



Fall 2014

Student Section



## *Ethics of Land Use Planning: An Exploration by an Aspiring Planner*

**Mitchell Calkins**

Masters Student in Sociology  
North Dakota State University

Ethics is the activity of “systemizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right or wrong behavior” (Fieser n.d.). Normative ethics, buttressed by metaethical theories, give us guidelines on what shall be considered moral. However, it is the application of these that most people find themselves involved in ethics on a daily basis, and thus, it is here that most ethical dilemmas are found. Philosophical scholarship can help us untangle these dilemmas.

One area that has a dearth of said scholarship is that of land use planning (Beatley 1994, 3-17). Like any other decision making process regarding public policy, land use planning involves the allocation of costs and benefits, the determination of courses of action that affect individuals and groups differently, and have both short- and long-term consequences. Efforts to lay out a system of ethics regarding planning have mostly been concerned with the procedure of the planning process and not necessarily about the end result.<sup>1</sup> There has been a lack of a general ethics

that combines inter-human ethics, the traditional domain of ethics, with an ethics of the natural environment along with an ethics of the human constructed environment (Fox 2006).

I argue that it will be beneficial to practicing planners, policy makers, and citizens to have an accepted ethical system – one that is coherent, consistent, and articulable – that can help determine what the morally correct choice is when alternative land use policy choices are being presented. Far too often decisions are made in favor of those who have more power and resources at the expense of those who have less. In addition, the legal framework that governs land use has the potential to lead us to some questionable outcomes. An ethically-inspired land use planning would assist us in determining whether or not laws and policies are serving society in the best way possible – or in other words, if it is serving the “public good”, if such a thing exists.

Two major ethical paradigms<sup>2</sup> that assist planners in their day-to-day

---

<sup>1</sup> The American Institute of Certified Planners have adopted a “Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct” that is arguably too vague in certain parts and is mostly concerned about the fairness of the process itself and not the impacts of planning decisions. To view this Code, visit [www.planning.org/ethics/ethicscode.htm](http://www.planning.org/ethics/ethicscode.htm).

---

<sup>2</sup> Watson (2003) mentions a few other unified ethical positions including Habermasian reasoning and consensus and various forms of environmentalism. Inspired by postmodern explorations into identity and difference, she criticises having a unified ethical system and recommends a viewpoint that sees the commonalities and differences among society and determine from that information, with reason, what is moral and what is immoral when it comes to planning.

duties are utilitarianism and Rawls' theory of justice. Although most planners probably do not articulate their ethical systems in these terms, the systems do cast a shadow over planners' work. Even supposedly technical matters supported by empirical evidence are infused with values and conceptions of "good" and "bad". Understanding how to judge the rightness or wrongness of a planning decision is of paramount importance, given the manners in which a community's culture and values interact with the legal and economic system and the ultimate impact it can have on the community's quality of life. Additionally, this is a topic that many residents will face some time in their tenure of living in a town or city. Controversial land use proposals touch our deep psychological and emotional predispositions. They activate strong responses and can lead to outcomes that are less than desirable for society as a whole.

This article will briefly (and incompletely) discuss the two dominant ethical paradigms within the field of planning. As an aspiring planner, I will conclude with my perspective on how to approach the ethical dilemmas I and others like me are bound to experience.

### **Utilitarianism or Technocratic Land Use Planning**

Utilitarianism, in a nutshell, follows the maxim *do that which will maximize utility (i.e. the presence of pleasure and absence of pain) for the greatest number of people*. Actions are judged according to their consequences on aggregate groups. Competing planning decisions, are weighed in a relatively straightforward calculation, often in terms of monetary values. For example, if the approval of a shopping

mall will bring  $X$  dollars' worth of benefits for the community (e.g. sales, wages, taxes, entertainment opportunities, etc.) while at the same time exacting  $Y$  dollars' worth of costs (e.g. traffic, damage to environment, pollution, aesthetic loss, etc.), as long as  $X > Y$  then the project is determined to be a net positive for the community and should therefore be approved. This cost-benefit analysis is particularly amenable to the mode of thinking used by economists and bureaucrats as well as greatly simplifies the pros and cons of choices as they are presented to policy makers (Campbell and Marshall 2002). It emulates the rational technocratic thinking these professionals have long used, which is believed to lead to quantitatively better decisions.

