Tab Eight: Dilemma Examples

Lives and Jobs at Stake: Which Story to Run?

Etienne Fossier knew his days as editor of one of Europe's oldest newspapers were coming to an end when the paper's owner, Charles Barnard, suddenly began to recommend strict policies to the editorial board. Until then, Barnard had maintained a hands-off approach. His major interest is in his African investments, which are doing very well, thanks to his close relations with many African heads of state.

One day, Etienne was asked by Barnard to fly to Africa to interview a head of state, and print the interview as soon as possible in their newspaper. Etienne complied, though the staff journalists let him know how opposed they were to the interview. Heated discussion in the newsroom centered upon accusations that Barnard is trying to influence public opinion and galvanize support for the dictator and his regime.

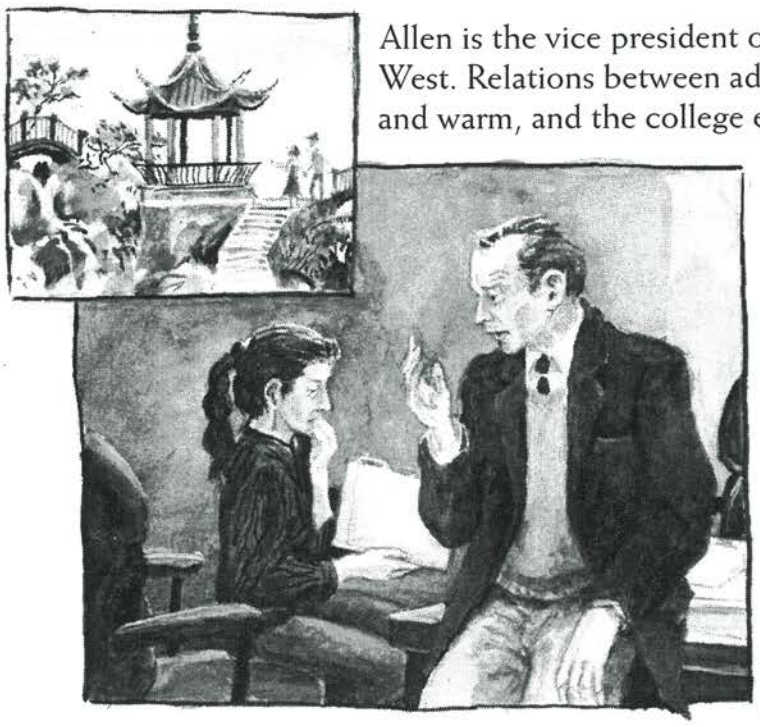
The interview went smoothly. But before Etienne left, something much more newsworthy emerged. Etienne was approached by people from a regional city several hundred miles from the capital, who pleaded with him to come with them. They told of the brutal suppression of people opposed to government policy. Etienne, a seasoned news reporter, sensed a story waiting to be written, and he was keen to observe signs of brutality that the regime was perpetrating on the local population. He decided to go. The journey was risky, but confirmed the stories of killings and rapes—crimes that government forces are inflicting on the local people.

Returning home, Etienne wrestles with a dilemma. Never has he had such a difficult decision to make. His prime concern is to figure out where his responsibilities lie. If he runs the interview, he risks losing the support of his hard-working staff. But if he runs the story on the government's brutal regime, what would Barnard's response be?

RESOLUTION

On his return to Europe, Etienne prints the interview, much to the dismay of the newspaper's staff, and gains the praise of the paper's owner. The following week, however, he runs the account of the atrocities, the evidence of which, you will recall, he was able to substantiate. The staff is delighted, but this action infuriates the owner, who eventually sells the paper to a competitor. As Etienne expects, staff opinions move rapidly, and he is heavily criticized for endangering their jobs. The paper is sold, staff positions cut, and Etienne moves to an academic post. But other papers, alerted to the problem, take up the cause and continue to tell about the government's outrageous handling of regional conflict.

Confidences in Conflict: Health at Stake



Allen is the vice president of a small liberal arts college in the Far West. Relations between administration and students are friendly and warm, and the college endeavors to meet personal as well as academic needs.

Early in the first semester, the parents of a new student visited Allen to tell him that their family had been posted to a remote part of China. Their daughter Sharon would remain at the college until the holiday recess, when she would join them for the duration of the break. At the end of the meeting, Sharon's parents mentioned to Allen that Sharon had been ill from an extreme eating disorder, but that she overcame the problem two years earlier. The parents did not expect a relapse, but asked Allen to keep an eye on her and to keep them informed.

