

Green Streams

Six years ago with a grant from the Long Island Community Fund, Diane Carlson and Dina Sawyer founded a not-for-profit organization called Green Streams, which extracts recyclable materials from the waste of local companies and sells them to scrap dealers.

In addition to the economic and ecological benefits it provides, Green Streams hires recent graduates from drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs to sort and transport the waste. Through the years they have helped hundreds of young people get into the job market - people who otherwise would not have had a chance.

The program is not without its risks, however. From the beginning, Diane and Dina introduced a 'one strike and you're out' rule. If an employee is caught even once doing drugs, drinking alcohol, stealing, or fighting at the worksite, he or she is dismissed on the spot. Diane and Dina enforce this rule without exception. They believe that the success of their program depends on their reputation for integrity.

One of their greatest 'successes' is Angela Youngblood, a single mother who cares for her neurologically impaired four-year-old at home. Angela has been clean since her son was born and has been promoted twice in her three years at Green Streams. She is now a supervisor and destined for a management position. And so it was with dismay that Diane and Dina learned from their controller that Angela was skimming waste for her own profit.

When they confronted Angela, she broke down immediately. She told them she needed the extra money to pay for her son's medical bills and begged them to let her keep her job. "If I lose this job," she sobbed, "I will have no place to go. No one will hire me with my record. I will lose my home. I will lose my boy, my precious boy."

Diane and Dina asked her to wait outside while they talk it over. Diane believes they have no choice but to fire her; Dina thinks she deserves a second chance.

Is firing Angela in the best interests of Green Streams? Would it promote Diane and Dina's long-term self interests? Does answering these questions help them decide what is right?

Do Diane and Dina feel sympathy for Angela and her son? Should their sympathy affect their decision? Why or why not?

What are Diane and Dina's alternatives? If they try to determine which alternative would produce the greatest good for the greatest number, what consequences should they consider?

Should the fact that Angela broke a rule make a difference in their deliberations? What difference (if any) should it make?

Is a utilitarian calculus helpful in deciding what the women should do? Should their decision be based solely on the anticipated consequences of their actions or is there something more they should consider? If so, what is it?