

# Duke Values



## Case Study: Conflict of Interest/ Conflict of Commitment

*“Conflict of Interest/  
Conflict of  
Commitment” is a  
fictional story that  
illustrates choices  
related to financial  
and time interests  
that compete with  
primary  
employment. It  
reminds us how  
important one  
person’s choices  
can be in  
maintaining an  
honest and fair  
work environment.*

## Conflict of Interest/ Conflict of Commitment

At the start of the weekly departmental meeting, Buzz noticed Josie text messaging. Josie is a long-time faculty member and known for having a full teaching schedule and a very active research portfolio.

He cleared his throat. “Josie, are you on track with hiring a research lab manager?”

She snapped to and lifted her head. “What? Uh, yes, I am. I just need to interview the position finalists.”

“Have you set that up?” Buzz asked.

“No, not yet,” she said, taking her papers and laptop from her case and putting them on the conference table.

“Well, you know, great candidates get snapped up quickly,” he said. “You better get on it.”

“Tell me about it,” she said. “I’ll call today.” As she opened her laptop, several brochures and pages of notes slid and fluttered onto the floor. Sheryl helped her collect them.

“Say, Josie,” Sheryl said. “Did you happen to submit your course syllabi yet? I don’t remember receiving it.”

“Uh-oh!” said Josie. “I totally spaced it. I’ll send it to you today.”

Sheryl glanced at the stack of materials she had straightened up for Josie. She whispered to her, “This does not look like it’s related to your teaching and research here... Did you pick up a consulting gig?”

“Yes, I finally knocked out my project for them this morning before I got the kids up for school.”

After the meeting, Buzz stopped Josie as she rushed out of the conference room. “You seemed to be only half-here during the meeting,” he said.

“I just have a lot on my plate right now,” she said. Just then her cell phone rang. She held up her index finger. “Sorry, I’ve got to take this,” she said. “Be right with you.” She ducked

## Our shared values are more than aspirations...

They are the beliefs and behaviors that we expect of ourselves and our colleagues.

They are the ideals that we must uphold in order to earn and maintain our reputation for quality and integrity, and to inspire confidence with each other and the world which we both serve and rely on for our future viability.

### Trust

We are honest, credible and reliable in our words, behaviors and actions.

### Living our Values

We avoid activities, pursuits or financial interests that are not compatible, in reality or perception, with our responsibilities.

We seek advice when expectations are not clear or when we question what is "right."

We do not use our positions of influence or authority to secure personal advantage or gain.

At Duke, accepting responsibility for what we value means that together we build and reinforce the culture that is our cornerstone.



into an empty room across the hallway.

After a few minutes, Josie stood at Buzz's office door. "Sorry. So, what were you saying?"

"Sit down for a minute," he said. "Is everything OK? You seem pretty stressed out."

"Well, I am, a little," she said, sitting down but perching at the edge of her chair as if poised for a quick getaway. "My ex just moved to Texas for a new job, so I've got the kids full-time. And he still hasn't rented his house here. With two mortgages to pay, you can bet he's not sending any child support. The bottom line is, yeah, I've been working a lot."

"That's a lot to manage by yourself."

"I'm pretty busy, but I'm managing. But I really can't turn down any work right now," she said.

"Listen, Josie," Buzz said firmly. "I hope you're not doing work for them on our time."

She lowered her head. "No—well, occasionally I need to take a call when I'm here, but it's not more than the one day a week I'm allowed as faculty," she said.

"Well, OK," he said doubtfully. "What was that text messaging in the meeting all about?"

"I'm sorry. Yes, that was another consulting client, texting with a little...crisis. I had to answer."

Buzz shook his head. "I'm thinking that your work here is suffering a bit from your other commitments. What do you think?"

"I keep it all straight—really—even if I'm burning the candle at both ends," she said.

Buzz replied, "You do look like you could use a little more sleep. I'm not sure I could juggle everything the way you are. Anyway, just make sure you're putting full energy into your work here."

"You bet. You know I always come through," she said in a strained voice.

Buzz smiled a bit uneasily. "I just hope we don't have a conflict of interest going on here," he said.

"My consulting clients don't compete with Duke," she replied.

"That's not what I mean. I'm talking about a conflict of commitment—of your time and energy," said Buzz. "Your outside work can't interfere with your responsibilities and commitments here. We need your top-notch teaching and research, which I know you are capable of."

"I got it, Buzz," she said, pursing her lips. "But you might show a little compassion," she said curtly. As she turned and walked away, he could hear her mutter, "I just don't know how I'm going to do it all."



## What would you do?

### Q: Was Josie's text messaging during the meeting appropriate?

A: No. Text messaging, sending emails and answering phone calls during meetings are all inappropriate workplace behaviors. Worse, Josie was communicating with her consulting client during time she had committed to Duke.

### Q: Was Buzz justified in talking to Josie?

A: Yes. Even though Josie's situation was difficult, he was right in letting her know that her behavior was inappropriate. It was also appropriate for him to find out more about her apparent difficulty coping with her commitments. Finally, he was correct to communicate that she is accountable for her performance, whatever the circumstances.

### Q: Should he take her family and financial situation into account?

A: Certainly. Faculty and staff don't operate in a vacuum. They have multifaceted personal lives outside of work, which can sometimes seem overwhelming. They may have second jobs or outside consulting businesses. Buzz should acknowledge the challenges of Josie's current situation, while at the same time reinforcing the conflict of interest policy.

### Q: How should Josie respond to Buzz's concerns?

A: She should assure him that she will ensure her obligations to Duke come before her outside activities. This may require her to drop some of her obligations so she can put her full energy into teaching and research.

### Q: What should be Buzz's next step?

A: Buzz must make it clear to Josie that if her outside work leaves her too exhausted or overcommitted to give her best, things may have to change. He could offer to help Josie develop a plan to manage her time and commitments.

## Duke Values

### RESPECT

We are a community of leaders, students, scholars, health care providers and staff who affirm and encourage open expression, academic freedom, regard for others and respect for laws and regulations.

### TRUST

We are honest, credible and reliable in our words, behaviors and actions.

### INCLUSION

We seek to welcome and fully engage people of diverse backgrounds, abilities and perspectives to advance our work.

### DISCOVERY

We seek to be an innovative community, to improve our individual capabilities and to share knowledge with one another.

### EXCELLENCE

We perform high-quality education, research, patient care and community enhancement, and are always mindful of the enduring value of safety and continuous improvement.



## SPEAK UP

If you witness or are asked to participate in actions that are not consistent with our values, tell someone.

Ask your supervisor, department head, academic dean, residence advisor or ombudsman for advice.

If that is not possible, contact **800.826.8109** to discuss your question or report your concern. The toll-free number is a confidential, and anonymous if you choose, service provided 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

## Key Points to Remember

- *Faculty and staff have a responsibility to make the work they do for Duke their first priority while they are on the job.*
- *Conflicts of interest include not only working for an entity that is clearly in competition with Duke, but also taking on outside work that conflicts with one's ability to perform their job for Duke to the best of their ability.*
- *Time is a resource, as much as is money, and using Duke assets (facilities, people or other resources) or spending time performing outside work may be a misuse of that resource.*

We speak up when words, behaviors or actions are not consistent with our values.

It takes courage to come forward. Retaliation for reporting concerns in good faith is strictly prohibited.