As the fall term progressed, Allen thought that Sharon, a genial but quiet girl, seemed to be getting thin and pale. In the light of her parents' disclosure, Allen wondered if Sharon had succumbed to her old illness.

Then, Sharon's resident dormitory advisor asked to meet with Allen. Sharon had confided that she was indeed having a relapse of her previous illness. Paramount in the dormitory advisor's concern was the confidentiality of her relationship with the girl. The fact that Sharon had chosen to speak about her illness indicated that she had taken the first and most important step toward recovery—recognizing and confronting the problem.

Allen consulted an eminent psychiatrist, who confirmed the resident advisor's opinion that Sharon had started to fight back. He also confirmed that the confidential relationship between the two young women was a key bridge to Sharon's recovery. He counseled Allen to observe but to do nothing unless it seemed that Sharon was continuing to decline.

Several weeks passed, and Allen thought he detected a deterioration in Sharon's condition. Knowing her disease could be life threatening, he met frequently with the dorm advisor, who related a picture of continuing progress in communicating with Sharon, but less success in Sharon's ability to overcome the illness. Allen now wonders if it is time to step in and take some action.

RESOLUTION

Together, Allen and Sharon's resident advisor set a deadline to call Sharon's parents if her condition does not improve. When Allen calls her parents, Sharon's father immediately relays his anxiety about her, based on the way she sounded during a recent phone call. Allen is able to describe the situation accurately from his own point of view without betraying the resident advisor's confidence. Sharon's parents return to withdraw her from school and find an environment better able to manage her illness, with the understanding that she can return to college when her condition improves.

The Rules of the Game

The mood at Baileyville High School is tense with anticipation. For the first time in many, many years, the varsity basketball team has made it to the state semifinals. The community is excited too, and everyone is making plans to attend the big event next Saturday night.

Jeff, the varsity coach, has been waiting for years to field such a team. Speed, teamwork, balance: They've got it all. Only one more week to practice, he tells his team, and not a rule can be broken. Everyone must be at practice each night at the regularly scheduled time: No exceptions.

Brad and Mike are two of team's starters. From their perspective, they're indispensable to the team, the guys who will bring victory to Baileyville. They decide—why, we'll never know—to show up an hour late to the next day's practice.

Jeff is furious. They have deliberately disobeyed his orders. The rule says they should be suspended for one full week. If he follows the rule, Brad and Mike will not play in the semifinals. But the whole team is depending on them. What should he do?

RESOLUTION

This particular story is one we have heard many times. For the most part, the resolution of the story is to follow through with the expected punishment for the long-term benefit of everyone involved. But, in one case, a coach who follows through ends up being fired.

Bucks or Bats: What's a Dad to Do?

After he graduated from college with a degree in science, Andy found a solid job in his profession, married, and had two sons. Twelve years later, he moved to another company that promised him steady advancement within its managerial ranks. A devoted family man, he admires his wife's dedication to raising the boys. But he also observes that his sons, approaching their teen years, benefit greatly from his fatherly friendship and counsel—especially as they approach what he and his wife realize could prove to be a difficult transitional period in their upbringing. So he has made a commitment to spend plenty of time with them, playing baseball and helping with their schoolwork.

But he also loves his work, and does well at it. And it has become apparent that to advance rapidly up the managerial ranks, he needs an MBA. A nearby university offers the degree in an evening-and-weekend program that would allow him to continue full-time employment, but it would soak up his free time for the next several years and throw most of the family activities into his wife's hands.

It is right, he feels, to honor his family's short-term needs—to stick close to his sons at a time when a father's influence seems so important. Yet it is also right to build for the future—to equip himself with an education that would make him a better provider in the coming years, when he would presumably need to pay college tuition.

So this is not, for him, a choice of family or work. The real question is, "Which course of action will provide the 'greatest good' for my family?"

RESOLUTION

This is a dilemma we hear often. Unfortunately we do not know exactly what Andy decided to do. We do know that some people view the long-term interest as involving more time with the children, while others view it the way Andy did. Our observation is that people tend to resolve this dilemma based on what *they* believe to be right for the long term.

Life or Death Emergency: Report or Respond?

One Saturday afternoon Don was returning home after a visit to his daughter's farm, some 30 miles away. Midway down the interstate, he sees another car come to a rolling stop near the edge of the highway. There is an elderly driver, slumped forward and seemingly unconscious, at the wheel. The driver's wife jumps out of the vehicle and waves her arms, at him seeking help.

Don's first thought, but only for a brief moment, is: Should I stop? He could, after all, simply call in the emergency over his car phone and continue his trip home, knowing help will arrive before long. But, as a trained EMT, Don knows he is skilled in aiding in and assessing situations such as this one, so he puts in a call to 911 and pulls over to the breakdown lane.

