

Ethics

Her Boss Serves on the Interview Panel



Q: The assistant to the city manager was delighted to learn that she is a finalist for a position in a nearby city. When the city staff called to set up the interview, they told her that her current boss, the city manager, is serving on the interview panel. The assistant expressed concern about the situation to her boss, but the city manager said that he saw no reason for him to resign from the interview panel. The assistant remained uncomfortable about the situation and sought advice on how to handle it.

A: The assistant has no ethical issue, as it is clear to the hiring organization that her current boss is serving on the interview panel. The city manager, however, has an appearance of a conflict of interest. A reasonable person may not believe that the assistant's current boss would be objective in assessing his subordinate, compared with other finalists. If the assistant is recommended for the position, other candidates could complain that she had an unfair advantage over them.

Because the city manager has not offered to step aside, the assistant's best recourse is to contact the human resources director to explain her concerns about the interview panel. If the human resources director does not change the process, the assistant could consider withdrawing her application for the job. The assistant agreed that withdrawing her application could be a good option in that case. She does not want to accuse her boss of unethical conduct; nor would she be comfortable in accepting a position if the selection process were tainted.