

After earning your licensed professional counselor (LPC) credential, you decide to gain access to insurance panels, and to open a private practice, which you do successfully. After a few years working in private practice, you decide that you would like to branch out, so that you can pursue one of your passions – working with systems. So, you decide to partner with an existing corporate consultation firm that consists of two professional consultants.

While working with the consultation firm, you receive a phone call from the president of a local business that employs about 60 people, a majority of whom handle customer service phone calls for a large, national telecommunications corporation. The president of the business tells you that he has been receiving complaints about the way that employees are handling customer service phone calls and, based on the complaints, the president has started monitoring his employees. While observing the call center, the president notices that many employees are leaving customers on hold while they spend a majority of their time talking with one another, playing practical jokes on one another, and watching cat videos on the internet. The president tells you that the situation is dire, and that consultants are needed as soon as possible, so that the national corporation who contracts with his business does not withdraw their contract, which could cost himself and his employees their jobs. You decide that the opportunity is within your scope of expertise, and you and your consulting firm move forward with the project.

You and the other two consultants with your consulting firm meet with the president of the company to further evaluate the scope of the problem, and to draft informed consent paperwork. During the informed consent process, it is decided that your consulting firm will conduct individual interviews with each of the employees, as well as the president and management team, so that you can further assess the situation. You agree that, after conducting the interviews and assessing the system, your consulting firm will develop a conceptualization of the organization and an action plan that can be

implemented to address the situation. As your consultee is worried about his employees losing their jobs, he tells you during the informed consent process that your firm will be sued for breach of contract, should you deviate from the informed consent contract. Since it seems like a straight forward process that will mirror many of your other consulting projects, you and your firm decide to move forward. The informed consent documents are signed, and the assessment process begins.

Since you dedicate a majority of your time to your private practice, you decide that your two consulting partners should handle a majority of the assessment process. Your partners engage each of the employees in interviews, assuring each employee that their response will be kept confidential from the management, as everyone agreed to this during the informed consent process. After your partners finish interviewing the employees, they send you their interview notes, as well as a spreadsheet listing each employee's name, position in the company, and primary grievances.

As you scan through the spreadsheet, you notice that the employees don't seem to be interested in talking or disclosing. A few mention that their boss is "rude" or "disrespectful". As you continue to skim the list, you are startled to see that one of your current private practice clients, who you will be meeting with later that day, is employed as a customer service representative with the business. Your client hasn't talked a lot about her work during your sessions, as she is more concerned with her relationship with her romantic partner. You set aside looking at the interview notes that your fellow consultants have compiled, so that you can consider the ethics of this dual relationship. Since you realize that you are now in a dual relationship with your client, you decide that you will disclose this to your client during your upcoming session.

Later that day, your client storms into your office and, before you can greet her, she starts venting:

I am so pissed off at my fucking boss! That asshole came into work drunk again!!! This has happened every day for the last week – he comes in drunk and yells at us to be more productive. We can't work in these conditions – we are scared to get on the phone with customers, since they might hear him yelling abusive and sexual slurs at employees.

Scenario 1

You hold up your hand to stop your client. After taking a few deep breaths with her, you continue with her individual counseling session.

1. What ethical codes are at play?
2. Do you disclose the dual relationship to your client?

Scenario 1.b

[If you chose to disclose the dual relationship to your client, assume the client asked you to keep her confidentiality, and to not bring what she told you into your consultation work]

After your session ends, you return to the information your consulting partners have compiled, and you realize that none of the employees disclosed to your partners what your client just disclosed to you.

There is no record of the president coming into work drunk or of him sexually harassing his employees.

However, all of the dysfunction in your consultees business suddenly makes sense to you, given what you now know.

Consultation/Collaboration Ethical Scenario: Dual Relationships

4

1. What ethical codes are relevant to this situation?
2. How do you handle your private practice client's disclosure?
3. How might the disclosure alter the way that you handle the consulting contract?
4. What are your feelings regarding subtly using what your client disclosed to conduct follow up interviews with some of the employees that focus specifically on the president's drinking or the climate of sexual harassment in the workplace?