Don first pushes the unconscious driver's car off the highway, out of harm's way, then he turns his attention to the ill man. Just as he is beginning to apply cardiopulmonary resuscitation, the man's wife confronts Don, saying, "No! Please do not try to revive him. He's had a serious heart condition for some time now, and he has a living will stating that he ought not to be resuscitated in a situation like this." The woman is adamant, but does not have the living will with her.

Don rechecks the man's pulse: It is weak, but the man is alive. What should he do?

But what would the Golden Rule advise? Put in the other man's position—and assuming that the living will has been drawn up—Don would probably want the "do not resuscitate" order to be upheld. After all, why else would one put together a living will? Still, the living will itself is not at hand, and a third way out seems unlikely to appear. What should Don do?

RESOLUTION

Don had called 911 before trying to help the ill man. When the woman asks Don not to resuscitate her husband, Don takes no further action. Within minutes, the paramedics arrive and check the man's pulse, which is weak, but still there. The woman tries to stop them, too, saying, "Please do not resuscitate." So the paramedics call their supervisor, who then calls the captain for a decision.

During this interval, another car pulls over with additional family members returning from a family event. These family members reinforce the mother's request. The paramedic captain asks that all family members present sign a statement that they have honored the wish of the man's wife and the man's living will, and the ill man is allowed to die.

How to Keep the Chips from Falling

Mr. Potato Chip Company has been a well-respected New England manufacturer for many years. Recently, the company decided to expand into new markets to assure a competitive advantage. To do this, they would need to attract new investors, and to accomplish that, they would need to show they were capable of producing a solid return on investment each year.

In keeping with these objectives, a policy is instigated that reduces the finished products' inventory to a rock-bottom level each June 30th, which is the end of the company's fiscal year. Why? The lower the inventory, the less money is tied up. This situation, in turn, tends to put the company in a better cash position at year end, which means that more money can be passed on to the stockholders as earnings per share.

As the recently hired production manager, Jane realizes there is a downside to this policy. With inventory levels on June 30 lower than at any other point during the year but with demand for potato chips higher than usual, the net result is an inability to meet the total customer demand for various types of potato chips. In fact, once inventory levels are reduced, it will take more than one month to get the process back to normal and running smoothly again.

The effect, Jane predicts, will be both lost sales at year end and a number of operations problems associated with a low-inventory situation.

For Jane, the dilemma is whether or not to confront senior management with these problems. Should she question outright the wisdom of the policy? She knows, on the one hand, that it is right to provide immediate, bottom-line performance for the company's stockholders. After all, they own the company, and there is nothing inherently wrong with reducing inventory levels, particularly given the need to attract new investors. And, is it really her place to question the decisions of senior management, especially being a new manager?

But isn't it also right, she reasons, to provide customers with what they want when they want it? Perhaps if stakeholders were aware of the effects of this policy, they would reconsider their position. If ending the policy would result in more sales, might that not also result in greater earnings per share for stockholders down the road?

RESOLUTION

Jane decides to quantify the costs associated with the practice of dropping inventory levels at year end. At the same time, another production location experiences a shortage of more than 16,000 cases of potato chips, which results in a severe customer service problem. This shortage, coupled with Jane's figures, convinces upper management to discontinue the policy.

Stop Them, or Let Them Go? A Captain's Dilemma

As captain of a U. S. Coast Guard cutter, Chuck is charged with patrolling the Mona Passage separating Puerto Rico from the Dominican Republic. Although not Hispanic, he and his wife are very fond of the warm, family-based culture they find in San Juan, where they live.

While Chuck is on patrol one day with his crew, many of whom are of Puerto Rican descent, an Immigration and Naturalization Service plane radios a request that his cutter intercept a small boat crossing toward a deserted section of the Puerto Rican coast. Chuck is not surprised. The passage, separating U.S. territory from an economically depressed nation, is a favored crossing point for refugees, drug runners, and would-be illegal aliens.

Making for the boat, Chuck sees that it is filled to the gunwales—not with terrorists or dealers, but with grandparents and infants. It is heading toward an isolated beach filled with brightly dressed people holding welcoming banners and carrying picnic hampers. These are families seeking to reunite with their elderly and young. Knowing their keen sense of family, Chuck's heart goes out to them. Yet his constitutional duty is clear: It is his job to prevent individuals from entering the United States illegally by stopping them and returning them to the Dominican Republic.

