**Ethics Awareness Month**

**Scenario 1**

**Paying a Volunteer**

**Scenario**

I was new to the job of director of development at an organization when I found out that an adult volunteer was being paid for her time. I asked the executive director to clarify why a volunteer was being paid. She told me that the volunteer’s parents make a contribution each year. Per their request, the organization gave a large portion to their daughter, the volunteer, so that the daughter could feel “as if she were working and had a job.”

I held back my scream and asked the executive director if any other volunteers were being paid this way, and fortunately, this was the only one. I also asked the executive director if she knew that a charity cannot give out cash in a non-programmatic way. I was told that the organization would lose the donations from the parent if we stopped doing this.

**Questions**

How would you handle this situation?

How should a fundraiser approach discussing the situation with the executive director?

Should the fundraiser approach the volunteer? What should the fundraiser say?

Are there policies or procedures that the organization should institute based on this scenario?

**Outcome**

I told the executive director that I could not continue in the job if the organization were to continue to do this, and that we had to tell the parents immediately that we could no longer pay their daughter. I asked her to please consult with legal counsel because I knew that what she was doing violated state and federal employment laws. I gave her 48 hours to get back to me.

Within 48 hours, the executive director told me that she would stop paying the volunteer and that I had to tell the donor. I spoke with the donor and explained exactly why we could no longer do this. I also took another job within the month.

I would like to add that the AFP *Code of Ethical Standards* was helpful to me. In addition, I had previously met a member of the Ethics Committee and reached out to that person to confirm that this was not only an extremely unethical situation, but also illegal.

**Commentary**

Consider the recipe, one that happens in so many situations: good intentions; a generous donor; a willing CEO; an ethical fundraising profession abiding by the AFP *Code of Ethical Standards*; and some very clear laws on this issue. It adds up to a big ethical no-no, but that is not uncommon.

While there is no specific section in the AFP code that addresses this EXACT scenario, there is an entire section (the very first section, in fact) that addresses “Public Trust, Transparency & Conflicts of Interest.” The stomach test is clearly failed when asking if this situation:

* Causes “conflict with their fiduciary, ethical and legal obligations” (standard 2)
* Ensures the organization “disclose all potential and actual conflicts of interest” (standard 3)
* Allows the professional to “comply with all applicable local, state, provincial and federal civil and criminal laws” (standard 5)

Another important takeaway from this case is the reminder that all members belong to an organization that is committed to the highest standards of professional behavior. Guided by the *Code of Ethics and Professional Standards,* we can confidently and discretely seek counsel and support from our colleagues. In this case, the fundraiser was fortunate enough to have already met a member of the Ethics Committee.

Members should know that the guidance and feedback is a key role of the AFP Ethics Committee. When faced with ethical questions and dilemmas, members are encouraged to contact the Ethics Committee through the AFP Global offices (Derek Mulhern, [derek.mulhern@afpglobal.org](mailto:derek.mulhern@afpglobal.org), is the staff liaison for the committee). The committee can provide oral and written advice and guidance to members, and all queries and communications are considered confidential.