

## PARKVILLE

### I

Elizabeth Dorsey is an engineer at CDC, Inc., a large corporation in a crowded metropolitan area. Elizabeth prefers living in a smaller community. So she commutes 30 miles daily from her home in Parkville, a community of fewer than 5,000 people.

Noted for her environmental concerns, Elizabeth is on Parkville's Committee for Environmental Quality, a small but active citizen's group. Last year the committee successfully spearheaded opposition to rezoning a Parkville recreational and wildlife area for commercial purposes. While acknowledging that commercial development would aid the local economy, the committee convinced the City Council that economic progress should not come at the expense of the environment.

However, now Elizabeth is facing a difficult problem. She has learned that CDC has its eyes on the recreational and wildlife area for developing a new facility. What do you think she should do? Explain.

### II

CDC, Inc., a large corporation in a crowded metropolitan area, needs to expand its operations. This will require a new facility. But the immediate area has little to offer. In surveying surrounding areas CDC's planning committee has determined that the most desirable location for its new facility would be in nearby Parkville's recreational and wildlife area. The planning committee is now authorized by CDC to approach Parkville's City Council.

CDC makes what it considers to be a very generous offer to the City Council. Presenting itself as an environmentally conscious corporation, CDC says it will need only 25% of the wildlife and recreational area; it will carefully monitor and control emissions into the air and water, using "beyond the state of the art" equipment and standards; it will annually contribute funds for the preservation and maintenance of the remaining 75% of the wildlife and recreational area. In addition, CDC points out how its presence will increase the tax base of Parkville, create new jobs, and enhance the local economy.

A member of CDC's planning committee learns that one of CDC's engineers, Elizabeth Dorsey, lives in Parkville. He suggests to committee chair, Jim Bartlett, that someone talk to her to see if she might be able to "soften up" Parkville City Council members. Jim thinks this is a good idea and calls David Jensen, chief engineer of Elizabeth's unit. "David," Jim says, "I'd like you to talk with one of your engineers, Elizabeth Dorsey, about our efforts to secure some land near Parkville." Jim goes on to detail CDC's plans and what he would like Elizabeth to be asked to do. How should David respond to Jim's request? Assuming he agrees to talk with Elizabeth, what should he say?

Consider these questions under two different circumstances:

1. David is not aware of Elizabeth's environmental concerns or her role on the Parkville Environmental Quality Committee.
2. David is aware of Elizabeth's environmental concerns and her role on the Parkville Environmental Quality Committee.

### **III**

[Following II. 1.]

Shortly after his conversation with Jim Bartlett, David Jensen calls Elizabeth Dorsey into his office and relays to her Jim's message. Unaware of Elizabeth's participation on Parkville's Committee for Environmental Quality, David asks, "Is there anyone on the City Council you know well enough to talk to about this?"

How should Elizabeth respond to David's question?

1. Reply that she does not know anyone well enough to talk about this matter--hoping that this will end the matter with David.
2. Tell David about her previous involvement with the City Council and her environmental stance concerning the wildlife and recreational area.
3. Other.

### **IV**

[Following III. 1.]

David encourages Elizabeth to work on making contact with someone on the City Council, either directly or through friends who know members on the Council. What should Elizabeth say in response to David's request? What should she subsequently **do**?

### **V**

David Jensen reports back to Jim Bartlett that he is not sure that Elizabeth Dorsey will be much help. "She said she doesn't know any Council members well enough to talk to them," David says.

Much to his surprise, Jim replies, "Guess what I learned just half an hour ago? I had a phone conversation with an old friend who moved away from Parkville last fall. He says Elizabeth Dorsey is on an environmental concerns committee in Parkville. She knows City Council members all right--she and her committee members took on the Council last year and blocked the Council's effort to open up commercially the area we want! We're going to have to keep an eye on her. Tell her she'd better "cool it" on this one."

What should David Jensen say to Elizabeth Dorsey?

### **VI**

[Following III. 2.]

Elizabeth Dorsey tells David Jensen about her activities with Parkville's Committee for Environmental Quality. She says that she cannot support CDC's effort to obtain a portion of the wildlife and recreational area.

"Well," David replies, "Jim won't like hearing about this. What am I supposed to tell him?"

"Why tell him anything?" Elizabeth asks. "Just say I won't be able to help."

"And if he asks why?"

"If he asks why, just tell him I'm not friendly with anyone on the Council. So I don't see how I can help to CDC on this. That's true enough," laughed Elizabeth.

How should David respond to Elizabeth's suggestion?

## VII

David Jensen follows Elizabeth Dorsey's suggestion and reports back to Jim Bartlett that Elizabeth doesn't see how she can help CDC. Jim replies, "I can see why she says that. I've just learned from an old friend who lived in Parkville until last fall that Elizabeth Dorsey is on a citizen's committee that's adamantly opposed to commercial development of the piece of land we want. The only help she's likely to give us is keeping her mouth shut on this. Tell her she should 'cool it'."

Should David relay this message to Elizabeth?

1. David should tell her what Jim said, but he need not add that he agrees with Jim.
2. David should tell her what Jim said, and he should add that he agrees with Jim.
3. David should simply drop the matter.

## VIII

[Following VII. 1. and 2.]

It is clear to Elizabeth Dorsey that if she joins hands with her fellow committee members and opposes CDC's plans for developing a new facility in Parkville, this will not be well received at CDC. Meanwhile, no one else on the Committee for Environmental Quality is aware of CDC's plans. Should Elizabeth report CDC's intentions to the committee? [Should she regard CDC's intentions as confidential, or can she take CDC's request that she try to gain access to City Council members as an indication that talking about about CDC's intentions would not be a breach of confidentiality?]

## IX

Over the next two weeks Elizabeth Dorsey keeps CDC's plans to herself. Then she receives a phone message indicating that the Committee for Environmental Quality is having an urgent meeting. At the outset of the meeting the committee chair announces that he has just learned of CDC's intentions. "We have to act quickly to mobilize against this," he concludes.

Should Elizabeth volunteer that she already knew about CDC's intentions? If she is asked, as an employee of CDC, whether she knew anything about this, what should she say? Should she now join with her fellow committee members in mobilizing against CDC's intentions?

