

DEPARTMENTS

Ethics Inquiries

The Difficult, Mistreated Employee

Scenario: The county manager just read a news story about a department director who had worked for him in another county government. Though the employee had not gotten along well with some of his colleagues, he had been competent. The newspaper story, however, insinuated that the employee now had given some of his new employees unauthorized pay raises. Knowing what a stickler this employee was for following procedures, the county manager immediately suspected that the reporter had gotten the story wrong.

When he called the employee's new boss to ask about the story, the other county manager confirmed that the reporter had erred but said that he was not sorry that this particular employee was facing some embarrassing news coverage. The county manager wanted to know if there would be an ethical problem if he wrote a letter to the editor or called the reporter to set the record straight but thought it would be a good idea to discuss this issue before acting.

Response: When news reports are inaccurate and someone's reputation may be damaged by such a story, the first reaction is to want to set the record straight. In this case, however, the county manager's instinct to react quickly might not help his former employee. The former employee may prefer to set the record straight himself. In any event, the county manager should not take the initiative to write a letter to the editor without getting such a request from his former employee.