close to her heart, as her mother had struggled for years to improve education for women in her native country of Eritrea before immigrating to the United States. Moreover, Alessandra had already done quite a bit of reading on the topic.

As chance would have it, Alessandra came down with the flu the week before her speech was due and was flat on her back for four days so she didn't begin working on her speech until the afternoon before it was due. Still, by midnight, she had completed what she felt was a strong draft.

The next morning she cleaned up a few typos and errors in her outline and then practiced delivering it for the next two hours. Just before leaving for school, she read the instructions one last time to double-check that she had done everything correctly. Were her eyes playing tricks on her? The speech needed to be supported by no fewer than five published sources, yet she had cited only four. How could she have overlooked this detail? Alessandra thought frantically. She could ask for an exten-

sion, but she had too much other schoolwork to do in the coming days and needed to complete this project now. She could leave her speech as it was, but Mr. Allen was a stickler for little details and he'd certainly lower her grade over the missing source.

Alessandra had, of course, read other books on her topic in the past, even if she hadn't cited them in her speech. Although she couldn't remember the specific details of these books, she recalled their general message well enough. That was the solution! She would write a few quotations from one of the books based on her memory, drop them into her speech—she knew just the spot—and then update her references with credit information pulled from the Internet.

In less than a half hour, Alessandra completed her emergency revisions to her speech and was on her way to class.

1. Although blatantly fabricating information from a source is clearly unethical, what do you think about someone like Alessandra writing quotations based on her memory of earlier reading?
2. What ethical obligations does Alessandra have to her sources?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

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As Marna and Gloria were eating lunch together, Marna happened to ask Gloria, "How are you doing in Woodward's speech class?"

"Not bad," Gloria replied. "I'm working on this speech about product development. I think it will be really informative, but I'm having a little trouble with the opening. I just can't seem to get a good idea for getting started."

"Why not start with a story? That always worked for me in class."

"Thanks, Marna; I'll think on it."

The next day when Marna ran into Gloria again, she asked, "How's that introduction going?"

"Great. I've prepared a great story about Mary Kay—you know, the cosmetics entrepreneur? I'm going to tell about how she was terrible in school and no one thought she'd amount to anything. But she loved dabbling with cosmetics so much

that she decided to start her own business—and the rest is history."

"That's a great story. I really like that part about being terrible in school. Was she really that bad?"

"I really don't know—the material I read didn't really focus on that part of her life. But I thought that angle would get people listening right away. And after all, I did it that way because you suggested starting with a story."

"Yes, but . . ."

"Listen, she did start the business. So what if the story isn't quite right? It makes the point I want to make—if people are creative and have a strong work ethic, they can make it big."

1. What are the ethical issues here?
2. Is anyone really hurt by Gloria's opening the speech with this story?
3. What are the speaker's ethical responsibilities?

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As Oscar and Max were finishing dinner, Max asked:

"Have you figured out what you're going to use for presentational aids in your speech next week in Professor Gilman's class? I'm totally stumped."

Oscar replied, "Yeah, I am so ready and actually pretty pumped about mine."

"What are you going to use?" inquired Max.

"Well, you know I'm going to try to persuade the class to agree with me that the death penalty is wrong. Well, I got ahold of an audio clip of someone writhing in pain during an execution. I'm going to play it while I show several photographs

of people who have been executed. THAT should really make my speech memorable and my argument convincing!"

"Yikes," exclaimed Max. "Are you sure that's such a good idea?"

"Yeah, why not?"

1. Is it ethical to use potentially offensive presentational aids if doing so will make your speech more memorable or your argument more convincing? Why or why not?
2. Could Oscar achieve his goal using different presentational aids? If so, what might they be?

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"Kendra, I heard you telling Jim about the speech you're giving tomorrow. You think it's a winner, huh?"

"You got that right, Omar. I'm going to have Bardston eating out of the palm of my hand."

"You sound confident."

"This time I have reason to be. See, Professor Bardston's been talking about the importance of audience adaptation. These last two weeks that's all we've heard—adaptation, adaptation."

"What does she mean?"

"Talking about something in a way that really relates to people personally."

"OK—so how are you going to do that?"

"Well, you see, I'm giving this speech on abortion. Now here's the kick. Bardston let it slip that she's a supporter of Right to Life. So what I'm

going to do is give this informative speech on the Right to Life movement. But I'm going to discuss the major beliefs of the movement in a way that'll get her to think that I'm a supporter. I'm going to mention aspects of the movement that I know she'll like."

"But I've heard you talk about how you're pro-choice."

"I am—all the way. But by keeping the information positive, she'll think I'm a supporter. It isn't as if I'm going to be telling any lies or anything."

1. In a speech, is it ethical to adapt in a way that resonates with your audience but isn't in keeping with what you really believe?
2. Could Kendra have achieved her goal using a different method? How?

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Nalini sighed loudly as the club members of Toastmasters International took their seats. It was her first time meeting with the public speaking group, and she didn't want to be there, but her mom had insisted that she join the club in the hopes that it would help Nalini transfer from her community college to the university. It wasn't that the idea of public speaking scared Nalini. She had already spent time in front of an audience as the lead singer of the defunct emo band Deathstar. To Nalini's mind, public speaking was just another type of performance—like singing or acting—albeit a stuffy one, better suited to middle-aged men and women than people her age, a sentiment that explained why she wanted to be elsewhere at the moment.

After the club leader called the meeting to order, he asked each of the new members to stand, introduce themselves, and give a brief speech describing their background, aspirations, and reasons for joining the club. "Spare me," Nalini muttered loud enough for those next to her to hear. The club leader then called on a young woman to Nalini's left, who rose and began to speak about her dream of becoming a lawyer and

doing public advocacy work for the poor. After the young woman sat down, the club members applauded politely. Nalini whistled and clapped loudly and kept on clapping after the others had stopped.

The club leader, somewhat taken aback, called on Nalini next. She rose from her seat and introduced herself as the secret love child of a former president and a famous actress. Nalini then strung together a series of other fantastic lies about her past and her ambitions. She concluded her speech by saying that she had joined the club in the hopes that she could learn how to hypnotize audiences into obeying her commands. After Nalini sat, a few of the club members applauded quietly, while others cast glances at each other and the club leader.

1. Is mocking behavior in a formal public speaking setting, either by an audience member or a speaker, an ethical matter? Explain your answer.
2. What ethical obligations does an audience member have to a speaker? What about a speaker to his or her audience?

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After class, as Gina and Paul were discussing what they intended to talk about in their process speeches, Paul said, "I think I'm going to talk about how to make a synthetic diamond."

Gina was impressed. "That sounds interesting. I didn't know you had expertise with that."

"I don't. But the way I see it, Professor Henderson will really be impressed with my speech because my topic will be so novel."

"Well, yeah," Gina replied, "but didn't he stress that for this speech we should choose a

topic that was important to us and that we knew a lot about?"

"Sure," Paul said sarcastically, "he's going to be impressed if I talk about how to maintain a blog? Forget it. Just watch—everyone's going to think I make diamonds in my basement, and I'm going to get a good grade."

1. Is Paul's plan ethical? Why or why not?
2. What should Gina say to challenge Paul's last statement?