Various problems arise as a result of using a utilitarian approach to planning. The first is the relative difficulty of quantifying the costs and benefits, or the pleasure and pain in Benthamian terminology (Gensler 1998). In the end, it is humans who are calculating this and it is unreasonable to expect that total objectivity will reign. The miscalculation or omission of certain costs and benefits can change the equation and thus place a land use proposal from being ethically right, in a utilitarian sense, to being ethically wrong (or vice versa). The ability to make sound decisions rests upon the capabilities of the people who are making the decisions, often planners or elected officials, to objectively view the situation at hand. While the theory may make intuitive sense, in practice it is challenging to carry out.

The second problem with utilitarianism is that the distribution of costs and benefits do not factor into the calculation, as long as there is a net

positive for society the project can be approved. However, according to this equation the costs can be borne by solely one group who may not have the opportunity to partake in the benefits. From this observation, a utilitarian may adjust his theory from being only act-utilitarian, or the idea that the act is right in itself only if it would have the best consequences at least as good as any alternative act, to that of rule-utilitarianism, or the idea that an act is right if it is in accordance with a rule that if followed has the best consequences for all (Hodgson 1967, 2-6). The rule, in this instance, may be that costs cannot be solely or proportionally borne by one group. If this situation is unavoidable, then measures to adequately compensate the group should be negotiated.

This movement to rule-utilitarianism shows that a pure application of utilitarianism may lead to outcomes that are ethically challenged. The incorporation of non-consequential thought shows that in order to reach an acceptable and positive outcome, we should pay attention to the process in which that decision was made. One route of doing so is to look to Rawls' theory of justice for inspiration.

### **Rawls' "Theory of Justice" and Advocacy/Social Justice Planning**

In order to incorporate moral ideas such as equality and freedom into land use ethics, qualities that are missing from a strict utilitarian perspective, one should look towards John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* for inspiration. Rawls argues that equality and freedom are not mutually exclusive values but rather can be synthesized into what he calls *justice as fairness*. The two principles that are derived from this are the Liberty

Principle, or the access that every person should have to certain basic liberties, and the Equality Principle, which is broken down into the Fair Equality of Opportunity Principle, which states that positions within society should be open to all to potentially achieve, and the Difference Principle, which states that while the positions may technically be open to all, it doesn't necessarily mean that social inequalities that inevitably result are morally wrong (McKay, Murray and MacIntyre 2012). To come to a conclusion of what the details for these two principles would look like, Rawls presents us with a hypothetical thought experiment, through which we determine the basic structure of society. He imagines an "original position" when the principles that govern society are made behind a "veil of ignorance". In this people are unaware of the amount of talent, resources, and advantages that they would come to possess. Since people are rational and risk-averse, they would choose to have a set of basic, inalienable rights that is meant for everybody (Beatley 1994, 68-69). They would avoid creating a society marked by severe and permanent inequality with one group oppressing the others, since there exists the possibility (probably quite large) that one would be born into such a group and would live a life of misery.

It is obvious to see that there is a major gap between this ideal and what is found in the real world. Power and privilege manifest themselves in a multitude of ways that infringe on people's basic rights. Recognizing this is an ethically untenable situation, there are planners who adopted the mindset and goals to change this situation and to incorporate a sense of justice and equity in their planning activities. Paul

Davidoff described this approach in his 1965 article “Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning”. Davidoff stated that planning extends beyond just the land use or physical changes of a city, but also touches the social, cultural, and moral fabrics that run through community life. Therefore it is imperative that groups that are traditionally underrepresented engage heavily in the planning process and perhaps create plans by themselves if their voices are not properly heard. The last point is important as it ties into the condition Rawls said needs to be met when the deliberation about what is right and what is wrong is going on – namely that all actors have equal and sufficient opportunity to participate in the deliberation. While he was using this on a grander scale, it is also true on the smaller scale – chiefly for my discussion here in the land use planning process (e.g. town hall meetings). Even with our contemporary pluralistic society, there are areas of commonality upon which a basic sense of morals that can be acceptable to all rational individuals. This commonality is something upon which to build and is a point of departure for the development of my own personal code of ethics once I enter the planning profession.

