



Podcast #31 How to Avoid Holiday Social and Ethical Catastrophes

Phyllis Mikolaitis & John Switzer Sales Training Solutions

Hi, it's Phyllis Mikolaitis, back with our bi-weekly podcast. Today, John and I want to help you avoid holiday social and ethical catastrophes. I have been researching this subject for a college course I teach. John and I thought it was an appropriate topic for this season of parties and gift giving. It is so easy to make a mistake that you will long regret. So, this podcast provides tips to help you safely navigate the season.

What you say matters, but it's what you do that really counts. When you cross ethical lines, your reputation can be ruined, and your credibility shaken. So, it is essential to be prepared. Making the wrong decision could cost you personally and professionally. It can also have legal consequences for you and your company.

Today, we gathered examples of the most common social and ethical issues. I'll discuss the standards some organizations are setting for social and ethical behavior including gift giving guidelines. Also, I'll add some information on protecting your unique insights and intellectual property. I can't cover all of the issues you may face in this podcast, but it is an excellent opportunity for you to begin creating your own set of standards of conduct.

It's said that ethics is doing the right thing while no one is looking. However, what does that mean and what is the difference between morals, ethics, and laws? The dictionary defines morals as right or wrong behavior. Morals are personal decisions that have personal consequences. They are derived from what your conscience believes to be right or wrong rather than from a law. Ethics provides a framework or moral map for conduct. It is a system of moral principles that affect how people in a group or culture make decisions and lead their lives.

Laws are enacted by a government's legal system, and they are linked to specific punishments. Why define the difference?

We're talking about ethics today, but you can see how they are related and create gray areas when you listen to this scenario. I visited the Scottish museum in Sydney Australia while there to deliver sales training. As we all know stealing is a crime. But, what would you do if your children were starving and their very lives depended upon getting some food to nourish them? Should you be arrested and sent halfway around the world for stealing a loaf of bread? Ship's documents in the museum verify that is just what happened to many people in the 17 and 18 hundreds.

Times have changed since then. However, we still face ethical decisions on a daily basis. What makes ethical issues so challenging for us is what one person believes is OK, someone else may think is not OK. So while the easy way often seems the simplest way, you could end up paying for it in the long run. That's why many companies have written policies to guide employees as they make decisions. They don't cover every situation, but they do provide guidelines.

I am going to start by discussing social and ethical decisions you may face in a holiday party. For example, your company hosts a holiday party at an offsite venue. You invite clients as a thank you for their business. One of your clients has too much to drink at the party. He asks you to drive him back to his hotel or his home.

What would you do?

You may think you are helpful if you agree to be his driver. However, you could be in legal trouble if you are in an accident. You and your company could also be in legal trouble if you arrange and pay for a taxi. Finally, you could find yourself in a compromising situation or fending off unwanted advances. It has happened. The venue may be able to help as they may be covered under their alcohol service insurance. Their representative can advise how they handle these situations and protect you from a regrettable situation.



Here is another situation for you to ponder. You go on a site inspection trip with the event planner for your holiday celebration. You realize how much you could save if you were working with the venue directly. So, you ask the representative of the place to send a copy of his contract with the event planning company directly to you for review. You don't mention this request to the event planner. Is it legal and ethical? If you have a contract with the event planner, it is illegal. The behavior is also unethical - the deal for the venue is with the event planner. Therefore, you must work with the event planner you have contracted.

Holiday thank you gifts to clients are a part of doing business. However, several situations require discussion.

Businesses start to cross ethical lines when they present gifts that are expensive, personalized or inappropriate. Many companies and government agencies have established guidelines for the value of gifts employees can accept. For example, many companies and all of the government agencies have a policy that a gift cannot exceed \$25 per person; otherwise, it's considered a bribe. An employee can be fired for accepting a gift that is outside the guidelines, and the vendor can be removed from the list of acceptable contractors. You don't want to lose long-term business because you wanted to impress the client with an expensive gift.

Sometimes it's the client that exhibits unethical behavior regarding gifts. I often sent holiday gift baskets to teams at my client locations. I arranged the timing to be during December planning sessions, and the baskets were much appreciated. However, another consultant told me of a case where he sent a basket to the client team as a thank you gift, and the president of the company had taken it home in addition to the basket that was sent to him. So, he was not setting an example of honesty and integrity for the employees. When possible, deliver the gift in person. When that is not possible, address the gift to a team leader or manager. Then follow up with a call to ensure the gift was delivered as requested and the team enjoyed the contents.



A positive way to recognize a client and not exceed the value allowed is to donate to a charity in the name of all of the employees. I suggest giving to charities that help children, as a higher number of those surveyed view them more positively than charities that support obscure causes or even some endangered species.