## X

[Following VII.]

One month after his conversation with David Jensen, Jim Bartlett is shown a copy of the Parkville Weekly Press in which Elizabeth Dorsey is quoted at a City Council meeting as speaking out against any commercial development of the wildlife and recreational area. She does not mention CDC specifically, but the implication of her remark is apparent. Jim then calls David Jensen and says, "What's going on here, David? I thought you were going to tell her to 'cool it'."

How should David reply to Jim?

## XI

You are a member of Parkville's Committee for Environmental Quality. Discuss what, from an ethical point of view, you think it would be appropriate for fellow member Elizabeth Dorsey to do in the above circumstances.

## XII

You are a citizen of Parkville. Discuss what, from an ethical point of view, you think it would be appropriate for Elizabeth Dorsey to do in the above circumstances.

[Prepared with David Zacker.]

## COMMENTARIES

### Kenneth L. Carper

Elizabeth Dorsey is involved in a moral dilemma arising from a conflict in roles. Her role as a citizen of Parkville and an environmental conservationist is in conflict with her role as an employee of CDC, Inc. Role conflicts always present difficult ethical challenges because they test loyalties and commitments (Nelson and Peterson 1982).

This commentary will first consider Elizabeth's personal dilemma as presented in the case study, from Part I through Part XII. After consideration of Elizabeth's situation, a few additional questions arising from the field of environmental ethics will be presented.

### I & II

Elizabeth becomes aware of the role conflict. Her employer is seeking expansion space, and none is to be found in the inner city where the firm is now located. Parkville's recreational and wildlife area is an attractive site for CDC, but it is Elizabeth's hometown and she has been instrumental in keeping commercial development out of the area.

Elizabeth's situation is made more difficult by the pressure exerted by CDC management. This pressure is not appropriate. David Jensen should not accede to Jim Bartlett's request, whether or not David is aware of Elizabeth's role on the Parkville Environmental Quality Committee. David should defend Elizabeth based on her value to CDC as an engineer, not as a potential political agent.

The type of pressure Jim Bartlett seeks to exert on Elizabeth would use her merely as a means to an end, rather than respecting her as an intrinsically valuable human being (Rachels 1986, pp. 114117). What he is demanding of her has no relationship whatsoever to her professional obligations.

David should inform Elizabeth of Jim Bartlett's request, so she will be better able to assess her situation and make informed choices. This information should be presented in a nonthreatening way, and David should also assure Elizabeth of his support.

In his discussion with Elizabeth, David may be able to gain some insights regarding the environmental quality of the Parkville site. Her opinions may be useful to the CDC Planning Committee, so they can be more informed as to the impact of the committee's proposal on the environment.

### **III & IV**

Elizabeth is presented with the opportunity to reveal her conflict. The sooner she discusses this with David, the better. Employers have an obligation to avoid placing employees in situations of apparent conflict of interest, but in order to do so, they must be informed. If David isn't already aware of her past work, Elizabeth should definitely discuss this with him and enlist his support. She may be headed for an unpleasant confrontation and she will need informed allies, whose support is founded in mutual understanding and trust.

### **V**

The dilemma presented in Part V should never have arisen. Truthfulness earlier would have kept Elizabeth out of this situation. Avoiding truthfulness in conflict of interest situations merely delays the confrontation and makes it more severe.

David now is in a very awkward situation. He has been forced to admit to his superior that a subordinate has been less than candid with him. His ability, and his desire, to support Elizabeth in later confrontations may have been damaged along with his credibility. However, neither David nor Jim is justified in ordering Elizabeth to "cool it." Such action involves excessive demands for loyalty and is clearly an abuse of management authority (Martin and Schinzingher 1989, pp.174177).

### **VI**

The option presented in Part VI is a good approach. It effectively takes Elizabeth out of the controversy. She won't help. She is not friendly with the Council, and she identifies the reason. She doesn't support CDC's proposal and makes it clear that she couldn't possibly be an effective advocate for CDC even if she did support the proposal.

This action shifts the burden for the ethical dilemma back to CDC management. Elizabeth has not threatened to use her position to either undermine CDC plans, or to profit within the firm from her unique relationship with Parkville.

### **VII**

Jim again demands that pressure be exerted on Elizabeth to "cool it." David should discuss with Jim the moral implications of this pressure. Also, David has the responsibility to inform Elizabeth again of her precarious situation. If David really values her as a person, he will offer to help sort out the alternatives and potential consequences with her. Combining their two perspectives may enhance understanding.

### **VIII**

Elizabeth should not break confidentiality with her employer when the opportunity is presented. She has some responsibility to her employer in this regard. The information will soon become public. Elizabeth's neighbors may be upset with her, but she should be able to articulate her reasons for confidentiality. Reference could be made to the ABET Code of Ethics which states that "Engineers shall treat information coming to them in the course of their assignments as confidential." Some have noted that this statement is too broad (Martin and Schinzinger 1989, pp. 182188). Certainly, employer confidentiality should be breached in cases involving public safety.

Other alternatives could be defended on moral principles, should Elizabeth be absolutely convinced that her silence will prevent proper public planning procedures from occurring. A careful assessment of potential outcomes should be undertaken before Elizabeth reveals her privileged information.

## **IX**

In Part IX, Elizabeth is forced to evaluate the strengths of her conflicting commitments. Proceeding further publicly may seriously jeopardize her career with CDC. Other role conflicts may also emerge at this point, such as her role as economic provider to her family. Her public position really shouldn't jeopardize her future with CDC, as it has nothing to do with job performance. However, in this circumstance, the threat is clear. Certainly, any informed party would find it acceptable for Elizabeth to step aside and let the CDC proposal be judged on its own merits.

## **X**

Elizabeth decides to make a public statement. If she is going to speak out, it should be done in this way. She has a right to political positions as a citizen. This includes the right to provide input to landuse planning decisions. But she has correctly expressed these opinions in general terms, consistent with her past public positions on the subject. The media may establish the connection between Elizabeth and CDC, but she importantly has not directly and specifically criticized her employer in the public arena.

However, Elizabeth's public statement does carry some important connotations. It may actually serve to "muddy" the decisionmaking process so that Parkville residents are not able to look objectively at the CDC proposal. Hopefully, Elizabeth has carefully considered her unique position of influence prior to speaking out.

