Morals for your story

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Dilemma

I work for a small engineering firm in the Golden area and I have run into an ethical dilemma. I work as an intern and I am striving for a full time position at the firm when I graduate in May. I am currently assigned to work with a co-worker on a project that requires significant amounts of experimentation and report writing. The co-worker has been with the firm for several years and he is in a position to influence the owner about whether or not to hire me in May.

The dilemma is due to the fact that he does almost nothing but surf the internet during work! There is very little supervision from the owner and because I am still getting all of the work done he does not ask any questions. I feel compelled to talk to the owner about the co-workers work ethic, but I do not want to disrupt my future career possibilities. If I do not talk to the owner about the issue, however, I may be at risk of losing my job due to the fact that I am consciously allowing a co-worker to get nothing done during company time. What do you think I should do?

--Accomplice or Informant

Responses

Unfortunately, slackers are a common problem in the workplace. There are many ways to deal with them. One extreme is to rat him out to the boss. The other extreme is to do nothing. It is usually best to follow Aristotle's example and aim at the mean. It is not your job to be a babysitter or the boss. It is usually best to deal with the problem directly. You should try to get your co-worker more involved by asking questions and for help if you need it. If that approach doesn't work, take him out for a beer after work to discuss your concerns in a nonthreatening way. This co-worker may not realize how much time he is wasting and just needs a friendly reminder to get back on track. Who knows, perhaps the liquid lubricated conversation will lead to a friendship and the co-worker will want to work with you more.

--Aristotle-ish Arbitration

Let's look at what Kant might think in this situation: if it is one of your principles not to lie (and that includes by omission) then it is your duty to either report your co-worker or ask the co-worker himself to own up to or cease his laziness. Whether you may lose the job opportunity or not isn't of consequence—not only because that may happen no matter which course you take—but also because by hiding your co-worker's misconduct, you are breaking an important ethical imperative in that you are obscuring the truth from your superior, the owner of the firm. The answer in this situation is simply to pursue the truth and make the owner aware of your co-worker's lack of a work ethic. What happens because of your exposing the truth will not matter in the end, because the principle of truth takes precedence over the consequences.

--Honesty's Champion

From a utilitarian point of view, you should not inform the owner about your co-worker's habits. By informing the owner, you risk losing your chance at getting a job with this company. The owner could talk to your co-worker about the situation, letting him know that you feel he is not doing his share in the work. Since the co-worker has influence over whether you will be hired or not, he will not be pleased that you talked to the owner, ratting him out. This decision on your part could cost your co-worker to think twice about his opinion in your future at the company.

Since utilitarianism is about achieving happiness in each decision that is made, you will be happier if you have a job in May. In order to have this job in May, you do not want to tell on your co-worker. Continue to work as you have been doing until the decision in made about whether you will be hired or not. After this point, if you continue to have problems with your co-worker then it might be time to inform the owner of the engineering firm. But as an intern, you do not have much voice in a company, especially against someone who has been working there for several years.

Understandably, the situation can be frustrating. If you want to subtly make a point that will not harm your future position, ask your co-worker if he or she would mind helping you out once in a while.

In order to be happy, you do not want to tell the owner of the firm as it could jeopardize your future happiness, and this happiness of having a job is greater than the happiness and gratification you could gain by telling the owner the habits of your co-worker.

--Talking to the Boss Could be Costly

If you feel compelled to tell the owner about your co-worker's lack of focus during work, you should. First off, you run the risk of not getting the job in May if the supervisor finds out you are allowing the co-worker to not work on company time. Telling the supervisor may show responsibility in yourself, and even if your co-worker won't recommend you for a full job instead of an internship, perhaps the supervisor will want to keep you anyways. I would recommend telling the supervisor as a last resort though; perhaps an easier approach would be to talk to your co-worker directly about his internet surfing on company time. You should do whatever feels most appropriate, but since your first instinct was to fix this issue, you should absolutely bring it up, or it will eat away inside you.

--Do What Feels Right

It sounds like the issue is mainly between you and your co-worker, since there is little supervision from the owner and nobody minds as long as the work is getting done. I would consider addressing the issue with your co-worker, rather than the person who may be hiring you in the spring. Your boss is ultimately
the one that will make the decision, regardless of the positive or negative input from your co-worker, so what really matters is how you look as a future employee in his/her eyes. In this case, it seems that you have more to lose by going straight to the owner, but more to gain by working it out with your co-worker. If you manage to get your co-worker to do a bit of work, you have resolved the problem yourself and can be considered by your boss to be an independent worker who doesn't need a helping hand every minute of every day. Also, you can avoid jeopardizing your position in both the co-worker's eyes and the eyes of the owner. If you can manage to work it out without going to the owner, the situation turns out better for everyone involved.

