



Mains Practice Question

Case Study

Abhishek Singh hails from an influential family of landlords. Being educated in Delhi in a top notch college he developed a preference for the civil services and got selected in the IRS and joined as an Income Tax Officer. Even after joining civil service he could not control the nightlife culture of visiting discotheque and night clubs with friends and getting inebriated.

Nowadays he is invariably out every weekend and can never come punctually to the office. Monday mornings are important in his office because the Commissioner takes a review of results achieved in the last week and plans for the ensuing week. Being late in the office every time, he tries to fabricate a story and explain the delay. His overall performance being good he has not attracted adverse notice of the bosses yet, but his immediate subordinates know why he is late.

What are the ethical issues involved in the present case? What are the alternatives available to Abhishek and choose the most appropriate alternative.

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Introduction

The given case reveals an issue of personal lifestyle undermining the functioning of the public service.

Body

Ethical issues in the case

- **Against the Code of Conduct:** Abhishek Singh, an Income Tax Officer, has a responsibility toward his duty to accomplish the tasks in given time and follow organisation's rules and regulations.
 - But his being late, especially on Monday, is against the code of conduct of the service.
 - Even it is not ethically (Code of Ethics) correct to reach office late and lie about the reasons.
- **Set a Wrong Precedent:** His conduct in the office, being late, can demotivate his subordinates and set a wrong precedent in the office.
- Personal Lifestyle impacting the professional ethics in this case.

Alternatives Available to Abhishek

- Whatever Abhishek is doing outside office hours is part of his personal life, and has no bearing on his official conduct.
- The matter may concern Abhishek's personal life, but it is likely to lower his official performance. It may be violative of official codes of conduct also.
- It is for the income Tax Commissioner to discipline Abhishek and ensure that he attends meetings on time.

- The fact that Abhishek is able to convincingly lie to explain the delay so many times shows that he is smart.

Evaluation of the Options

- The **first alternative cannot be supported**. Fundamentally, he has not been able to make a transition from the lifestyle of a somewhat spoiled young man to that of a responsible public servant.
 - What was nobody else's business when he was a student will soon become a matter of concern for his department and the sooner he realises this, the better for him.
 - His lifestyle is indulgent and **lacks prudence and temperance**.
 - One may recall here **Aristotle's concept of golden mean and value of prudence**. Even though Abhishek can afford an extravagant lifestyle because of inherited wealth, the habits he developed are fraught with problems.
 - His delay in reaching office shows that his behaviour is affecting his official discipline.
- The **second alternative is the appropriate one**. His lifestyle has begun to undermine his official discipline. He is also cultivating the horrible habit of telling lies. Instead of addressing the cause of unpunctuality he is fabricating stories.
 - This cannot work for long. His weakness cannot remain hidden for ever and when known to office he will lose credibility - which is already happening.
 - When the burden of falsehood becomes heavy the moral agent no longer remains trustworthy and his esteem in the eyes of others melts away.
 - When that happens the individual becomes unfit for any leadership role such as civil servants are expected to assume.
 - Civil servants are expected to behave decently in personal life and philandering is not an acceptable quality. It can expose them to risks of blackmail and scandals thereby endangering public interest. His behaviour is a form of moral turpitude and violates the codes of public servants.
- It is true that the **Income Tax Commissioner has to enforce discipline**. But then, Abhishek is a senior officer and has to carefully observe official discipline and protocols on his own instead of waiting to be coerced into disciplined behaviour.
- The **fourth response is very inappropriate**. A morally bad act or behaviour even if carried out with confidence and style is to be condemned. Smartness has to be admired or accepted only when displayed in moral conduct and actions.

Conclusion

It is the responsibility of Abhishek to maintain and follow rules of the organisation and codes of conduct so that day to day businesses are not affected. He must be more sensitive towards the public cause.