### **Development of a Personal Code of Ethics**

Given the fact that the majority of planners are employed by local government entities, the scope of their work is defined by not only by simultaneously enabling and restricting land use laws but also the policy directives given by elected officials and government administrators. Although it sounds cynical, the first duty of a planner is to not get sued. While the law guarantees, more or less, that citizens are

treated with due process when they need to petition the government on land use issues, the law is not enough to ensure that matters are handled ethically.

I firmly believe that in the majority of “controversial” land use cases, there exists a possibility for an amenable compromise between the two (or more) sides. It is all about balance. Neither side may have a totally legitimate case to get all of what they want. If one side does, then the case ceases to be a thorny ethical dilemma at all. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that both sides are talking past each other and are not engaged in a discussion that involves compromise (Kaufman and Smith 1999). The role of the planner here would be to bring the parties to the table for mediation, all in the hopes of coming to a win-win situation, if at all possible. This mindset reflects the ideas of Jürgen Habermas and his discourse ethics which aim to ground justice in the argumentation process itself with a practical discourse that leads to a consensual argument (Campbell and Marshall 2006). For this discourse to take place, all of those who are affected by the action and who are competent to speak shall be free to do so. Each participant shall have the equal right to introduce and question presented claims and to put forward reasons for their claims. In the end, the force of the better argument, it is believed, must hold sway and must be freely acknowledged by all those taking part (Bohman and Rehg 2011). Institutional frameworks, in this case carried out by the planner, should allow for free and equal exchange. In the real world, the application of Habermas’ discourse ethics is rocky and uneven, nonetheless it presents planners with a workable ideal to strive for. In fact, free and open dialogue is featured in the

## *Ethics of Land Use Planning*

aforementioned American Institute of Certified Planners Code of Ethics.

I am aware of the limited political power that a lone planner has, but nonetheless should approach this profession with a sense of promoting the public interest. A singular public interest may not exist, *per se*, but intuitively this would lead to a utilitarian approach that seeks to maximize the positives for the most people, or to produce a net positive utility. Issues of equity and disproportionate impact will inevitably arise, therefore as a planner I should be willing to educate and provide elected officials with the information that they need to make an ethical choice. Planning, in all of its facets – from the physical to the social to the cultural – is an inherently ethical activity. Questions of who benefits from a decision, how those decisions are made, and what are the obligations that planners have towards the public they serve are ones that will vex me for a long time. My goal will then be to keep abreast of the latest scholarship in the emerging field of land use or built-environment ethics and to apply that in my professional duties.

### **References**

- Beatley, Timothy. 1994. *Ethical Land Use*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.
- Bohman, James, and William Rehg. 2011. *Jurgen Habermas*. Edited by Edward Zella. Winter.
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/habermas/#HabDisTheMorPolLaw>.
- Campbell, Heather, and Robert Marshall. 2002. "Ethical frameworks and planning theory." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 23 (3).
- Campbell, Heather, and Robert Marshall. 2006. "Toward Justice in Planning: A Reappraisal." *European Planning Studies* 14 (2): 239-252.
- Davidoff, Paul. 1965. "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 31 (4): 331-338.
- Fieser, James. n.d. *Ethics*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/>.
- Fox, Warwick. 2006. *A Theory of General Ethics: Human Relationships, Nature, and the Built Environment*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Gensler, Harry J. 1998. *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Hodgson, D.H. 1967. *Consequences of Utilitarianism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kaufman, Sanda, and Janet Smith. 1999. "Framing and Reframing in Land Use Change Conflicts." *Journal of Architecture and Planning Research* 16 (2): 164-180.
- McKay, Stephen, Michael Murray, and Sean MacIntrye. 2012. "Justice as Fairness in Planning Policy Making." *International Planning Studies* 17 (2): 147-162.
- Watson, Vanessa. 2003. "Conflicting rationalities: implication for planning theory and ethics." *Planning Theory and Practice* 4 (4): 395-407.