With regard to the continuing threats from Jim Bartlett, David should reply forthrightly. He should tell Jim that he did convey Jim's warnings to Elizabeth, but that he tempered the information with his own judgment and offered Elizabeth his support to exercise her conscience.

There may be a component of sex discrimination in Jim Bartlett's attitude. Special care is required of managers in situations where males have traditionally held dominant management positions. In these situations, female employees find it more difficult to be assertive. David should ask Jim if he would make the same implied threats and charges of disloyalty towards a male employee in Elizabeth's position.

## **XI & XII**

Parts XI and XII investigate the perspectives of the Committee for Environmental Quality and the typical Parkville citizen. Elizabeth should discuss her opinions with the Committee for Environmental Quality, but she shouldn't take a leadership role unless she is willing to jeopardize her job.

It is probably more important that Elizabeth ask to discuss her concerns with the CDC Planning Committee,

especially if her concerns are founded in specific issues of unique environmental sensitivity. Elizabeth is not going to be an effective advocate on either side, for her motives will be questioned by both sides. Her conflicting roles inject unnecessary confusion. Parkville residents should be allowed to review the CDC proposal objectively. Consideration of all the facts in an open public forum should enable the community to judge the proposal on its own merits.

## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

The role conflicts encountered by Elizabeth in this case study are so interesting that one might overlook some equally interesting moral questions from the field of environmental ethics (Martin and Schinzingher 1989, pp 262278). Space does not permit discussion of these questions, but a thorough review of the case should include the following:

1. Why does Elizabeth commute 60 miles each day if she is truly concerned about environmental quality? What form of transportation does she use?
2. Is the Parkville site unique? Is it particularly sensitive to development? Or is this a case of the "Not In My Backyard" objection to changing land use?
3. Has Parkville become an exclusive community for affluent commuters, and if so, have the original residents been displaced by the high taxes associated with preservation of undeveloped land?
4. What about the citizens who live in the big city, those who can't afford to live in Parkville? Do they have regular access to the environmentally protected area, or is it enjoyed only by the residents of Parkville?
5. Denial of the CDC proposal may result in further congestion and pollution of the inner city. What are the ethical implications resulting from this alternative?
6. Can communities like Parkville hold out forever? There are many examples of quality environmental projects involving cooperative business and government alliances. Maybe this is the best opportunity Parkville will ever have to preserve its quality of life, considering economic and environmental factors. Is it possible to sacrifice a little in order to preserve most of an environmental asset?
7. Consider the implication of CDC's plans as they impact the inner city. Abandoning the current location will reduce the tax base that supports city services. How will this affect those who must live in the city?

These questions deal with broader environmental issues. They are not directly related to Elizabeth Dorsey's dilemma. If we had specific answers to the questions about Parkville, however, we might be able to better assess the fundamental moral principles guiding Elizabeth's reasoning.

### **Suggested Readings:**

1. Martin, Mike W. and R. Schinzingher 1989. Ethics in Engineering (2nd edition), McGrawHill, Inc., New York, NY,
2. Nelson, Carl and S. R. Peterson 1982. "Conflicts of Roles in Engineering Ethics," Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering, American Society of Civil Engineers, New York, NY, Vol. 108, No. E11, January, pp. 711.

3. Rachels, James 1986. The Elements of Moral Philosophy, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, pp. 114117.

## Michael Davis

People like to advise someone in Elizabeth Dorsey's situation, "You cannot serve two masters." The advice confuses Dorsey's situation with that of a slave.

A slave has a master, an owner with absolute power over him. Only one person can have absolute power over you at any one time. You can only serve that master properly by serving no other. A slave with divided loyalties is, by definition, a bad slave.

Dorsey is not a slave. She is a free person. A free person has no master. Having no master leaves her free to develop relationships with whom she pleases. With such relationships come loyalties, commitments, and other interests. Sooner or later some of those interests will come in conflict. Freedom is messy.

Freedom is especially messy for engineers. The engineer, simply by working as an engineer, undertakes to serve the public, clients, employer, and profession--four "masters". The engineer also tries to serve himself in a morally appropriate way. That is, he tries to earn a decent living by serving public, clients, employer, and profession in the way engineers should. Each profession tries to define itself so that, for example, serving the public does not conflict with serving one's employer. But, since human foresight is weak, such conflicts still occur.

Dorsey has conducted herself as a good engineer should. Not only has she used her engineering knowledge to benefit her employer, she has made it available to a citizen's group she believes to be serving the public interest. She has, in the words of the NSPE Code III. 2.a, "[worked] for the advancement of the safety, health, and well-being of [her] community." And, as a result, she is in trouble.

Her employer has asked her to lobby for it. Lobbying is normally the responsibility of Public Relations (or some other department without engineers). Nonetheless, engineers may properly participate in lobbying as engineers. They may provide help on technical questions. An engineer could, for example, properly make a presentation to Parkville's city council explaining how CDC's plan would protect the environment.

An engineer's participation in lobbying is, however, necessarily limited. An engineer cannot put the weight of her professional judgment behind whatever her client or employer wants. She must believe what she says. Deception cannot be part of her job. Engineering codes of ethics are unanimous on that. (NSPE Code III.3.a.)

Yet, down the chain of command has come this request for Dorsey's non-technical help in lobbying for CDC's proposal. What can be said about the request itself? There is, I think, nothing inherently wrong with it. But for her interest in Parkville's environment, Dorsey might have been happy to do as asked, lobbying not as engineer or loyal employee, but simply as Liz Dorsey, commuter (someone who would like to work nearer home).

So, David Jensen, her supervisor, has no reason not to convey the request to her. Indeed, whether he knows of her activities in Parkville or not, he has an obligation to give her the chance to decide for herself what she will do (as well as an obligation to his superiors to do as asked). He should, however, consider which Dorsey he is asking (engineer, loyal employee, or commuter). Which he thinks he is asking will affect his tone and may well affect how Dorsey responds.

