Morals for your story

*The Oredigger*, vol. 91, issue 13 (Jan. 24, 2011), p.8

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Dilemma

Don't worry; I don't live in the dorms or in Mines Park.

Recently a friend was studying at my apartment. He noticed some bugs on my reclining chair and said they were bedbugs. As soon as I was convinced that he was right, which took about two minutes of a Google search, my friend helped me carry the chair to the alley. We could not lift it into the Dumpster, so we left it beside said Dumpster. My friend didn't stay much longer, and he texted me on the way to his car to tell me that the chair was gone.

What should I do? Am I ethically obligated to put up a notice in my building to warn people that the recliner has bedbugs? Or do I let them alley-shop at their own risk?
--Recently Exterminated

Responses

Oh my goodness. Please, please put a notice up. I recently moved into a new apartment to find that the previous tenants had a serious bed bug problem, which had spread to the surrounding four units. The cause of the infestation was a (now evicted) neighbor who found a sofa in a dumpster. If they had known, it wouldn't have spread to the surrounding units. You might be bed bug free for now... but if, say, your neighbor picked it up, you're going to be in trouble soon. They can be such a hassle to get rid of—protect yourself and those around you, and let the community know.
--Been There, Done That

I believe that it is an ethical obligation for you to post the information of your chair's infestation. However, blanketing the entire apartment complex you are in with this information is not the most rational way to do this; firstly, because it would create a large panic within the building which could have easily been avoided, and secondly, it isn't even known if the "sidewalk shopper" even resides in your building. So, a publicly broadcasted message of this bed bug problem would be to little effect.

Instead, you should post a discreet, anonymous message near the dumpster, explaining that if anybody picked up a chair near that dumpster, it should be inspected immediately. By doing this, three things are accomplished: You are satisfying your ethical responsibility to whoever picked up the chair, you prevent panic from spreading like wildfire among your peers in your building, and you maintain your anonymity. I hope you find this information to be useful.
--Clay

I do not think that you are obligated to find the person who took the chair and tell them that it had bed bugs; however, it is socially polite for you to make a sign that has a statement about the chair and tells what the problem was. This would take you all of a couple of minutes to make and you could print a couple and put one on the door to the building and one by the dumpster.
--Ray

Based solely on the fact that the chair was next to a dumpster, I am led to believe that the person who left the reclining chair behind has no responsibility to post anything in the form of a public service announcement. For all we know, whoever picked up the chair lives in another part of town and noticed a stray piece of furniture and figured they would be able to use it. Unless said person is blind, they would notice the bedbugs and take care of the problem. If you feel the need to post a PSA, there is definitely no harm in doing so, but I do not believe you are ethically obligated.
--Anonymous

Next Week's Dilemma

When I got accepted to Mines my grandfather offered to pay for my college tuition. He said an engineering degree is a worthwhile investment. He doesn't think a marine biology degree is a worthwhile investment, though, so he's not paying for my brother's college tuition. The bad news is that I've decided I want to change my major. To physics.

Is it unethical not to tell him? Is there anything wrong with letting him see for himself on graduation day? Maybe he won't come to graduation and he'll never have to know. Or maybe I'm obligated to keep studying what he offered to pay for because life isn't supposed to fun anyway or something like that.
--Physics Rebellion