Ethical Scenarios from Sara Baase, *A Gift of Fire* (2nd ed), Chapter 10

typed in by Phillip Rogaway for ECS 188

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1. **Copying an employee's files.** *You are a computer system manager. An employee is out sick and another employee requests that you copy all files from the sick person's computer to his so he can do some work.*

2. **Insufficient privacy protection.** *Your customer is a community clinic that works with families that have problems of family violence. The clinic has three sites in the same city, including a shelter for battered women and children. Currently, the clinic uses no computers. The director wants a computerized record system, networked for the three sites, with the ability to transfer files among sites and make appointments at any site for any other. She wants to have an Internet connection for e-mail communication with other social-service agencies about client needs. She wants a few notebook computers capable of storing copies of records that staffers can carry when they visit clients at home. At the shelter, staffers use only first names, but the records contain last names and forwarding addresses of women who have recently left. The director's description of the system makes no mention of passwords or encryption. The clinic's budget is small, and she wants to keep the cost as low as possible.*

3. **Risky systems.** *Your team is working on a computer-controlled laser device for treating cancerous tumors. The computer controls direction, intensity, and timing of the beam that destroys the tumor. Various delays have put the project behind schedule, and the deadline is approaching. There will not be time to complete all the planned testing. The system has been functioning properly in the routine treatment scenarios that have been tested so far. You are the project manager, and you are considering whether to deliver the system on time, while continuing testing, and to make patches if bugs are found.*

4. **Risky systems.** *Suppose you are a member of a team working on a computer-controlled crash-avoidance system for automobiles. You think the system has a flaw that could endanger people. The project manager does not seem concerned and expects to announce completion of the project soon. Are you ethically obligated to do something?*

5. **Release of personal information.** *You work for the IRS, the Social Security Administration, a medical clinic, or a large credit bureau. Someone asks you to get a copy of a person's file. He will pay you $500.*

6. **Release of personal information—version 2.** *You work for the IRS, the Social Security Administration, a medical clinic, or a large credit bureau. You know another employee sells files with people's personal information.*

7. **A test plan.** *A team of programmers is developing a communications system for firefighters to use when fighting a fire. Firefighters will be able to communicate with each other, with supervisors near the scene, and with other emergency personnel. The programmers will test the system in a field near the company office.*

8. **Copyright violation.** *Your company has about 25 licenses for a computer program, but you discover that it has been copied onto 80 computers.*

9. **Hiring foreign programmers.** *You are a manager at a software company about to begin a large software project. You will need to hire dozens of new programmers. Using the Internet for communication and software delivery, you can hire programmers in another country at lower salary than programmers in your country. Should you do this?*

10. **10.18.** *A small company offers you a programming job. You are to work on new versions of its software product to disable copy-protection and other access controls on electronic books. The company's program enables buyers of e-books to read their e-books on a variety of hardware devices (fair uses). Customers could also use the program to make many unauthorized copies of copyrighted books. The company's Web page implicitly encourages this practice.*

11. **10.21.** *Suppose you came to the U.S. from Kosovo 15 years ago. You now have a small software company. You will need to hire six programmers this year. Because of the devastation by the ware in your homeland, you have decided to seek out and hire only programmers who are refugees from Kosovo.*

12. **10.23.** *You are the president of a small computer-game company. Your company has just bought another small game company that was developing three new games. You look them over and find that one is complete, ready to reproduce and sell. It is very violent and demeaning to women. It would probably sell 200,000–400,000 copies. You have to decide what to do with the game.*

13. **10.25.** *In 1990, the campaign of a gubernatorial candidate in Massachusetts distorted a digital image of his opponent in a television interview to make the opponent appear more menacing.*

14. **10.31.** *The faculty at a large university requested that the campus store sell an electronic device, Auto-Grader, that students would use when taking machine-scorable tests. Students would enter test answers into this personal electronic device and then send the answers via infrared signal to the instructor's computer in the classroom. Once all the answers are received, the instructor's computer immediately grades the test and sends the students' scores back to their devices. Suppose you are a university dean who must decide whether to allow use of this system.*