

### THE SITUATION

John was walking through product development when he noticed an unreleased graphics card from one of Robin Electronics' vendors, ProTune, on Tony's desk.

"I didn't think that version had been released," he said to Tony.

"It hasn't. Rob from ProTune gave it to me to try out. I think he wants us to use it in our next gaming laptop."

John's mind immediately went back to the hard push he was responsible for since the regime change at Robin Electronics. It had only been a year and a half since the founder had come out of a short five-year retirement to address the toxic culture that had developed since his departure. John was head of one of the few departments that had been insulated from the problems that had developed and spread throughout the company. It had gotten so bad that the company had lost or fired more talent in 14 months than the five years previous. Employees were going on Glassdoor.com to vent their frustrations and share what was going on within the company. John remembered a couple of reviews that at the time he really identified with, but since the change in leadership had worked very hard to leave behind. One employee that John knew very well and who had written on Glassdoor that management under the old leadership was, "...untrustworthy and not interested in supporting employees. It seems like they are there to make themselves money and not let anyone else advance or get a raise. They are full of empty promises and never seem to come through."

They suggested that management,

"Get rid of most of the top executives. They're not all completely morally bankrupt, but some should be working as repo men or IRS agents."

Walking by Tony's desk and seeing the inappropriate gift from ProTune reminded John of the ways employees tried to rationalize unethical behavior because of poor leadership and toxic culture. This was exactly why John had been promoted to Culture Liaison to work with individual teams across the company and address residual cultural and ethical issues. A big part of his job was educating employees on the Core Values that drive the ethical decision making within the company.

1. Treat people the way you want to be treated.
2. Nurture a desire to do your job well and be successful.
3. Be courageous and find new ways to solve problems.
4. Do the right thing even when no one is watching.
5. Be generous with your time and give back whenever possible.

These Core Values were meant to be a way of realigning the bad decisions employees were making as a result of the previous culture problems, but John was unsure if his work and the work of the new management that had been put in place was having an effect. The company had begun incorporating the Core Values into everyday life by incentivizing individuals to acknowledge co-workers who lived out core values in a particular situation, such as in meetings or on team projects. All employees were given small booklets of the core values that could be checked off with spaces to write someone's name and make comments about their behavior. Every quarter employees could submit the reviews they were given for a chance at winning prizes like an all-expense paid Disney vacation for their family. John knew Tony had received some good core-value reviews before, but accepting this gift was something that Legal had talked to employees about a number of times. John thought Tony may have still been in the old mindset of "watching out for number one." As John stood at Tony's desk wondering what to do, he silently reviewed his options before speaking.

### **John's Options**

1. Fire Tony and make an example of him to demonstrate that things were really different under the new management team.
2. Ignore the gift and focus more on working with Legal to educate and reinforce the connection between Robin's Core Values and making ethical decisions. In particular, more education on doing the right thing when no one is watching, having integrity, and not accepting inappropriate gifts from vendors.
3. Confront Tony about the gift and make him go to the new CEO and explain what happened and let the CEO decide what to do.

4. Acknowledge that there is still work to do to refine processes for educating and changing the culture at Robin, and report this incident to Human Resources and allow Tony the opportunity to learn from his mistake.
  
5. Confront Tony and set up a meeting with the ProTune rep that gave Tony the graphics card in order to establish the rules Robin Electronics has on appropriate vendor relationships.

## EPILOGUE

John weighed the risks of each of these decisions and determined that he would rather substantiate a decision to give a good employee another chance while still acknowledging that what he did was wrong. He decided to involve Human Resources and also felt a responsibility to let the CEO know the situation. John knew that the CEO may react strongly but hoped that working with HR would allow Tony to keep his job. He was wrong. The CEO fired Tony and in subsequent communications reinforced that Robin Electronics had a zero-gift policy for vendor relationships.