

An Ethical Dilemma

Sam and Charlie worked together for 3 years. Every month, Sam was absent 1 or 2 days. He told his supervisor and friends that he was absent due to illness. Due to the nature of his position, these absences were not a major issue with respect to Sam discharging his duties. Sam could be difficult to deal with at times but also could be very helpful and funny. Sam had a driver's license in the past but no longer had one. All in all, Charlie felt that Sam discharged his responsibilities in at least, an acceptable manner.

One day, Sam was fired. Management, citing confidentiality, did not disclose why Sam was fired. A few days later, Sam contacts Charlie and asks if he could use Charlie as an unofficial reference. Charlie agrees. Soon after this, Charlie heard a highly creditable account from one of the company's customers in another state that Sam had gotten so drunk at a dinner with him that he needed help getting into the door of his hotel.

A few days later, Sam again contacts Charlie and tells Charlie that he is so angry at his old company that he is going to come in and "take care of everyone" except Charlie, the receptionist and one other coworker. Charlie does not believe that Sam is serious, but these comments leave him uneasy. Just about the same time Charlie hears another credible account of a business trip taken by Sam where Sam was intoxicated after hours. A couple of months later, a recruiter who Charlie knew, calls him and asks if he would recommend Sam for a position.

Does Charlie face some ethical dilemmas? Is so, what are they? What if anything should Charlie tell management? What should he tell the recruiter? Which of his principles might be at odds with one another? Should Charlie ask Sam why he was fired?

Here is what actually happened: Charlie thought over Sam's comment and decided to tell management the next day about Sam "taking care of everyone". He told them that he didn't think that the threat was credible, but that he was uneasy about it. Management moved the receptionist out of the elevator lobby and placed her behind a secure locked door. Employees were told that henceforth, both access doors into the office space would remain locked at all times.

Charlie told the recruiter that he had heard reports of Sam's intoxication after hours while on business trips and that he did have some attendance problems. He did not tell him about Sam's comments about coming in to "take care of everyone". Sam did not get the position. Charlie learned later that Sam felt that Charlie must have said something to the recruiter. Charlie and Sam never spoke again. Sam soon found a new position.

Should Charlie have passed along Sam's comments to management? Should he have done it sooner? Did management act appropriately? What about the conversation with the recruiter?