It may work out in your favor if you simply ask your co-worker to help you with a specific aspect of a project. If you ask for his assistance in specific areas, it is harder for him to avoid the work entirely. If coaxing your co-worker into doing some work doesn't pan out well, then I suggest addressing the problem directly with him. Even if he becomes upset and speaks to the owner about it, odds are the owner will respect that you tried to address the issue yourself and may even take your side in the matter.

--Eligibility Is in the Eyes of the Employer

I think you need to decide what will give you the greatest happiness. If you are a patient person and are willing to wait until May to see what happens, that may be your best route. If this co-worker has this great of an affect whether you get the job or not, and if you continue to do all the work, he may highly recommend you so he can continue to be lazy. If this happens you can then choose to talk to your coworker about how much work he/she does or go to your boss. Plus if you are patient and don't get the job in the end, then it is not your problem anymore and you will not have to address it.

If you are not a patient person I would recommend approaching the coworker first. I think it is wrong to go behind a coworker's back and go to the boss if you have a problem with him or her. It creates a bad triangle and can lead to more problems than solutions. Also you may not know the whole story; it is possible that the person does work when you don't know or part of his work is being on the internet. In addition to this, your coworker may not feel this way and could feel really bad if you go straight to your boss before first addressing them. I think you need to decide how much you can take and for how long before you decide to take action. You should know yourself better than anyone, thus you will know whether you can wait to deal with the problem or if you need to deal with it right away. Once you decide this, you can take one of the above actions.

--A.L.

You are in a tough situation; however, you really need to decide what is best for you. Ask yourself if you really want to start a career by working at a firm where you will be constantly picking up the slack of another co-worker. If this sounds appealing, then it would be in your best interest to not tell the owner about the co-workers lack of productivity or else both of your future careers will be on line.

On the contrary, if you decide that you do not want a future at the firm, I still would advise you not to rat out the coworker, mainly because your future employers will be calling that firm for a reference and they are not going to want to hear that you left because of conflict with another co-worker; the consequences from telling will hinder your career search. Also, when your internship ends, the owner will be forced to realize the co-worker is not efficient since there is no one picking up the slack. I recommend you avoid ratting out the co-worker and weight the importance of this firm as a potential career.

--No Tattle Telling

Because his use of the internet is not harming anyone, I would say to ignore how annoying it might be until you receive the job. In my opinion, it is not worth your chances of not receiving the job over something as little as internet use. If it was something that was putting someone in harm's way or putting the company in jeopardy, I would without a doubt say to report him; however, since this is such a minor offense, let it slide and eventually your diligence will pay off. Don't view yourself as an accomplice. After all, you are the one getting all the work done. Remember, this is temporary.

-Keep Up The Hard Work

If I were in your position, I personally would try to give subtle hints to the guy to help you or do his own work, although I am sure this is easier said than done. If this does not work I would then politely bring it up in conversation around other co-workers so others know he is not working on the company's time. The last thing I would do is tell the boss what he is doing because if you get the job and this man becomes your superior after being scolded for not working, things will not go to well for you.

--Hints Can Work Wonders

If you feel that you are being treated unfairly because of doing all the work, then it is necessary for you to report the situation with your superior. But before doing so, you need to get your point across with the co-worker in a way that isn't offensive. Yes, you might end up losing your job, but being afraid of speaking up would gain you nothing but sadness and anxiety. How could this be good for yourself and your future?

--Avoid Anxiety

Next Week's Dilemma

My question is about plagiarism, I think. I suppose what I'm trying to establish is what the boundaries of plagiarism are. I have to write a paper for a class and I could potentially choose a topic that I have written about already for a previous class. It won't be possible to use the entirety of my already existing paper for this one since the assignment is slightly different, but would it be unethical to use portions of it? And what about the research? Would it be wrong to reuse it? I suppose if I choose a new topic, I won't even have to worry about if I'm plagiarizing myself. But I would prefer to continue my thinking about this topic more deeply than to choose some other topic I'm not as interested in. What do you think I should do? What are the main dangers I should be sure to avoid?

--Writing Papers Can Feel Like Walking Across a Mine Field