---

*Mitchell Calkins is a graduate student pursuing a Masters in Sociology at North Dakota State University. His research interests are mostly related to urban sociology and community development.*



*No Cookies for You?  
The Morality of Charity Selling within Businesses*

**Charlie Schmitz**

Undergraduate Student  
North Dakota State University

---

Girl Scout Cookie time, America's undisclosed favorite season of the year. The vast majority of us can't wait to get our hands on a box of one of our favorite delicious snacks. We sit anxiously in anticipation for the knock on our front door hoping it will be one of the local Girl Scouts ready to sell some cookies. However, many of us receive offers in other locations, such as outside of a store or at work from one of the parents of a Girl Scout. In fact, more often than not, people end up purchasing these glorious cookies while at work because it is much easier to do so there.

Using the Rights/Responsibility lens, I will debate the topic of allowing parents to sell items, such as Girl Scout Cookies, from their children's fundraiser while at work. Personally, I do not see anything wrong with this, but it does bring up some concerns. I think this way of selling is a good way for the children to sell more of their products than they could without their parents' help. To establish my conclusion, I will follow the formula for the Rights/Responsibility lens and explain what the problem is, what the issue is with the problem, what choice is made, and what the final choice should be based on.

First, I would like to explain what the Rights/Responsibility lens is. The Rights/Responsibility lens is one of the core ethical frameworks used to help

decipher a problem and is used to analyze if a certain situation is ethical. Each lens is made up of four core question groups - contextual, ethical, moral, and spiritual - and each of these includes other more general questions, such as "what was the problem?" The lenses are basically templates used to help come to a conclusion of the overall problem.

The moral problem under consideration here is whether or not companies should allow the employees to sell their children's fundraising items at work. While most people would not think there is anything wrong with this, some moral issues have emerged. Most of the concerns, at least that I can think of, have more to do with the parents and kids rather than the business, although there are some business related problems I will mention later. Sticking with the Girl Scout example, a fundraising event is meant for the kids to go out and sell, not for the parents to do the work. By having the parents take the cookies or order forms to work with them means the girls can essentially sit back and let their parents handle the business. This kind of defeats the purpose.

Of course, the overall purpose is to raise money for the Girl Scouts, but if that was the sole purpose, the organization could easily put the cookies on store shelves and not have the girls do anything. While placing the cookies in a

## *No Cookies for You?*

store might make the cookies less special, they could limit the quantity a store can have, and only offer them at certain times throughout the year. Doing this would keep the cookies special and limited and also increase sales, but I am not here to talk about hypothetical sales tactics for the Girl Scouts. The defeated purposes are the lessons the girls learn from such an experience. By doing door-to-door sales or setting up a stand outside a grocery store, the girls are actually engaging with other people and enhancing their communication abilities, among other skills. Some of the girls may never experience business responsibilities until the Girl Scouts, and will learn through them how to handle money, inventory, and selling.

As previously stated, the main concern is not so much with the company, but with the people involved. In this instance, the ethical actors, or the ones that take the action, would be considered the parents, because it is basically their final decision if they want to sell their children's items at work. Now, knowing some kids, they may whine until their parents agree to accept their plea to sell the cookies at work, but that is not a big proportion of the selling that parents do. From my experience, the children usually politely ask for their parent's help, or the parent may even volunteer for the child. No matter which way the discussion goes between the child and parent, the parent has final say because it is they who will be carrying the products and doing the selling.

Even though the main concerns are with those involved, there are some with the company as well. For example, they could initiate a rule forbidding the sale of such products while at work to prevent distractions to the employees, because no company wants inattentive

workers. That leaves two options for the business: to allow the sale of fundraising items at work, or to not allow it. If they continue to allow the sale of products, nothing will change within the company. But if they disallow it, some employees may become upset, but overall production could slightly increase. In terms of the business and production reasons only, it would be best to have more focused workers in order to get more production and therefore more income.

However, the chance of unhappy employees, to me, outweighs the chance of increased production, because an unhappy worker will not care enough to help increase production. This could be defined as a utilitarian argument, wherein the situation that produces the best consequences will be the right one. For a better understanding, utilitarianism is defined as a belief that a morally good action is one that helps the greatest number of people. So the issue that arises for the company could be quoted as, "Well, we can keep our employees content and not change anything, or we can take away the rights to sell products while at work and hope people don't retaliate." Both options have pros and cons, but determining the one that produces the best consequences might be a challenge.

