

Do the **Right Thing**

It's not always easy to make the most ethical choices with all those carrots in front of you

HOW EASY WOULD IT BE TO ASK YOUR SALES PERSON TO purchase Broadway tickets for you, pay for an expensive meal, or comp your room for a weekend to “visit” the hotel? After all, you are negotiating a contract for a meeting, so why not give the hotel the opportunity to show you just how much they want your business?

Ethics should be in the forefront of your mind when you are negotiating a contract, because while you want to get the best deal for the meeting and look like a star on your own merits, you do not want to squeeze the hotel out of a fair profit. Perhaps the hotel needs this sale now, but there will come a time when you are desperate for space or a service the hotel can provide. Would you want to have to jump through hoops the way you expected the hotel to do for you? Being ethical is important to keeping a good reputation in this small industry.



Blurred Lines

The problem with ethics in this industry is that the rules of right and wrong conduct are not always black and white, and your organization may not have a written policy to guide you. Where do you draw the line about accepting gifts? Is it OK to accept a \$25 fruit basket for a meeting that provides \$25,000 in revenue to the hotel? How about accepting a flat screen TV for a \$3.5 million-dollar meeting? For frequent flyer miles: Do you take them for (1) only your flight and hotel; (2) for your entire group booking with the hotel; (3) give them to your company; or (4) donate to a charity? Where should the line be drawn?

For planners, the simple answer is to take the high road, and prove that you can successfully negotiate anything without added incentives. But when in doubt, use this ethics litmus test:

► First, determine if the action you take would be legal.

- Ask someone you respect if the course of action seems logical, reasonable, and fair.
- Weigh your actions: Would they pass the test of good sportsmanship?
- Question whether your actions would violate someone's trust or goodwill.
- Ponder the spirit or intent behind your actions.
- Consider whether your reputation would be tarnished — or enhanced — if someone were to find out.
- Analyze whether there could be any chance that your behavior would be interpreted as inappropriate.
- As yourself: If you were to recount your decision to someone you respect, would it be with pride or shame? If this were done to you, or if your employee made the same decision, would you be upset?

If your company does not have an ethics policy, suggest creating one so that all staff members are on the same page (e.g., all gifts are reported to management; only gifts worth \$25 or less can be accepted). If your company does not want to instate a policy, know in your own mind how you should respond to these ethical dilemmas:

- an offer to take a fam (familiarization) trip to a really inviting place — but one where you are unlikely to hold a meeting
- being asked by your boss to get his room comped for a weekend when there is no meeting involved
- hiking up an individual's sleeping room cost so your organization could make a profit or you can defer the room rental you neglected to budget.

When it comes to ethical choices, you want the ones you make to enhance — not detract from — your status as a leader. ■

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