

The Situation

Alex was sitting in the weekly purchasing group's staff meeting but he couldn't concentrate. He kept looking over at Alfredo. Fredo is looking to leave NatCon - he applied for a supervisor's job with ExecuBuild and had asked Alex to be a reference for him. They are good friends, but Fredo is not "the sharpest knife in the drawer." Face it, he does the barest minimum and even then, doesn't do it well – certainly not the kind of employee Alex would want to have as a supervisor.

But what could he do? His best friend had asked for a favor and he said, "yes". Now he has a message on his voice mail to call some body named Allison at ExecuBuild about Fredo's application. What can he say? What should he do? Does he try to help his friend or does he tell this Allison person what he really thinks?

And it's not just Fredo's job application at ExecuBuild that has Alex worried. He did some things at NatCon that are not exactly by the book. Just two weeks ago he used the copier on their floor to make about 250 fliers for a youth group conference at his church. The youth group is a good cause, Alex is a member of it as well, but employees are supposed to use company equipment for business reasons only. This particular copier is only supposed to be used by the purchasing team for work that they are doing and it is a small copier besides. Big jobs, over 25 copies at a time, are supposed to be taken downstairs to the central reproduction center. What if somebody is monitoring the copier usage and notices that someone made 250 copies at one time.

Fredo also has been using his position in purchasing to arrange to buy certain items for personal use. Just last month he got a real good deal on a laptop computer. The company bought 20 laptops and Fredo was the purchasing agent on that transaction. He needed a computer for home and asked the vendor if he could get a laptop for himself at the same price. The vendor agreed and Fredo got a great deal. He paid for the computer with his own money – it's not like he stole it or anything like that – but Alex knows that he isn't supposed to do that kind of thing and he is just as certain that Fredo knows that too.

Alex is roused from his thoughts by Elena – his supervisor. "Alex, I asked a question. I'd appreciate it if you paid more attention in my meetings. Do anyone have any idea why our copier usage is higher this month than is usual. Do you know if anyone has had a special project that required a lot of copies – or perhaps if someone was using the copier for personal use?"

"Uh oh! Now what should I do?" If I tell Elena that Fredo made a bunch of copies for church he will get in trouble. Besides that, he will hate me for telling. But Elena is my boss and just asked a pretty straightforward question and I don't want to lie to her. If she ever found out I would be in real trouble, and besides, I don't want to lie to her. Maybe I'll just keep quiet. That's not the same as lying.

The Task

If you are Alex:

- Do you tell Elena about the copies?
- Do you tell Allison that Fredo may not exactly be an ideal candidate for the supervisor job at ExecuBuild?
- What do you tell Fredo?

What are the issues in this situation?

How important is it for you to be honest with Elena?

Is it honest to keep silent?

As you consider each issue ask yourself these questions:

Are there rules, regulations, policies or procedures that I should consider as I think about as I consider what I am going to say or do?

Who is helped and who is harmed by the decision I am considering?

Am I living up to the standards and expectations of my employer that I be honest and trustworthy?

Am I living up to my own sense of what is right or wrong, good or bad, fair or unfair?

What are my priorities? – Being honest? Having self-respect? Keeping Fredo's friendship? Being trusted by my supervisor?