As Chuck and his crew close in, the boat crosses a sand bar too shallow for the cutter. Chuck does have, however, an outboard-powered inflatable on board that might stand a chance of catching the small boat. Yet giving chase so close to land, he knows, might cause some of the passengers to panic and to try to wade ashore while their boat is still dangerously far from the beach. That concerns him: While his duty is to enforce the law, he also knows that the Coast Guard's job is above all to save life, not to endanger it.

Should he launch the inflatable? Or should he turn away, citing the sand bar as the final impediment to the capture?

RESOLUTION

Chuck, the coast guard captain, lowers the inflatable and gives orders to give chase—knowing that if the coxswain throttles back the 75-horsepower outboard only slightly, the small boat with the children and elderly might make land. In fact, the coxswain does as he is ordered—and catches the boat before anyone jumps off. The ride back to San Juan is the longest two hours of Chuck's life—not a word is spoken among his crew, and there is hardly a dry eye.

The incident then reaches public attention, and Chuck is chastised in high government quarters for doing what he thought was his duty and giving chase to helpless grandparents and children, and is told not to do so again.

Ultimate Responsibility: A Lieutenant Colonel's Dilemma

As an air force lieutenant colonel, Jack commands a squadron of fighter-bombers. Like other squadron commanders in his wing, he is concerned about safety. While the record was not terrible, there had been aircraft accidents and many close calls recently. Something was out of kilter.

Soon after Jack had been promoted to squadron commander—in charge of 25 pilots, 25 navigators, and 300 maintenance and ground personnel—he took a different approach. Every Friday afternoon he decided to convene his 50 fliers in the Squadron's Bar. To pay for refreshments they would each plunk down a dollar on the pool table for each mistake or close call they had while flying. The plan worked: They would talk for hours, freely and frankly, about what was going on in the squadron and how to improve safety. Jack had just one standing rule: amnesty. Whatever was said within the room was to be held in confidence, and nobody would get in trouble for admitting they had made an error while flying.

In the months that followed, the conversation was open and direct. Lots of issues, big and small, came to the surface concerning management, personnel, maintenance, regulations, and everything else. Jack began to notice the hoped-for change: His squadron's safety record rose higher and higher in comparison to other squadrons in his wing.

Then one Friday a pilot recounted an experience he had had earlier that week during what should have been a routine flight. He was flying in formation when the lead plane peeled off into a turn too soon. Having only seconds to adjust to the confusion, he lost his bearings—experiencing what is known among fliers as "spatial disorientation." When he came out of that potentially fatal condition, his plane was soaring upwards into the clouds, far from the formation. Deeply shaken, he headed back to the base, landed, and went home for the day.

Jack thinks the conversation that Friday, regarding ways the whole squadron could work together to prevent such situations, was particularly good. But he also knows that spatial disorientation is such a serious problem that the air force requires any such incidents to

be reported up the chain of command. When the circumstances leading to these types of incidences are investigated, there is usually discipline and retraining involved. Yet Jack had offered amnesty—which is the reason, he is sure, that the pilot had been willing to speak frankly.

A few days later, Jack's superior officer calls him in. One of the officers at the bar that day had broken the confidence and told the commanding general what had happened.

"What are you going to do?" Jack's superior officer asks him.

RESOLUTION

Jack files the required report and lightly disciplines the pilot who had suffered spatial disorientation. The Friday meetings continue, but they are not really the same as before the incident. And Jack worries that the improved safety record will deteriorate after he moves on to his next position.

Getting Medicine to Bosnia: Acceptable Bribery?

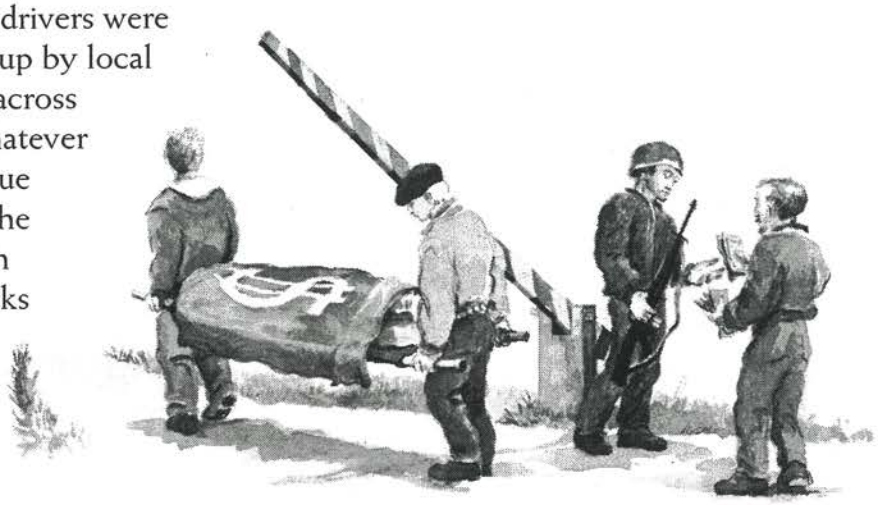
As chief legal officer in a well-respected company making lifesaving drugs, Alistair was asked by his board of directors to look into rumors of price-fixing in the firm's European offices. His board has a very strong ethics policy, and is especially wary of price-fixing, bribery, kickbacks, and other unethical activities that can plague overseas operations.

