

Thompson Security Systems Teaching Notes

What Are the Relevant Facts?

1. People depend on the security systems that Thompson leases to protect their personal safety as well as their property.
2. Bob Anderson is still very new in the company and is facing his first formal performance appraisal.
3. Beth Roberts has been with Thompson for many years and has successfully overcome the barriers which often keep women out of management.
4. Bob has reason to question some of Beth's information, based on the information he received in his corporate training, the feedback he received from customers, and Beth's unusual behavior in his earlier query.

What Are the Ethical Issues?

1. How can Bob balance his loyalties to his superior and to the company with the right of customers to receive accurate information?
2. To what extent should Beth be allowed to disseminate information to prospective customers when it deviates from company materials?
3. To what extent should Beth be allowed to dictate to Bob the information he conveys to his prospective customers, especially when it deviates from company materials and he has reason to suspect its accuracy?
4. If the information Beth is disseminating is accurate and the result of her own research and experience, what is her obligation to share this information with others in the company?

Who Are the Primary Stakeholders?

- Beth Roberts
- Bob Anderson
- Customers and prospective customers of Thompson Security Systems
- Competitors of Thompson Security Systems
- All employees of Thompson Security Systems
- The owners of Thompson Security Systems

What Are the Possible Alternatives?

1. Bob could tell Beth that he questions the information and doesn't feel comfortable in presenting it to prospects.

2. Bob could tell Beth that he simply forgot to include the information and agree to do so in future presentations:
 - And then "go along" and present the questionable information in future calls.
 - Or, agree to present the information but do so only when Beth is present.
 - And/or "blow the whistle" by reporting the situation to Beth's superior or others in the company.

What Are the Ethics of the Alternatives?

- Ask questions based on a "utilitarian" perspective (costs and benefits). For example:
 1. What possible alternative would provide the greatest good to the greatest number?
 2. How can costs be measured in this scenario?
 - *If the information is inaccurate:* How much value can be placed on disclosure of information to customers? How much value should be placed promoting the careers of women like Beth in the company's management? Does higher management know that Beth uses deception to enhance her productivity? If so, are they endorsing the practice through their silence? Given that the equipment is leased and not sold, what will the financial impact be for Thompson if customers discover the deception? What will the impact be on Thompson's competitors? On the safety and welfare of its customers?
 - *If the information is accurate:* What are Beth's rights to keep to herself information that she has acquired through her own diligence? What is her obligation to share this with other managers and employees of the company? Will it harm her career to share this information unselfishly with "competing" managers on the same career track?
- Ask questions based on the "rights" perspective. For example:

1. What do each of the primary stakeholders have the right to expect?
 - What are Beth's rights as a supervisor?
 - What are Bob's rights as an employee?
 - What rights do Thompson customers have here?
 - What rights do Thompson competitors have here?
2. What obligations do the stakeholders owe one another?
 - What are Beth's obligations as a supervisor?
 - What are Bob's obligations as an employee? How is he to balance his obligations to the company with his loyalty to Beth? How about his obligations to customers and prospects?
- Ask questions based on the "distributive justice" perspective (benefits and burdens). For example:
 1. Which alternative most fairly distributes the benefits and burdens among the various stakeholders?

2. Which stakeholders carry the greatest burden if Bob "goes along" and does nothing?

What Are the Practical Constraints?

1. Directly or indirectly accusing Beth of dishonesty is not likely to improve Bob's first performance appraisal.
2. Bob has his suspicions but no direct knowledge as to the truthfulness of Beth's claims. He doesn't have the depth of her experience with the firm, its products, and its customers.
3. Bob is sitting beside Beth in the car, and she is waiting for an answer. He has to answer with something *now*.

What Actions Should Be Taken?

1. What should Bob say? What should Bob do?
2. What would you say and do if you were Bob sitting in that car? Why would you make that choice?
3. Which framework of moral reasoning (utilitarian, rights, distributive justice) makes the most sense to you as a means of resolving this dilemma?