Another issue that goes along with this debate is whether or not the company is simply being used without any compensation. Parents that work for a company generally have many coworkers, or at least a connection to many people. So when a parent is asked by his or her child to help sell some products at work, he or she can easily find people to buy, simply by going to work. The question that comes to attention is: should the company receive



some reward or compensation for letting people do personal selling on company property? Some could argue yes, but they are already being rewarded by their workers for getting work done. But the workers are also getting compensated with a wage already as well. Not that any extreme selling takes place, but the workers that do sell personal items at work are essentially using the company building as a trading area without paying a fee. That might be stretching it a bit, because this type of selling is only Girl Scout Cookies and it is benefitting young girls rather than the parents, but it could be taken into consideration by the company. However, like mentioned previously, if personal selling was a distraction, then the company should step in to stop it, rather than try to receive compensation.

Now to get into detail about the choice that I think is the best for the company, parents, and children. I believe that selling fundraiser products, such as Girl Scout cookies, should be allowed at businesses. Overall, this type of selling does not hurt anyone, and if it doesn't hurt anyone, then why ban it? I know I said the parent/worker could become distracted, but really, it would not be for more than a few minutes each day. Many parents would probably make an announcement that their daughter is selling Girl Scout Cookies, and those that are interested would listen while others would ignore the announcement. Those that want to purchase the cookies approach the parent and tell them what they want, and it is as quick and simple as that. Also, this is a great way for the child to reach many people at once without spending an exorbitant amount of time going door to door to reach the same number of people that they were able to with their parents.

Technically the kid would not actually be the one selling, but if the Girl Scouts are doing the fundraiser in order to reach a goal or to make money, then having their parents help is great exposure, because they reach more people than they normally would.

Also, the children may not even want to participate at all, but feel obligated to at least do something. I know this from personal experience. In my elementary school we would have a yearly magazine drive where we were encouraged to go door-to-door to sell magazine subscriptions. Well, I really only wanted to do it for the prizes we could win, but after a couple days I was sick of trying. Then I would just say, "Hey, Dad, can you see if anyone at work wants to buy some magazines?" Then I would maybe get a few more sales, and that was good enough for me. I never saw anything wrong with selling that way, because I was never interested enough to do it all on my own. Additionally, my dad never complained that selling for me was distracting to him or his co-workers. With that being said, I think fundraising sales should be allowed on the job because it helps more than it hurts.

Finally, I will discuss why I made this final choice. I mentioned a few reasons already, but there are more I will state. For one, most parents love their kids more than anything and would do whatever it takes to help them. This could be related to care ethics, which states it is better to help someone close to you than a stranger. In this case, helping a significant other, such as one's child, is more beneficial to the parent than what would come from ignoring their child and sticking strictly to their work. If a parent could do something as simple as asking their coworkers if they

## *No Cookies for You?*

are interested in buying a product to help their kid, it should not be an issue with the company.

Also, this may sound counterintuitive to what I said before about kids doing their own work, but if the kid sets a specific sales goal and cannot do it all on her own, what is wrong with getting a little help from her parent? The parent could also tell his or her child, "Since I was able to sell a few of your products, you should call the people that bought and simply say thank you." That way the child still receives face-to-face, or voice-to-voice, interaction and at least played some role in the sales, and this can be a good life

lesson as well. Plus, when the product needs to be delivered, the child can still act as the salesperson by delivering the product.

Overall, I do not see anything wrong with selling fundraising products while at work. The benefits far outweigh the disadvantages, and the final decision seems to be a good one for that reason. The kids will make some extra sales while also making their parents' coworkers happy for being able to get something like Girl Scout cookies. If you could do something as simple as that to help your child, why wouldn't you?

---

*Charlie Schmitz is a senior pursuing a degree in Business Administration at North Dakota State University. He was born and raised in Springfield, MN, but currently calls Sartell, MN home. He is a founder and member of Autumn's Outcast, a pop-punk-rock band that modeled its style off of bands such as Blink-182. If Charlie isn't at home, school, or playing an instrument, he can most likely be found at one of his favorite places - his lake cabin near Detroit Lakes, MN, where he has been going every summer since he was born.*



*Friend or Employee?  
When Moral Duties in Business Conflict*

**Jared Richter**

Undergraduate Student  
North Dakota State University

---

In the business setting, an employee can be faced with numerous possible types of conflicts in his or her duties. Though it may be difficult to prepare for these conflicts before they happen, it may be to one's advantage to think about some of the different business conflicts and how they could be handled if they were to occur. This could make for an employee that is prepared to handle possible conflicts with a structured and confident mindset rather than a hazed sense of resolution when the situation arises. A person prepared for such conflicts may have the ability to quickly realize the moral resolution with less stress than one who must assemble the pieces midst the search of finding any type of resolution.