After several months of detailed interviews in Europe, Alistair satisfied himself that the rumors are groundless. As one of the European managers said, "There's no issue here." But, he added, "if you really want something to investigate, look into the Bosnia contract."

Over the months, Alistair kept hearing about "the Bosnia contract." So when he finished his report on the price-fixing rumors, he decided to satisfy his curiosity on the other matter. The contract, he discovers, is ordinary in almost every respect: A major relief organization contracted with his company to supply a million inexpensive kits of medicine for delivery into the war-torn regions of Bosnia. Like most such contracts with charitable organizations, it contains hardly any profit for his firm.

What he finds strange, however, is the payment of an extraordinarily large commission to a Romanian distributor to deliver the kits deep into Bosnia. Seeking out the executive in his own firm who negotiated the contract, he has one question in mind: Was this a bribe?

Yes and no, says the executive. According to the Romanian distributor, the backs of the delivery trucks were loaded with the kits—and the glove compartments were stuffed with cash. That way, when the drivers were stopped at roadblocks set up by local militia units operating all across Bosnia, they could pay whatever was demanded and continue their journey. In the past, he notes, drivers without cash were taken from their trucks and shot. If the kits were to be delivered, this was a cost of doing business.



Alistair feels sure that none of the money flowed back to the executive, whose only motive was to get the kits delivered. And by this time, the deliveries had already been made. Yet Alistair still faces a dilemma. Should he draft a separate report to the board on this most unorthodox contract—possibly causing great harm to the executive who had negotiated it or embarrassment to the relief organization, which was aware of the commission? Or should he keep silent?

RESOLUTION

An internal investigation is launched: No one in the company had taken any money. A lawyer investigates and finds the contract was not a violation of the Foreign Corrupt Trade Practices Law because the people demanding payment were not government officials, but vigilantes or bandits. The company's conclusion is to leave it alone, because there was no corruption within the company's own ranks. If such a contract were to be proposed again, however, they would need to launch a wider discussion of the subject within the company.

Heartaches at Headstart

Susan, on the staff of a Headstart center, is working in a particularly remote, poverty-stricken rural area. Her sympathy for her clients and her ability to make broken relationships viable again are legendary among her largely illiterate, always needy constituency. And, like many staff, she contributes many more hours than her job requires.

One particular case has haunted Susan for ages. Seven-year-old Betty Castle has lived with her aging grandmother since birth in a dilapidated trailer that lacks indoor plumbing and other amenities. Betty does not have her own room, and her outdoor play is carried out among the rusting appliances and assorted rubbish in the front yard. One priceless gift that the child enjoys, however, is the love and devotion of her grandmother.

Betty's cold and indifferent mother occasionally takes Betty away for a few weeks, causing grief for both Betty and her grandmother. During one of these absences, Susan finds out from Betty's grandmother that her mother collects welfare checks for Betty but never passes them along to her. Susan also finds out that Betty's mother is living with a dangerously abusive boyfriend. Generally, Betty's mother does not keep Betty very long before returning her to her grandmother.

All the materials necessary for a nightmarish dilemma are now in Susan's hands. Susan weighs her options. On one hand, Betty's mother is defrauding the government by misspending the checks intended for Betty, and Susan feels duty-bound to reveal it. On the other hand, if Susan discusses the check fraud with social services, official scrutiny of the case might result in having Betty removed from her loving grandmother and placed with her negligent mother and her abusive boyfriend.

What should Susan do?

RESOLUTION

While Susan is struggling with her dilemma, Betty's mother moves into the grandmother's home to recover from a broken leg inflicted by her abusive boyfriend. As a result, Susan, Betty, and Betty's mother and grandmother spend more time together, and their ties become closer. And Betty's gets more attention from her mother than usual.

After Betty's mother recovers, she takes a job, rents a two-bedroom apartment in a neighboring town, and buys a car. Betty willingly goes to live with her. She is able to attend the same school, and teachers and school administrators say they have never seen Betty happier or better cared for.

Susan, with the help of unexpected circumstances, is able to find a "third way out" of her dilemma.