Take care to check that the money is going to help the charity and not for high overhead expenses. I've surveyed companies and found some have regretted that they didn't take time to check the financial information for the charity. You can check online at www.charitywatch.org. For example, you'll find that Feed the Children spends 85% and World Vision spends 92% of their donation on relief efforts. The Salvation Army spends 82% on aid, but during disasters, it draws from its budget to spend 100% on relief.

Here's another example regarding gifts from one of my events. I worked with a friend as an event planner for the Michigan state ball at a Presidential inauguration. On the night of the event, among other duties, I was responsible for the distribution of the commemorative Jeffersonian Cup with the Presidential seal. The guests had received a card with their invitation that was to be exchanged for the cup at the end of the evening. There were hundreds of guests at the event, and some tried to get extra cups by saying they were getting it for someone else on the other side of the room. I said I needed the card in exchange for the cup as there were only enough for each guest to receive one cup. Some were angry and tried to reach for another cup. However, I would tell the guests who wanted to get more than their share I had two U.S. Marines at my side and a security walkie-talkie available to ensure everyone received their gift. And they did.

If your gift is commemorative or has some unique intrinsic value, you may want to number them and associate the number with a guest or exchange a voucher for the gift.

Sexual harassment has been in the news and social conversations. It can be a hand on the shoulder meant as a sign of support or more serious situations including rape. As I mentioned in the earlier discussion about driving the client either to his or her home or hotel can put you in an

awkward position. At a holiday event, an employee was asked to drive a married client home after an industry event. The client casually mentioned her husband was out of town and she deliberately left her briefcase in the back seat of the employee's car. Shortly after he left, the client called the employee and asked him to bring her briefcase to her at home. When he arrived, she had changed into a silk robe and poured two glasses of wine. She didn't achieve her goal. The employee said he sped out of there like lightning. It was a lesson for him to take care not to be placed in a compromising situation in the future.

In another case, a client asked a vendor if he could use her bathroom after walking her home from a holiday party. He then tried to assault her sexually. Fortunately, she escaped unharmed.

There has been more than one situation where rape charges were brought against the offending person. So, never invite anyone you don't know well into your room or home. You could be putting yourself in a dangerous situation. Have a friend or a co-worker you know well to accompany you and be on alert to rescue each other. If a client or vendor asks to come to your hotel room for any reason, don't allow him or her to enter. If the hallway is deserted, go to the desk and ask security to accompany the person to their room and have security or management escort you to your room. In today's world, it can happen to either a female or a male. So, everyone needs to be careful.

The holidays are a friendly, social time of year, but a professional demeanor is essential, and no one should take personal liberties.

Finally, the year-end push for business and pressure from managers can create an environment where some people make promises they cannot keep. Other people have overstated the capabilities of their product or service to get a signed order. Another unethical behavior is not including all of the accessories necessary for the recommended capabilities or level of performance. The salesperson plans to suggest the accessories in the new year when the order has been processed, and new funding is usually available.



Needless to say, the sales rep won't get future business from the client if he or she caves to any of these behaviors. It's important to do due diligence and represent your capabilities and costs accurately.

I now want to mention one last ethical issue which protects you. It takes a tremendous amount of time and creative work to provide unique insights and prepare an original and accurate proposal. You can add a statement on the first page of the proposal indicating that by turning the page and reading the proposal, the reader acknowledges the work belongs to you, the creator. It can't be shared outside the client company, and if the unique insights and ideas are used without awarding a contract to you, they must compensate you fairly, or you will seek legal action. To avoid any issues, insert a copyright statement on proposals and clearly identify yourself or your team as the creator of the work.

Here's a final summary of Professionalism and Ethical Behavior

1. Take responsibility for obligations, actions, and decisions
2. Represent capabilities and conditions accurately
3. Exhibit fairness and transparency in all transactions
4. Adhere to ethical standards of conduct and avoid situations in which you could be vulnerable
5. Demonstrate adherence to company protocol
6. Communicate regularly and seek advice if you are unsure of the guidelines
7. Maintain a positive and cooperative manner

Well, that wraps up our podcast for today. We hope you enjoy a happy holiday without any issues.

Thanks to my business partner, producer, and audio engineer John Switzer, for his excellent work with me on today's podcast. Join us next time when I'll share more hints and tips. I appreciate your feedback so please send your questions, comments or topic suggestions to me at Phyllis@salestrainingolutions.com.



Visit our website @ www.salestraining solutions.com; there are resources available under freebies. You can also join our bimonthly newsletter and get our Free eBook on Storytelling: The Secret to Sales Success. The link is on our website next to the podcasts and blog posts. Watch for our FREE mini-course on Presentation Skills and Storytelling coming soon. As I said, it's absolutely Free and filled with tools, tips, and resources to help you achieve success.

Happy Holidays!