A possible example of a business setting dealing with conflicting duties could occur when your boss approaches you about a fellow coworker - who is also a close friend - that has been slacking at work. Your boss then proceeds to ask you to report back to her about his work activities and some information about his personal life for the purpose of figuring out why his work productivity has diminished. Conflict occurs here when you are forced to make a choice as to fulfill your duties to your boss acting as an employee and the duties you have to be a loyal friend.

In what follows, I will first lay out the viewpoints of the friend and the boss, give two competing action alternatives, and then analyze and defend

the best option of accepting your boss's request while keeping your friend aware of the situation.

In a scenario like this one it is important to consider the point of view of your friend. You and this friend have been pretty close ever since you were hired by the company. You both talk quite a bit and usually find time to hang out on weekends when neither of you are busy. Your friend may have a full family and like any family, it demands a lot of time and attention. You know that your friend has been having marriage issues recently. Because of this, you have noticed that he has been a little down and stressed out. He has told you that he has struggled sleeping at night worrying about the mess of a situation he is in with his family. Because of this, he has mentioned that he can get very tired at work. Your friend says that he tries to keep his personal problems at home as much as possible, but he considers that to be easier said than done. Often at work his mind easily starts to wander to his personal life, preventing him from getting an adequate amount of work done. He realizes that his job performance is down sharply and that he has been slacking compared to his normal self, but he insists that he needs to immediately get back to where he was before this whole hiatus occurred to prevent any serious consequences from happening, such as losing his job. Also mentioned by him was the concern that the boss may be pondering

## *Friend or Employee?*

the idea of firing him for his inadequate performance.

Next, it is important to consider the point of view of your boss in order to help you make the soundest of decisions as possible. Your boss has been with this firm for only a year after transferring from another office in the region. She has not quite grasped all the information about her employees' personalities, and is also still working on learning the friendly details of their personal lives to be in good relations with them. She knows you and your friend decently well as you have both proven yourself to be solid workers in her time with the company. Your boss has seen you and your friend talking at work and remembers you both spending much of the time together at work events outside of the office.

Recently, your boss has started to realize that your friend has not been acting like his normal self. She recollects a number of occasions where she has felt that your friend has been overly exhausted and that he did not really seem to want to be at work. There was an instance the other week when your boss asked your friend to do a simple work task for her. He responded saying that he would have it completed immediately, but even after an additional reminder from her, he never completed the task. As a result, she looked into the work he had been completing which showed that his productivity has been consistently slipping as of late. This along with the other recent incidents jointly gave her the conclusion that your friend has really been slacking at work.

Your boss is not quite sure what she should do about it though as she is worried that confronting him would make him upset with her and put a ripple in the workplace relationships that she

has developed and seeks to continue to develop. She then thinks that she could have someone keep a keen eye on your friend and report back to her about his work activities and also personal activities that may be affecting his work performance. Because he is your close friend, she thinks that you could obtain relevant information which could then be reported back to her. She decides that the following day she will request you to do this for her while keeping it completely secret from the rest of the workplace. Your boss expects that you will fulfill your duties as her employee and accept her request to monitor your friend's activities. Though she understands you are close friends, she thinks you realize that the betterment of the workplace and its performance is of very high importance to you, and that it is your duty to obey her reasonable demands.

The first option to respond to your boss would be to deny her request and not report on your friend's activities. This option would fulfill the duties you have as a friend. You could tell your boss that if she feels that what your friend does at the workplace or at home needs to be monitored and observed, then she can take full responsibility in completing that task and not request it from one of his greater of friends. She may be taken back by this response to her request, but in the reality, she should not be asking a coworker to practically spy on another coworker nor a friend on a friend.

