Right vs. Right Dilemma Case Studies

1. The Trooper’s Dilemma
   This case concerned an auto mechanic called to the scene of a wreck on a state highway in Ohio.

   Arriving at the isolated, wooded spot, he could see immediately what had happened: A large flatbed truck had gone off the highway and hit a tree head-on. On impact, its load of steel had torn loose and slid forward through the back of the cab, pinning the driver helplessly inside. The cab was on fire, in danger of exploding at any minute.

   As he arrived, so did a state police car. And as the trooper ran to the open cab window, the mechanic could hear the driver inside screaming, “Shoot me! Shoot me!” It was obvious that the trooper could not lift off that load of steel and free the driver. So, with the flames growing in intensity, the trooper slowly removed his service revolver from his holster. Then he paused, reconsidered, and slid the revolver back into his holster. And then, amid the driver’s screams, he removed it a second time, paused, and put it back once again.

   It was at that point in this agonized struggle that the mechanic saw the officer do a remarkable thing. Running back to his cruiser, he grabbed a small carbon tetrachloride fire extinguisher. It was hardly enough to quell the fire. But it was large enough to spray in the driver’s face and put him to sleep, which is what he did.

   Shortly afterward, the cab exploded.
2. The Social Service Counselor

As a counselor on sexually transmitted diseases, May worked at a social service agency for women. One day she discovered that she herself had two such diseases.

Knowing she had no sexual relationships with anyone but her longtime companion, she reasoned that the diseases could only have come from him. Confronting him with her concerns, she accused him of transmitting the diseases to her—in effect charging him with promiscuity, since he could have contracted the diseases only through sexual relations with other women. He denied it adamantly, refusing even to submit to medical testing. She subsequently ended their relationship.

Some months later, a young woman May did not know came in for counseling after having contracted a sexually transmitted disease. In their discussion, the client revealed the name of her boyfriend. To May’s astonishment, it turned out to be her own former boyfriend—a fact apparently unknown to the young woman.

May’s dilemma: Does she maintain her professional demeanor and give no hint that she knows anything about the man? Or does she warn the young woman of what she knows?
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The Case of the Loyal Employee

Bill was the chief financial officer of a small liberal arts college that is under economic pressures. Among the small staff of administrators with whom he worked closely was Maud, a single woman in the comptroller’s office whose loyalty to the school knew no bounds. In twenty years of service, she had held a number of different positions. Yet she never quite proved suited to any of them. Big-hearted with her fellows and careful in her tasks, she was nevertheless a slow, deliberate worker unable to grasp the newer technologies and easily flustered by changes in routine. Bill had several conversations with her about her work, each ending in tears on her part. He knew that six years away from retirement, she had little accumulated savings and no family. Her life seemed completely wrapped up in the school.

Bill was also aware, however, that with increasing costs and a leveling of enrollments, he had to make adjustments to his staff. It was clear to all involved that Maud’s work could be nearly eliminated by new computer equipment. It was also clear that there was no obvious position into which she could be moved, and that her salary was a significant drain on the budget. The requirements of the community made it plain that she should be released. The needs of the individual, however, urged Bill to keep her in place for another six years.

In which dilemma category(ies) does this case fit?

Mercy vs. Justice

Individual vs. Community

Short-term vs. Long-term

Truth vs. Loyalty

Use the Resolution Principles to advise Bill as what action he should take.

Ends-based (what’s the greatest good for the greatest number of people involved?)

Rule-based (what’s the highest principle or value I can honor with my actions?)

Care-based (what would I want done to me or for me in the same situation?)