Dorsey's problem is the result of her (properly) having a life of her own about which her employer (or a part of

it) does not know. CDC has ignorantly put Dorsey in a bind. What should she do? If Jensen sounds at all like a superior when he asks her to lobby, Dorsey's first impulse will probably be to protect her privacy, avoid confrontation, and tell a "white lie". While such lies are (generally) morally permissible, they are not consistent with an engineer serving her employer as a faithful agent. White lies do not meet "the highest standard of integrity [in professional relations]". (NSPE Code III.1] An engineer who feels it necessary to tell an employer white lies should seek a new employer. Something has gone seriously wrong between her and her employer.

What should Dorsey do? She might begin by explaining everything to Jensen and asking his advice. He is a potential ally. He may well dislike having to ask a subordinate to do something "political". He may know how firm the request is, what assumptions it rests on, and how best to respond. The request is not necessarily written in stone. It might even be written in water, no sooner made than forgotten. Senior executives do not always appreciate the effect their works will have on subordinates. Jensen is more likely to be helpful if treated as a helper.

But let's suppose the worst. Though Dorsey seeks Jensen's help, he eventually sighs in exasperation, "I'm only the messenger. You must decide for yourself and take the consequences." What should Dorsey do now? She must, I think, say something like this: "Sorry. No can do. I've been working with the Parkville Environmental Quality Committee for more than a year now. They'll certainly oppose CDC's plan. I don't want to choose between CDC and my neighbors. Tell the people upstairs that I have a conflict of interest."

Dorsey should, I think, say something similar to the Parkville Environment Quality Committee even if she believes CDC is clearly in the wrong. Unless she is willing to quit CDC now, she should not directly help the Committee. The most she should do is advise the Committee on how to find another engineer. She should do no more than this for at least three reasons.

First, openly confronting CDC is likely to poison her relations with her superiors. She has access to information outsiders would not have. CDC probably has no way to know whether any of that information is relevant to the Parkville plan. They are therefore likely to view her as a potential spy, an enemy within.

Second, the public is likely to suppose that she knows more than she in fact does. Employees generally do not openly oppose their employer unless it is doing something outrageous. Dorsey is likely to be identified as a CDC employee. Her opposition will therefore carry more weight than it would had she no connection with CDC. CDC will find her status as an employee working against it. Unless CDC has done something to deserve that disadvantage, Dorsey should not treat her employer as if it does.

Third, Dorsey probably can't conduct herself properly while working for CDC and helping the Committee. The more headlines she gets for the Committee, the more likely her relations at work are to go sour. The more her work relations sour, the more likely she is to overdo or underdo what both CDC and the Committee need to have done right. She would not be able to provide either with the independent judgment she guarantees anyone for whom she works as an engineer.

So, she should thankfully take Bartlett's advice when it comes. "Cooling it" will allow her honorably to maintain good relations with both her employer and her neighbors. Being an engineer does not require her to choose between them this time.

**Joseph Ellin**

## I

This case involves questions of employee freedom, loyalty, conflict of interest, and conflict between conscience and interest. In general, what you do on your own time is your own business. Employees ought to have the freedom off the job to participate in community affairs according to their own lights. The employer should not try to dictate or influence what form that participation takes. However it could be said that employees owe off-the-job loyalty to their employer, at least to the extent of not opposing the company's interests. Employee off-the-job freedom extends first and foremost to questions not directly related to the company's business concerns, such as supporting political candidates or taking positions on issues such as abortion. When the company has a direct stake in some matter, however, the situation changes and the employee might well have an obligation to support the company or at least not to oppose it. This is especially true when the company has a lot at stake, such as whether it can expand or replace its physical plant. What you do on your own time doesn't affect your job performance, but if it hinders your company's operations, it might affect whether the company has a job for you to perform.

On the other hand, suppose your company is about to do something you disapprove of, because you think it is against the public good. Imagine further that the project does not in any way relate to your normal job responsibilities. Are you obliged to go along out of loyalty? Are you obliged to help the company accomplish its unworthy goal, if you should be asked to do so?

Elizabeth Dorsey's employer, CDC Inc, plans to build a facility on environmentally sensitive land in the small community in which she lives. It is evidently important for CDC that the facility be built on this location. As luck would have it, Elizabeth not only values the quality of life in Parkville, she is a member of a citizen's environmental group, which has already successfully opposed rezoning of recreational land. Elizabeth, we may assume, does not like CDC's plans, and she is inclined to oppose them. However the case does not state what her reasons are for hesitating. Perhaps she is concerned only with her self-interest as an employee who is not expected to oppose the company, at least not in public. However she may wonder whether she is within her rights to assume that she's free to do what she wants, even on her own time. She may think that it's disloyal for an employee to cause problems for the company; or she may recognize how important this project is for CDC and not want to cause CDC harm. Also, she may feel a conflict of interest, since as a Parkville resident who enjoys small-town life, it would be better for her if CDC built somewhere else.

## II

CDC official Jim Bartlett learns that Elizabeth lives in Parkville and tells her boss, David, to ask her to lobby for the CDC proposal with the Parkville City Council. Should David comply? No reason is given why David should not agree to the request to try and enlist Elizabeth on the side of CDC. Absent special circumstances, it doesn't seem unethical for a company to ask its employees to help it in the political process. For all CDC knows (circumstance #1), Elizabeth would favor the project and be happy to help by exercising her right to lobby her elected representatives. The ethical problem would be if Elizabeth were subject to undue pressure, but to this point such pressure is at most hypothetical and implicit, and Elizabeth is free to resist it. Even if David knew of E's environmental concerns, (circumstance #2), this should not prevent him from talking to her; to assume that she's necessarily opposed to the CDC proposal would be presumptuous. To this point, he hasn't been asked and doesn't intend to exert any pressure on her, merely to ask her assistance.

What David should say is basically what Jim Bartlett asks him to say, assuming Jim hasn't asked anything outrageous: the CDC needs this facility and since Elizabeth lives in Parkville, maybe she'll support it. If he's

aware of Elizabeth's environmental concerns, presumably he'd want to make the environmental pitch to her, as CDC has made it to the City Council. If CDC's environmental pitch is sincere, David thinks he's got a good case and a reasonable environmentalist ought not oppose the project. But even if CDC's environmental approach is window dressing, there's no good reason why David can't try it out on Elizabeth. She can always shoot it down if she sees it that way.

