

## The Innocent Gift<sup>1</sup>

You arrive at the department office one Tuesday morning and see the departmental administrative assistant holding a box of software that looks very familiar to you. When you ask about it, the assistant explains that it was a gift that your senior colleague, Professor Cutter, had given her. “She gave me the software package to load into my home computer,” said the administrative assistant, Mary Willingly. “I thought it was very nice of Professor Cutter. It cost her eighty-five dollars and she made a point of telling me that she paid for it herself with her own credit card.”

“Did Professor Cutter mention why she give you that particular software?” you ask.

“Oh, yes. She said she planned to be asking me to do a little extra work on the weekends and Dr. Cutter wanted me to be able to work at home instead of coming in to the department.”

“What kind of work? Did she say?”

“No, I think it might be recording her grades for her and maybe some budget work for the conference the department is having next spring. She said that you put her in charge of getting the speakers and arranging all the logistics; which was a big job. She said it would be good experience for me to work with the budget and help with the planning.”

“Mary, it concerns me that you would be working on departmental business at home, and doing it as overtime as well.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” Mary says. “Like I said, it will be good experience for me. I won’t charge the department for the hours. And anyway, Professor Cutter said she would reimbursement for any expenses and pay me for my time too. So, you see, it’s all fine with me.”

You thank the administrative assistant, a young woman still in her first year with your department, and tell her you will have to think more about this arrangement before you can approve it. She looks at you wondering whether your approval is necessary, but decides not to raise that question.

You go to your office and pull open your budget notes to confirm your recollection that the software in question had come up in conversation before. In fact, yes, it had. Professor Cutter had purchased that particular software two months earlier using the departmental account number -- without your prior authorization -- at the campus bookstore. At the time you had insisted that Mary return the unopened software when she came to you to ask about loading it on to her office computer. Not only had the purchase not been authorized, but the college had just standardized on a different software package. Your budget shows that the software was returned and the money credited back to your department budget.

### Questions:

- 1. What would you do had the administrative assistant not followed your explicit directions about returning the software to the Bookstore?**
- 2. Should you allow the AA to load the software, now received as a gift from Professor Cutter, on her departmental computer?**

Professor Cutter was very angry when you insisted that Mary return the software to the bookstore. The Professor accused you of purposefully humiliating her in front of the office staff. She said you were a fool to think that the faculty were necessarily going to agree to learn a new software package just because

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<sup>1</sup> All characters, situations, and stories described here are fictional. No reference to actual persons, events, or institutions is intended or assumed. Drs. Peter and Noreen Facione developed and refined these hypothetical cases based on the experiences gained through their many decades of service as faculty, administrators, workshop presenters, and leadership consultants to colleges and universities throughout the nation.

the dean wants to standardize things. And anyway, your prior authorization was not needed since she had intended all along that buying the software with departmental funds was merely her way of using a part of her professional travel money for the year.

**Questions:**

**3) What to do about Mary and working overtime at home?**

**4) What to do about Professor Cutter?**

**5) What potential difficulties for the department, staff, students, and institution lurk here?**