

The following scenario was developed by the Center for Ethical Leadership at Christian Brothers University. It is designed to determine how you process information and make decisions. There is no right or wrong answer.

Lost File – Ethical Dilemma Pitting Individual versus Community

You have been involved in a very tight election, opposing a very popular incumbent. About two weeks prior to election day, the local newspaper runs a very negative article about your opponent and some “shady” dealings occurring during his tenure in office. Although the allegations do not point to any illegal activity, the reporter does imply that a particular financial transaction shows questionable decision making.

Your opponent denies the allegations and insists the transaction is above board. He claims he cannot locate the files associated with this particular incident and, therefore, cannot defend his actions with anything other than his honor, reputation, and good name. The press continues to have a field day over this issue, tearing up your opponent and leaving you in the enviable position of not having to comment on the situation.

You win the election by a surprisingly large margin. Exit polls show it was your opponent’s inability to produce evidence proving there was no wrongdoing that swayed voters your way. Your opponent walks away from the election not only defeated at the polls but also in public opinion and reputation.

About three months into your new position you are working on a case that causes you to rummage through some of your predecessor’s old files. There you find the “smoking gun”... the evidence that clears your opponent of any wrongdoing. You are unsure if the information was accidentally or intentionally misfiled.

(1) What will you do with this information?

I will immediately call my former opponent and make him/her aware of what I have found, and together we will hold a news conference to tell the voters the truth.

(2) Will you consult anyone before deciding what to do? If so, whom?

There is no need to consult anyone before deciding what to do. This is a very straight-forward situation and requires no deep thought.

(3) When making your decision about what to do, whose needs did you consider?

I considered the needs of the voters. They always deserve to know the facts, the truth. I also considered the needs of my former opponent and his family.

Was this an easy decision for you to make? If not, what were some of the issues that went through your mind that caused conflict?

As I said earlier, this was very straight-forward, and it didn’t require any soul searching on my part to decide what to do.