### III

David's request puts Elizabeth on the spot and she had better be up front from the first. Although she's an environmentalist, to this point she hasn't made up her mind about CDC's request, though, she's inherently suspicious of it. She shouldn't conceal the fact that she's an environmentalist and that David or Jim will have to sell her on the environmental points, though there might not be much point in going into the gory details of past battles. CDC wants her help, and she owes it to David to give him the chance to convince her of the merits of CDC's plan. If she's not convinced, she should be able to explain why. She might, for example, point out that she has a conflict of interest because development would alter the life style in her quiet town.

One might even note that talking to Elizabeth is actually a good opportunity for CDC officials. If they can persuade Elizabeth, they should be able to persuade the City Council. If they can't persuade Elizabeth, they should at least have a better idea of the weakness in their plan and the kind of opposition they're about to run into.

Of course David and Jim may not appreciate this new turn, and may expect unquestioned obedience ('loyalty') from employees such as Elizabeth. If she suspects this, she may be tempted to conceal her involvement with the Council as a way of trying to get off the spot (option 1); but she should realize that pretending to be uninvolved is foolish as well as dishonest. She might foresee that David would press her further (as he does in IV). And her denial that she knows anyone on the City Council is a bit implausible. In a town of 5,000, there's probably a member of the Council living next door. Further, by denying involvement at this point, she's making it more difficult for herself to become involved later: if she ever does decide to act against CDC, her past activities will obviously come to their attention, which would be embarrassing to say the least.

### IV

Elizabeth foolishly tries to pretend she's not in a position to help, and David foreseeably presses her to contact a member of the Council. Predictably, her feeble dodge hasn't succeeded in averting the issue. Elizabeth has to realize that sooner or later she's going to have to face the question of whether she wants to fight the CDC project, or not. Why doesn't she give David and Jim the chance to make the environmental pitch to her? If she's not convinced, she can make her rebuttal points and explain that therefore she can't help them. If she is convinced, then she has no excuse for not helping.

Elizabeth's action seems to be motivated by a fear that CDC will hold it against her if she doesn't co-operate. It may be this fear that leads her to try to dodge the issue by prevaricating. She may have some reason for this fear, based on what she may know about CDC, but to this point there's been no indication that the fear is warranted. But even if it is, it doesn't follow that deception is her best means to avoid the problem.

### V

Now Elizabeth's ill-advised attempt at deception backfires. You can never escape the Mafia. Everyone knows

everything in a small town and someone rats on Elizabeth to Jim: her dirty secret is out, she's an environmentalist! Now she's about to be given a direct order to cool it. The order itself may be illegitimate, but Jim is understandably angry with Elizabeth. David's been told to transmit this order, and perhaps he doesn't like this task. He may think Elizabeth has a right to do what she likes, and perhaps he might try to persuade Jim to let her alone. He might point out that there's no gain in antagonizing a valuable employee, and after all Elizabeth does live there. So she has a right to defend her town's way of life. On the other hand, Jim's reaction seems to suggest that Jim is worried that Elizabeth's opposition could influence the outcome, and the project is presumably quite important to CDC. David is not being asked to advice Jim, but to talk to Elizabeth, and all things considered perhaps he'd better do so. We don't know that David personally doesn't support the CDC project. So it's not that he feels Elizabeth is in the right. Even if he's sympathetic to her position, he's wearing his company hat at the moment; all he's being told to do is to relay Jim's message not to get involved.

What David should do after relaying Jim's message is another question, and that depends on how Elizabeth responds. David hasn't been told not to give advice and counsel to Elizabeth according to his best lights. So if she asks him what he thinks she should do, he is free to tell her.

## VI

Under this hypothesis, (following III 2), Elizabeth very wisely comes clean with David from the beginning. But inconsistently with her own honesty, she asks David to prevaricate for her in order to cover her refusal to cooperate. She now has a reason, however, supplied by David: "Jim won't like it" (that she won't co-operate). Fear of Jim is her reason for concealing her opposition. But why should she be afraid of Jim before she's even heard CDC's case? David ought to ask Elizabeth for a chance to make the pitch. Time enough then to worry about what Jim will do; perhaps CDC's environmental case is so poor, Jim won't have the heart to retaliate. As for lying, David shouldn't do it. He knows that if she had told him that she didn't know anyone on the City Council, he was prepared to ask her to make such a contact. So he can now tell her that Jim will probably ask the same. Deception is still deception, and nothing's gained by passing it up the ladder from David to Jim.

David can tell Elizabeth that he understands that she can't cooperate with CDC, but he doubts that she can avoid the problem so easily. Even if Jim accepts her truthful but not quite honest response that she "can't help," she will still have to face the question of whether she will oppose the CDC request. Isn't it better to pass on to Jim that she doesn't approve the CDC proposal and so can't co-operate? She doesn't want the swamp paved over and a big facility built in her little town: Jim should be able to understand that. If she's fearful of saying that little, then she may really have a problem at CDC, which is very likely going to recur sooner or later; but at least she won't have the added problem of having tried to deceive her boss.

## VII

As in V, Jim finds out through someone else what the true state of the question is: despite her attempt to conceal it, Elizabeth is an environmentalist. Again, David is told to relay the 'cool it' message, which he should do, as there are no grounds for his refusing to tell her what Jim has commanded. Whether David adds that he agrees with Jim depends on whether he does agree. If he does he can say so. If he does not, perhaps he shouldn't say that unless Elizabeth asks him for advice or help. He is certainly not under any obligation to Elizabeth to volunteer his own opinion, but he has no reason to conceal it if she asks. If David basically agrees with Jim, he might feel that he ought to make an attempt to get Elizabeth to see the light. Jim will expect this. It's the right thing (he thinks), and it's better for her. After all, Elizabeth could be in the wrong and tilting at windmills: maybe the CDC plan really won't hurt the environment, and no doubt Parkville, which is near a big city, can't remain a small town

forever. If there's any reason why David shouldn't make these arguments to Elizabeth if he feels they're valid, it would be that Elizabeth could take the whole thing as threats from her boss. Whether this is realistic depends on circumstances not stated in the case, but in general, the fact that David is her boss shouldn't by itself prevent him from advising her to co-operate with the company.

