

The Whistleblowing debate

(To comment: iainaj.mckie@btinternet.com)

Dear Iain

'In his lecture on ethics, **Dave Grieve** gives an example to consider, something like this: You are a fingerprint examiner with a police department in Scotland. You have seen the fingerprints in the Marion Ross murder case and you know the SCRO made at least two erroneous identifications. You have an ethical responsibility to your chosen profession to speak out and make every effort to correct the harm that has been done. But if you do that, you will lose your job and your career and have to start over. You have an ethical responsibility to your wife and two young children to provide food, shelter, and clothing to them. If you lose your job and have to start over, you will not be able to provide for your family.

What do you do? Which ethical responsibilities dominate?

I admire (those) who do speak out. I pity those who do not. I, for one, would rather live under a bridge and eat worms -- and take my family with me -- than stay quiet and let a terrible wrong be done that I might have helped stop. I do not understand the people who remain silent in the face of an enemy, nor do I understand how they retain even a shred of self respect.'

Pat Wertheim.

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Dear Iain

The matter of whistleblowing in cases of wrongdoing in the world of business has been considered at length.

It is a Corporate governance issue and it is now a requirement that companies and public bodies have a system in place which allows whistleblowers to make disclosures without fear of recrimination by basically protecting their identity. This is done by making it known to staff and others that anyone with a matter to disclose should do this to an independent person or body. In companies this could be the chairman of the audit committee who is independent from management function and that is certainly what we have done in The Church of Scotland General Trustees.

It seems to me that it would be a simple matter to direct persons in the police service with a concern to report directly to the police complaints authority which would be debarred from disclosing its source but would be required to conduct its own investigation.

I hope this is helpful and a reasonable first kick of the ball!

Best Regards

Findlay.