



## Office Supplies

You are working at your summer internship. While having lunch in the break room, you overhear another intern talking about how great it is to have access to all these office supplies and how he's stocking up for his next year of college. He talks about how much money he's saving because he won't have to buy any supplies for the whole year. The office supply cabinet include pens, rulers, staplers, folders, tablets of paper, flash drives, binder clips, etc. What do you do?

**Thought question:** would it make a difference to your decision if the intern was taking the supplies to stock the start-up business he runs on the side?

### Takeaway Lessons:

- 1) **Rationalization.** It's not hard to rationalize or to understand and ignore taking one or two small items because there are so many and they seems like such small items. Thinking about what would happen if everyone did this, though, and its effect on the business is worth the effort. How would expenses be affected?
- 2) **Habits.** Many bad habits start with small steps; incrementalism can lead to places one never intended to go.
- 3) **Drawing the Line.** Knowing where to draw the line is important. Here's a test case. How would you confront your colleague? How would you say to a supervisor or the person in charge of the supply cupboard?

### Issues

Theft  
 Responsibility to employer  
 Costs to business  
 Severity of act  
 Office culture  
 Whistleblowing: should you tell?

### Resources

Company Code of Conduct  
 Mentor  
 Colleagues  
 Parents  
 Company Ethical Hotline (Anonymous)

### Rules and Regulations

Company Code of Conduct  
 Laws about theft

### Questions

Do you think it is true, or was the intern just boasting? Is it any of your business?  
 Is this stealing?  
 What would happen if everybody did this?  
 What would it do to company expenses / availability of supplies to interns in the future?  
 Will it affect how the company views interns? Views you?  
 Should you confront the intern?  
 What if your boss finds out you knew and didn't say anything?  
 Can you just ignore what you overheard?  
 How do the managers act? Do they do the same thing? How seriously is this taken in the environment?  
 Do you have a responsibility to report the intern to your boss or to HR?

### Options

Ignore the situation  
 Ask the intern how the boss would react if s/he knew this was going on  
 Ask your boss how office supplies are inventoried/audited  
 Tell a secretary in the office the kinds of things getting discussed in the break room  
 Talk to your boss about how s/he handles problems of this nature  
 Suggest the interns get a review of the policies and procedures  
 Report the conversation to your boss or to HR  
 Call the company ethics hotline

*Based on 2MC developed by Tina Ho, 2010 Section Leader.*