David of course can anticipate that Jim expects him to persuade Elizabeth to obey, or at least make an attempt to do so (as happens in sec. X below). Given this, he'd better make the attempt, certainly if he believes in the CDC project; but even if he doesn't, Elizabeth has a right to hear the CDC arguments. David is free to point out that CDC won't like Elizabeth's opposition, but he should be careful not to appear to otherwise threaten her: she can hardly expect that by opposing the project, she's going to win any points with CDC officials! Disapproving what she does and using coercion against her aren't the same. The difficult question at this point for David is if he anticipates that Jim is apt to take an unfair tack and try to force Elizabeth to do something she doesn't feel she can do. If David tells Elizabeth he anticipates this, he might expect problems from Jim later. Since Jim has put David on the spot, he'd better think out carefully what view he takes of the situation. There's no point risking his own neck if he basically thinks Elizabeth is a disloyal employee who's digging her own grave. David might agree that Elizabeth has a right to her freedom of action, but that she's overstepped the lines. Maybe he thinks that the environmentalist concerns are wrong and that Elizabeth should show loyalty and help the company, and he should be free to try telling her this and see what she says. But if he thinks she's got a right to act independently and Jim is unfairly running over her, then he may feel he's got an obligation, based on friendship or his own loyalty to a subordinate, to help her; and if he thinks he can advise her or in some way run interference for her and protect her from Jim, he should offer to try.

David has to make a complicated assessment which we can't make for him because the case doesn't give enough information. For all we know, Elizabeth is a crank or an environmental extremist. She might be a romantic who thinks small towns are forever and who simply can't face inevitable change and development. Or she might be making a false choice of values, preferring another swamp for the pleasure of the wealthy Parkville suburbanites when real people lack jobs. David seems to be caught in the middle of the Elizabeth situation and has to take into account the realities as well as abstract questions of Elizabeth's rights.

## VIII

In section II it is stated that CDC has made a presentation to the City Council. So it is not clear why it is said now that the Parkville environmental group is unaware of CDC's intentions. In any case, having made a presentation to a public body, CDC can hardly claim that its intentions are confidential. Elizabeth is perfectly within her rights to discuss the CDC proposal to the City Council with the other members of her environmental group or anyone else.

Assume however that CDC's plans, though known to Elizabeth, are still in the formative and confidential stage. Elizabeth should not rush to the environmental action group (CEQ) with what she knows. Confidential plans should be considered confidential until they have been explicitly said to be not confidential; employees should not draw inferences from what has been said to them that plans are no longer confidential. CDC's intentions are not public property and there may be good business reasons why they do not want their plans revealed prematurely. Until CDC makes an official move, it is always possible that it will change its plans, or that what it presents will be significantly different from what Elizabeth has heard about. Further, it is not clear what the environmentalists are going to gain by having advance knowledge of CDC intentions. Sooner or later CDC will have to come public, and then there will be time for study of the CDC plans and formulation of a response. (If no such

adequate response time is given, the CEQ's quarrel will be with the City Council for acting in haste, and not with Elizabeth for failing to reveal company confidential information). That Elizabeth even considers violating company confidentiality in order to give an edge to the CEQ indicates that her loyalties are so much with her environmental interests that there may be a real question whether she can in good conscience continue as a CDC employee.

## IX

The environmental committee learns of CDC's apparently still secret plans, and wants to mobilize quickly against them. But they have no right to ask Elizabeth what she knows or doesn't know. Such a question would be a provocation and could be construed as a deliberate attempt to cause problems for Elizabeth at CDC. If she answers, they may well press her for further inside information; she might be put in the position of undercover spy for the CEQ, which would totally undermine her position at CDC. She should reluctantly, even indignantly, refuse to answer. If the CEQ wants to mobilize, they can do so based on whatever they already know: it didn't take much knowledge to get the CEQ members up in arms, so why shouldn't they assume that the same knowledge is sufficient to mobilize everyone else?

Elizabeth actually has an acute conflict of interest problem with regard to CEQ. How can she support them while on the payroll at CDC? Can they trust her to do her best and give them honest advice? She is compromised as a member of CEQ from the beginning. Suppose she honestly comes to the conclusion that CDC's proposal is not so bad, can the other members of CEQ trust this judgment? May she not feel impelled to attack CDC more stridently than necessary just to prove her environmental correctness? It is probably best for Elizabeth to offer to quit CEQ as soon as this situation develops. No one is indispensable.

But suppose this difficulty is resolved because of the trust the other people on CEQ have in Elizabeth's environmentalism. They may not accept her offer to quit, since they have a strong interest in her propaganda value against CDC. (Headline: "CDC Engineer Denounces Project"). Should she take an active role in opposing CDC? This is really the core problem of this case. It is useful to remember that activity can take many forms, not all of which require a front-line presence. Perhaps CDC will accept her opposition if it isn't also faced with very loud and embarrassing public protest by one of its own employees. Elizabeth should remember that as a citizen, she's got the right to act politically, and that her employer has no right, legal or moral, to determine what she does. Yet at the same time she might very well want to take into account the claims of loyalty to the company which pays her salary. And she also needs to remember that her right to political action is one that is going to be difficult to enforce and might prove costly for her if her action makes the employer sufficiently angry. So she has to make a judgment taking all this into account. She has to decide how important it is to oppose this project, whether there aren't other people who might oppose it as effectively as she but at less personal risk (too bad for the CEQ if any of its members is indispensable), how angry CDC is likely to be at her, etc. Perhaps there are certain things she can do, like provide behind the scenes technical advice, which won't upset CDC at all; other things-marching, making speeches, etc. might prove more embarrassing to her company and costly to herself.

## X

We now imagine that David has had his little heart-to-heart with Elizabeth (as in section VII), but in vain: the next thing Jim knows, one of his engineers is all over the newspaper speaking against development of the CDC target area. Jim is understandably not pleased and asks David what's going on? David can reply to Jim that he passed on Jim's message and urged Elizabeth to cool it. What else he says depends on what he told Elizabeth and how she replied. If he's promised to try to protect her, he'll have decided in advance how best to talk to Jim about her (as Jim sees it) disloyalty and disobedience. It's become pretty clear now that Jim is a person who brooks no

interference; when he gives orders he expects results. David must have known this, and probably has acted to Elizabeth more or less as Jim would wish. If he hasn't, he's presumably prepared to stand up to Jim and persuade him to go easy on Elizabeth. Whether he's got an obligation to do so or not would depend on the considerations referred to in section VII.