When the boss knows that you have a close friendship with the person she is asking you to report on, that serves as an immoral request on her behalf. She should understand your choice of not wanting to be the middle grounds between trying to figure out the

specific problems with your friend's work performance and her curiosity. It also should be understood by her that the employees in her workplace have the right to certain degrees of privacy. Employees have the right to not have their coworkers spy on them outside of the workplace, especially when they have been with the company for a long period of time. It is not as though the boss is trying to hire someone and wants to know their personality before hiring, but rather this scenario involves a past proven worker being spied on for the reason that his productivity has recently slipped. In your boss trying to figure out what is happening in your friend's personal life, she is using you as a channel to interfere into his personal life to obtain details that he likely does not want anyone else but you to know about.

It is also worth noting that the boss never approached him about the issue in that she has not provided him an opportunity to explain himself and his decreasing work productivity. Before she has someone spy on him and breach his privacy, she should at least allow him the opportunity to explain himself before she sets out to investigate him and his activities.

In choosing to deny your boss's request and play the role of an honorable friend, the preservation of the relationship between you and your friend overrides the duty to obey your boss. The relationship is preserved because you will not be risking the possibility of having your friend find out and be upset that you have been sharing details of his work and personal life with your boss.

In choosing this first option, there are a number of drawbacks that need to be considered. Even though

your boss wanted the knowledge of this scenario to be kept only between you and her, secrecy in any situation can never be fully guaranteed. It is possible that your boss may have informed another party or two about this situation which may have eventually led to your friend finding out about the information exchanges between you and her. It is very likely that he would not be happy with you for sharing his work and personal life with your boss. If your boss is not content with you denying her requests in this option, the relationship between the two of you could be put in rough shape as she may be upset that you chose to fulfill your duties as a friend over those of being an employee. Because of this, it is possible that your boss would fire you for not obeying her. She may feel that it is your obligation to be an employee in the workplace over being a friend, and if you do not choose to honor that, then she may find that you do not belong with the company.

If you were fired, it is a possibility that your friend could end up being fired in the near future as well. After your termination, the boss may find someone else to spy on your friend's activities. The information he or she finds and reports back to your boss could be incomplete and inaccurate in that the spy may not develop a thorough enough of an understanding as to the person your friend is. Because of this, the person that does the reporting on your friend may report to your boss claims that are based on assumptions and feelings. This could result in your boss using that information to also make the decision that your friend does not belong with the company.

The next option is to accept your boss' request, and then carry-out the

## *Friend or Employee?*

task. This option would fulfill your duties as an employee. Choosing this option would mean that you would have to gather information on what your friend does at work and also acquire at least some additional knowledge of what may be occurring in his personal life. Whatever information you obtain would be reported back to your boss.

While the time frame for this task is uncertain, the major unknown of this option is what the end result could be. It is possible that with your help the boss could figure out what your friend's problems are, and then she could try to help him, such as being more lenient on his workload/work performance. Also in fulfilling this option you would be committing yourself to the duties of an employee which in turn may bolster your relationship with the boss. Your boss may be happy as to the extent you went to help her by choosing the role of being an employee over that of being a friend. Because of this, you may be a name that stays in front of her mind when it comes to considering who is most likely to receive upcoming promotions or if you deserve a nice raise come time when your boss does the employee reviews.

In choosing the second option of fulfilling your boss's request, there are a number of important downfalls that need to be considered. With this option comes the possibility that your boss will not be fully content that you completed the request she asked of you. In other words, it is possible that your boss may not be as overjoyed by the completing of her request to the extent that you thought she would be. The reason for this counter-intuitive result could be that she expected you to act in the role of an employee rather than a friend the entire time as she may not have ever

considered the possibility that you could choose to fulfill the duties of a friend over those of an employee. That leaves this option with a chance that you will not gain anything from it as you failed to solidify the relationship you have with your boss.

Also for this option, your boss may overreact to any minor details you report back to her. It may be hard for you to gauge how she would react to any information you provide which could lead to her taking the most insignificant of details and make a big issue out of it. For example, your boss may conclude from you that your friend has been struggling to keep his personal life and marriage issues away from the workplace, contributing that to his slacking. As a result, she may demote or fire him. Because of you doing the reporting for your boss and fulfilling your responsibilities of being an employee, you could very well be the one at fault for your friend losing his job. If your friend were to find out that you were at least partly responsible for him losing his job while reporting to your boss about his work and personal life, the two of you may have a rocky or nonexistent relationship from that point forward. The end result of this option contains a possibility that you will lose your friendship and also the chance that you will be unable to bolster the relationship you have with your boss.

