

Ethics Case 1 – Team Harmony

edited by Rick Birney

Tom, Mary, John, and Julie were assigned as team members for a semester long group project in one of their college classes. Throughout the course of the semester, five separate group assignments were assigned to the team. The team decided that the best way to accomplish each assignment would be to divide each one into four equal parts and assign each team member a part. As part of the group organization, Tom volunteered to be the group's project manager. As project manager Tom was responsible for scheduling the work assignments between the various team members and keeping everyone on task.

As the first submission dead line approached, all the team members completed their assigned duties on a timely basis. Each team member prepared a well written and quality submission. After the four team members completed their individual parts, the work was handed to Tom, who as project manager, agreed to organize it and implement the final submission so that the different parts would look consistent. Wanting to make a good impression with his fellow team members on this first submission and desiring a good grade on it, Tom had volunteered to assemble each of the team members' parts into a single cohesive submission.

The first submission went off without a hitch and the group received an "A" for all their hard work. All the team members were happy with the result of their hard work. Tom really felt proud of his extra contribution as project manager. To celebrate their success, the team decided to meet after their classes at one of the local college hang outs and toast their success. During one of their many toasts that evening the team members all agreed that this was the best overall team they had ever been assigned.

As the semester progressed the team followed the same successful model that served them well on their first submission. Unfortunately as what normally happens in many cases the various team members became very busy as the workload increased in their other classes. Mary got really sick the week before one of the group submissions were due and was unable to complete her portion. During one of the group submission John was called out of town to work on a project for his part-time employer. Not wanting to let his teammates down, he worked all night and emailed his part to Tom. Unfortunately, it was not sent until the evening before the assignment was due.

As the semester continued, Tom found himself doing more and more work to clean up his fellow team members submissions. As an example, when John sent his part late because he was called out of town, Tom had to get up at 3 AM in the morning the day that the assignment was due in order to pull everything together. While Tom enjoyed the team's

accolades as the team continued to do well on their assignments, he became more and more irritated that he seemed to be doing more and more of the work. Tom's personality was such that he believed as the overall leader of the group he should not complain to the rest of the group and that he should just grin and bear it.

At the end of the semester, and after finishing all their group assignments, the instructor asked each group member to submit a written evaluation of their peers, with a separate evaluation sheet for each one of the team members. Also, the instructor asked that each team member submit a written evaluation of their own contributions to the project.

Mary, John, and Julie met a few days before the peer evaluation was due (Tom could not attend because he was in class) and they all agreed that since each team member work hard on their equal share of the project that they would give each other the same great peer evaluations. They all rewarded each other with the same amount of evaluation points, and they were all happy for being able to earn an "A" in such a hard course, a course which demanded a lot of hard work, superior communication skills, and team cooperation.

Upon hearing from his fellow teammates on what they had agreed upon with their peer evaluations, Tom got very upset. Tom's peer evaluation stated that most of the group work was individually carried out by him and that his peers basically acted as "helpers". His evaluation also stated that his fellow team members were always late in handing their assignments to him, and that he suffered throughout the semester just to get their parts handed in on time. In addition, he told the instructor that he had to put extra effort and time just to organize his peers' work and sometimes had to redo some of their parts because they were incompetent and irrelevant to the assignment.

Needless to say, the instructor was very surprised to see such a difference between the peer evaluations for this group.

Based on the information presented in this case, please answer the following questions in bullet-point format, not all in one paragraph:

1. What were some of the ethical issues addressed in this case?
2. Did Tom act in an ethical manner when he presented his opinion to the professor?
3. What do you think the professor should do in this case?
4. How do you think this team could have avoided this problem?
5. What could the professor have done to help mitigate this type of problem?
6. What important lesson did you learn from this case?