Elizabeth has certainly not made life any easier for David by getting herself in the newspapers. Perhaps David didn't make it clear to her how big a problem Jim could be. Or perhaps she wasn't interested in knowing. By putting David in jeopardy, Elizabeth puts her own fairness and integrity into question. One wants to know whether Elizabeth alerted David about her statement to the City Council, and whether his support was conditional on her not going public in such a visible way. There are limits to how far you can help someone who won't help themselves. If Elizabeth is counting on David to get her out of trouble with CDC, she may be asking for more than anyone can deliver. She is going to have to accept that if you do risky things you may suffer the consequences.

## XI & XII

There cannot be two different 'points of view'; what's ethical is ethical. Elizabeth has every right to act politically as she sees fit when she's off the job, and the company has no right to expect that she will act as its front. Nevertheless the company does have some call on her loyalty, which means that it's not unreasonable for them to think that if she can't support them, at least she ought not to oppose them either, or at the very least not to cause them too much embarrassment by overt public activity. If Elizabeth has decided that CDC's proposal is so destructive that it must be stopped at all costs (to it and her), then perhaps she can no longer honorably continue to work for them. Can you work for a company that is as bad as all that?

Much depends on the merits of the case: if the CDC proposal really is as good as CDC says it is, or at least arguably so, then the company could take the position that Elizabeth shows both disloyalty and bad judgment in opposing it as vigorously as she has. But if the CDC proposal is essentially a snow job, then Elizabeth might think she has no choice but fight it. She's certainly within her rights and the company would be entirely unjustified to penalize her for exposing its fraudulent claims. If this should happen, CDC is probably not the kind of company Elizabeth wants to work for anyway.

## Neil R. Luebke

This case could easily form the plot for a three-day television miniseries. All the ingredients are here: environmentalists versus a large corporation, large metropolitan interests versus small town values, potentially thousands of people affected by the actions, and in the center of it all Elizabeth Dorsey, engineer, who might become a heroine, a goat, or even a sacrificial lamb. The possibilities of dramatic scenes of showdowns in corporate board rooms or City Council chambers boggle the imagination. In the miniseries, no doubt, the Committee for Environmental Quality, supported by mass rallies and marches by the citizens of Parkville, will eventually win over the City Council and send the political types from CDC packing back to the metropolitan area. Elizabeth Dorsey, fired from her job with CDC, will be almost immediately hired by a new environmentally conscious firm relocating in Parkville but without using a single square foot of the recreational and wildlife area. Parkville lives happily ever after, all because Elizabeth Dorsey was true to her principles. So much for drama.

The case before us, however, often has analogues in more mundane situations in the real world. The conflict between business interests, on the one hand, and personal or professional values, on the other, lies behind many of the most difficult and troubling cases in engineering ethics. As many writers have pointed out, the codes of

ethics of the engineering societies often place dual and conflicting responsibilities on engineers: a responsibility to hold the public welfare paramount yet at the same time a responsibility to do one's best for one's client or employer. In our case, not only Elizabeth Dorsey but several other persons in CDC seem to judge these two obligations to be in direct conflict.

But must the obligations be in conflict in this case? First, as described in our story, CDC, Inc., seems to be an environmentally responsible corporation. Not only does it make a generous offer to the City Council concerning care of the wildlife and recreation area, but it is unlikely that Elizabeth Dorsey herself, given her environmental concerns, would work for CDC and feel any loyalty to it if the company was not environmentally responsible. Certainly, Parkville could have been targeted as a site for corporate building that would be far less hospitable to the environment than CDC's plan, so Elizabeth Dorsey's concerns with the environment seem not to, on the surface of it, be necessarily hostile to the CDC approach. Second, we might ask, what is in the public welfare? The Committee for Environmental Quality is admittedly a small but active citizen group, and at least some maintenance of recreational and wildlife area seems to be important to the citizens. On the other hand, there are doubtless other interests in the town: employment interests, the possibility of greater local taxes for public improvements, and other economic benefits that go along with the location of a new firm in town. So it may be an open question whether the entire recreational and wildlife area that the Committee for Environmental Quality wants to preserve should justifiably be preserved. Committee members may own parts of the town, but they do not own it completely. Indeed, the corporation may have an interest in relocating out of the crowded metropolitan area into an area that would be pleasant for its workers. The corporate officers should realize that it has nothing to gain by spoiling its own new nest or by pursuing tactics that alienate a major portion of the community. Ideally, something like the following might happen: CDC makes its interests known to the Parkville City Council; the Parkville councilors then set up a number of public hearings and discussions so that various local groups can express their concerns and have their questions straightforwardly answered. Both city officers and CDC officials make an effort to be open and public in their dealings so that Parkville residents will not have the idea that some political shell game is going on behind closed doors. In the end, some mutual accommodation may be worked out. The Committee for Environmental Quality may come to see that preserving 75 percent of the recreational and wildlife area joined with a firm commitment from the City Council to maintain its noncommercial zoning, and with additional funds to help support the environmental development of the area, is a better alternative than several other imaginable ones. On the other hand, if the community is truly hostile toward CDC and has no interest in expanding its economic base at the expense of its small-town lifestyle, CDC might drop its plans.

Now let us turn to Elizabeth Dorsey. What moral considerations are appropriate to her decisions in this case? First, she should be honest with the people in her corporation as well as with the people in her community. Her interest in the environment is not in and of itself disloyalty to CDC. Furthermore, as a resident of Parkville, she is in a position to bring home to any official in CDC who asks her the concern of the community for a certain way of life. In fact, a CDC official might even be astute enough to ask her opinion about what should be done. Second, Elizabeth also has an obligation to maintain any confidential information that is the property of the company. It is difficult to believe that any information in a detailed proposal to a city council would remain confidential for long, however. Since Elizabeth has worked within the corporation, she might have a better perspective on the types of plans that CDC has and be in a position to put to rest any false rumors that members of the Committee on Environmental Quality might hear or circulate. The really difficult situation for Elizabeth occurs when three persons in the corporation, including her immediate superior, decide that she should be asked to soften up some of the City Council members. It is unfortunate that a committee member thought that such a softening-up routine would be a good tactic. It is also unfortunate the committee chair went along with the idea.