The last option takes jointly from both of the previously two mentioned options. When your boss comes to you with the request of monitoring your friend and reporting back to her, you could accept it. But instead of keeping your friend in the dark about this situation, you would be quick to inform him about the situation without your boss knowing you are doing so. In other

words, your boss would be ignorant that you are keeping your friend in the loop throughout this situation. Your friend knows that he has been struggling at work and needs to improve immediately. Telling him may get your friend to be more motivated to brighten up at work and encourage him to work harder for the purpose of bolstering his productivity. While this does run the risk of your friend possibly being upset because your boss is in a way going behind his back to figure out what happened to his productivity, he knows that he has been far off his norm as of late; so he should be fairly understanding of the situation at hand.

In addition, for the benefit of your friend, your boss is having you complete this request instead of someone else in the workplace. This is beneficial for your friend because he knows that you understand him and the issues he has been having to deal with in his personal life. It is very likely that your friend could trust you to be honest to both him and also your boss through this whole ordeal rather than someone else in the workplace of whom he may not know well. As a result, your friend would likely be sure not to inform your boss that he is aware of the request she has made of you, keeping you safe from the possibility of the boss being upset with you. Together, you and your friend can discuss what could be said when you are asked to report back to your boss. Doing this will help control what your friend wants your boss to know and it will also meet the expectations that your boss has for you in completing her assigned requests.

It is very likely that the relationship you have with both your friend and boss could at least be maintained. It is possible that your

friend could initially be annoyed with you in accepting the boss's request to report on him, but the end result should have him realize that you helped save his job and could even possibly restore his personal life. He could very well be content that you chose to consider your duties of being a friend over those of an employee. As for your boss, she should be content with your fulfillment of her request. This option also carries the possibility that your boss could be very happy with the results you obtained. She may think that you did an excellent job of obtaining information on your friend and that you were very cooperative in the task she requested of you. Like the previously stated option, she may be satisfied that you chose to fulfill your duties as an employee over those of being a friend - as far as she knows.

The option I would choose for this scenario would be the previously mentioned option of accepting your boss's request to report regarding your friend's activities while you quietly keep your friend in the loop about the situation. With the close friendship and duties of being close friends that you and your friend have, you both know when certain things need to be kept silent to any outside parties other than yourselves. This scenario is most definitely one of those hushed situations. Both you and your friend would need to understand that making sure your boss does not know you are informing your friend about her requests is of very high priority. If your boss found out that you were sharing information about this scenario to your friend, one or both of your jobs could be in jeopardy.

In choosing this option, all parties involved will receive the fairest of treatments. Your friend is aware and

## *Friend or Employee?*

has complete knowledge of the boss's attempt to figure out what has been going on in his life that may be the cause of his lack of productivity. Your friend will also have an influence in what is reported back to your boss, all the while your boss receives the information from you that she has requested. You also get the best out of this option because you have the opportunity to help your friend possibly save his job and preserve the relationship you have with him, while you also keep your boss happy and satisfied by completing her requests. Your boss is looking for you to fulfill the duties as an employee to be the middle grounds between her request and your friend's activities. This option

will meet that as well as fulfill the duties you have as a friend in that you are trying to keep your friend's well-being at the highest of levels possible. You are also being a good friend in that you are communicating to him anything that may occur - such as him losing his job - if he does not turn his productivity in the opposite direction. The other two options carry the strong risk of hurting the relationship you have with your friend as well as putting a wedge between you and your boss. This option is the most capable of leaving everyone overall as fairly content when the issue is resolved, thereby leaving the workplace in the happiest and healthiest of conditions.

---

*Jared Richter is a sophomore from Mora, Minnesota, who is studying Accounting at North Dakota State University. He is a Resident Assistant on campus and has also spent time working with Hall Government and Residence Hall Association. Jared is an active member in the Fargo-Moorhead chapter of Chi Alpha and is also very involved with the music department at NDSU playing trombone in The Gold Star Marching Band, University Band, and pep bands. Among many interests, Jared enjoys Minnesota Vikings football, Camaros, and spending time with his nieces and nephews.*