When planning committee chair Jim Bartlett approached Elizabeth's boss, David Jensen, David should have expressed some qualms about asking Elizabeth to undertake a lobbying effort on behalf of the corporation, but he could have said to Jim that he would talk to Elizabeth about the corporation's plans in order to see whether she has any ideas or suggestions. David could say this whether or not he knew of Elizabeth's environmental concerns. It would not be fair for David to respond to Jim's request by saying, "Oh, Elizabeth's going to fight you every step of the way because she's a very active member of the Parkville Environmental Quality Committee." At that point Elizabeth would have been labeled the enemy in Jim's eyes without Elizabeth's having said a word.

Let us suppose that David Jensen does communicate Jim Bartlett's message to Elizabeth. Before committing herself to any course of action, Elizabeth ought to find out as much as she can about the plans. Perhaps she could ask to talk to Jim Bartlett himself or some of the members of the committee. She should also be up front with David Jensen, Jim Bartlett, or anyone else at the corporation concerning her interest in the environment and her work with the Committee on Environmental Quality. She should make it clear in the process that she is not in any manner opposed to the CDC corporation or with a possible CDC plant location in Parkville. Her only qualms have to do with the specific site and the possibility of resulting environmental damage. She should also inform the persons that the City Council has gone on record as opposing economic development of the area when it came at the expense of the environment. Finally, Elizabeth should, insofar as she can, push for a public and open discussion of CDC's proposal.

If, after learning all the facts, Elizabeth Dorsey is still firmly in opposition to the CDC move, then she has some hard decisions to make. At one extreme, she might choose to remain completely neutral in the matter, refusing to take any role that is favorable either to the committee or to CDC. At the other extreme, she might decide she could no longer work for CDC, resign her position, and devote herself full time to fighting their proposal for Parkville. On the other hand, if she sees merit in the proposal, she is confronted by a different set of choices. In either case, her challenge is to balance her public commitments with her professional commitments while at the same time maintaining her personal integrity.

How would Elizabeth's situation be viewed by other persons concerned with the case? A citizen of Parkville would, I think, expect a number of things from Elizabeth. There is the expectation that she would not do in her fellow citizens simply in order to continue to receive a paycheck from the corporation. At the same time, the citizens would not want her to be unsympathetic to other concerns in the community besides environmental concerns, since if Elizabeth led the fight and was an employee of CDC corporation it is clear that she could garner considerable publicity for herself and her cause, publicity which would look so damaging that CDC might scrap the plans completely. In short, a fellow citizen of Parkville might be concerned that Elizabeth not misuse her special position. Although some members of the Committee for Environmental Quality might want Elizabeth to be their reformer "inside the tent," they ought to be more sensitive to her special position, a position in which no matter what she says she might be misunderstood. The committee members should expect Elizabeth to be straightforward with them and honest in her evaluation of the merits of CDC's plans. The company and its officials should not attempt to dictate Elizabeth's ideals or force her to compromise them. On the other hand, they may also rightfully expect that Elizabeth would not act in such a way as to embarrass the company or unjustifiably to impugn its good name.

### **Lea P. Stewart**

While reading this case, two questions kept entering my mind: "Why are CDC employees acting this way?" and "Where is the CDC public relations department?" Contrary to popular belief, 'public relations' is not a dirty

word. In the contemporary view of public relations, it means communicating the organization's message to its publics. These publics can be outside the organization (in this case, the citizens of Parkville and, in some sense, Elizabeth Dorsey) or inside the organization (Elizabeth Dorsey and the other employees). Because it did not rely on a well-defined public relations effort, CDC, Inc. put Elizabeth Dorsey and her co-workers in dangerous ethical territory.

CDC has decided to expand its operations by building a new facility. The planning committee has decided that the most desirable location would be in Parkville, a small town with citizens committed to preserving its recreational and wildlife areas. We can hope that the planning committee considered citizen opposition to its plan when deciding on this course of action and decided that other aspects of this location made the construction of the new facility desirable in spite of difficulties in obtaining the necessary legal permits.

Deciding on the site for the new facility was a task assigned to the planning committee. Assuming that they did their jobs well, CDC truly needs this particular site for its new facility. This is a decision that is clearly within the function of a planning committee. Nevertheless, once they have made this decision and convinced the appropriate organizational decision makers of the soundness of their plan, their job is done. There is no reason for a member of the committee to request that one of CDC's employees ask another employee to "soften up" the Parkville City Council members. This request is asking an employee to serve as a lobbyist for the organization. That function requires specialized skills is not part of the standard job of an engineer.

Asking Elizabeth Dorsey to serve as a lobbyist for CDC places her in a precarious ethical position. She is being asked to serve as an advocate for an organizational decision. This role is clearly beyond her job function. In addition, she is being asked to serve as a mediator between her employer and her community. She is being asked to perform a task that should be performed by employees in the public relations department. These individuals are trained to present the organization's position to the public and have agreed to do this task. In addition, public relations practitioners follow a code of ethics for their profession and can seek guidance from their professional association (the Public Relations Society of America) if they feel they have a potential conflict of interest.

Clearly Elizabeth Dorsey feels caught between her desire to serve the environmental needs of her community and the desire of her employer for a new facility. CDC has placed her in an untenable position. If she reveals her environmental activism to the chief engineer of her unit she can be accused of not supporting her organization. If she does not reveal her previous activity in Parkville she can be accused of lying to her supervisor. By asking her to perform an inappropriate task, CDC has forced her to choose between her previous environmental activities and her employer. No matter which option she chooses, in some way she is harmed.

This case is particularly distressing because there is no reason for Elizabeth Dorsey to be placed in this situation. If CDC, Inc. wants to site a new facility in a town, they should ask the appropriate organizational employees to lobby for this effort. If the corporate public relations department is not capable of this task, an outside firm can be hired. These employees will follow their profession's ethical guidelines, and CDC engineers will not be asked to perform tasks that are not part of their organizational responsibilities.