



King County

KING COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS

REPORT ON THE

2008 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY

**HELPING EMPLOYEES MAKE ETHICAL DECISIONS
TO ENSURE THE PUBLIC'S TRUST IN GOVERNMENT**

2008 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY REPORT

2008 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY – DESCRIPTION

The Board of Ethics conducted the fifth annual on-line ethics quiz and survey from October 6 to October 24, 2008. Created and produced by the ethics office, the quiz is designed to raise awareness among county employees of the ethics code, the board and its office, and the services they provide. The board believes that education is an effective tool for encouraging ethical practices in King County, and understands that knowledge about the ethics code allows employees to follow its road map for fair dealings. The result is public trust and confidence, which are essential to the valuable work performed by all King County employees.

This year's quiz not only tested employee knowledge of the code, but also allowed participants to provide valuable feedback on ethics education and training conducted by the executive director. Individual responses are kept confidential, but results are summarized in the following report.

DISTRIBUTION METHOD AND RESPONSE RATE

Executive Sims announced the quiz on October 6 via county-wide email voicing his support and inviting participation. All county employees having computer access were able to take part. The initial announcement was followed on October 14 with a brief reminder via employee global email. Access to the quiz and survey remained open for three weeks until October 24.

In order to increase availability and participation, the executive director worked with Human Resource Service Delivery Managers (Ethics Partners) to provide hard-copy versions for any employees without computer access. In addition, she appealed directly to department directors to encourage their employees to take the quiz and provided a sample text for that purpose. At least three directors responded and took action.

The quiz is designed in an on-line intranet format, meaning that county employees, but not the general public, may take part. In order to enable employees who have shared access through a common computer (for example at field facilities), there were no unique identifiers or restrictions placed on access to the quiz. Although there is a very slight possibility that someone might enter the quiz site more than once, given the number of overall responses, any multiple would have had a minimal impact on the summary results.

Of 12,000 county employees with computer access, 2,361 or 19.7% took the quiz. This represents a 2% increase in participation over 2007. A special effort was made to provide hard copies to employees without computer access and, despite this outreach, only one employee submitted a hard-copy version.

Employees who responded to all quiz and survey questions, and who provided name and contact information in a completely separate submittal, became eligible for a random drawing. From this pool of 877 entrants, three names were drawn by ethics board member Anne Watanabe to win one of three prizes: a \$20 certificate at Macy's department store, a \$15 certificate at Barnes and Noble bookstore, and a \$6 certificate for coffee at Starbucks.

Because the primary purpose of the survey is educational, rather than as research or as part of an evaluation, the survey was sent to all county employees with computer access. This means that the responses were voluntary, not randomly assigned, and that the survey population may or may not represent the county employee population as a whole. The results are however indicative of employee knowledge and opinions, especially employees with ready computer access, and does not represent the knowledge and opinions of field personnel without access.

EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO QUIZ QUESTIONS

The following are the 17 quiz and survey questions; 'n' represents the total number of responses. The number of responses to each option (e.g. a., b., c.) and percentage of that response to the total is shown. The correct answer and its explanation follow each question.

1. My co-worker and I love politics and we're very excited about the November elections. She's been coming to my desk a lot lately to talk about her candidate's upcoming fundraising breakfast, but I don't think we can spend time this way. What should I tell her? (n=2355)

- a. Keep your voice down: 9 (.38 %)
- b. Forget it. Your candidate is going to lose: 4 (.17 %)
- c. Let's talk this over during lunch at the local coffee shop: 2342 (99.45 %)

c. Let's talk this over during lunch at the local coffee shop.

Explanation: Everyone is encouraged to participate in the political process and political discussions are a part of that. However, political activities must be conducted on your own time using your own resources. If political activities in your office are causing you concern, talk it over with your supervisor or call the Ethics Help Line at 296-1586 (KCC 3.04.020)

2. Which of the following topics are NOT included in the King County Code of Ethics? (n=2286)

- a. Use of county resources: 51 (2.23 %)
- b. Second jobs and post-employment: 635 (27.77 %)
- c. Harassment from co-worker or boss: 598 (26.15 %)
- d. Acceptance of gifts and meals: 23 (1.01 %)
- e. Use of official position for gain: 40 (1.75 %)
- f. Political activities in the workplace: 109 (4.77 %)
- g. Unfair disciplinary action: 1289 (56.38 %)
- h. Conflicts of interest: 57 (2.49 %)

c. Harassment from co-worker or boss; g. Unfair disciplinary action

Explanation: The Code of Ethics covers a number of topics that strengthen the public's trust in King County government. However, you won't find issues of (c) workplace harassment and (g) disciplinary action in the Code. These issues are best handled by contacting your supervisor or Human Resources personnel within your agency. (K.C.C. 3.04)

3. Laurie and her co-workers have a great relationship with several vendors they work with. Sometimes they brain-storm about county projects together after work at a local restaurant and take turns picking up the check to make it even and fair. Any problems with this arrangement? (n=2352)

Yes: 1958 (83.25 %)

No: 394 (16.75 %)

Yes, there is a problem with this arrangement.

Explanation: When we conduct business outside of a professional environment, a reasonable person might believe that our business practices are just that – unprofessional. When we accept meals from those doing business or seeking to do business with the county, that same reasonable person might believe that our judgment could be biased in favor of that business. Even if our decisions might not be affected by receipt of something of value, the appearance of conflict remains and could affect what the county values most: the public's trust in government. Laurie, hold your meetings during regular work hours, in a conference room provided for that purpose, and pay your own way. (K.C.C. 3.04.030)

4. Laurie not only has good working relationships with her agency's vendors, but they love her work. As a matter of fact, they talked with her about coming to work for them when the current project is successfully completed. May Laurie talk about this exciting new offer? (n=2351)

a. Yes, if she meets with the company on her own time: 474 (20.16 %)

b. No, not until the job is completed: 231 (9.83 %)

c. Not until the job is completed, and she should notify her supervisor: 1646 (70.01 %)

c. Not until the job is completed, and she should notify her supervisor.

Explanation: Laurie's personal interests are about to collide with her job responsibilities. She wants to talk about a great new job for herself, but she must be impartial when working on the project with the same vendor. She cannot reasonably do both. (K.C.C. 3.04.030) In addition, she now has a potential conflict even if she tells the vendor she can't discuss the matter. She must notify her supervisor right away to ensure that the process is kept open and transparent and free from conflict. (K.C.C. 3.04.037)

5. June and Oscar are working hard to produce the official kick-off for the department's Clean Air, Water and Earth Day. Since they want to be cost-conscious, June and Oscar plan to solicit local businesses for coffee, snacks and prizes. Is it allowable for June and Oscar solicit these prizes? (n=2343)

Yes: 625 (26.68 %)
No: 1718 (73.32 %)

No. June and Oscar must find another way.

Explanation: The Code of Ethics prohibits unauthorized solicitation by county employees so that no person or business in King County feels implicitly coerced to provide aid for government sponsored events. The broad scope of power and authority of King County agencies may make the businesses that are solicited feel they must contribute. This is most obvious in areas where agencies have direct authority over persons being solicited. June and Oscar may either use approved county funds to purchase the items for the event, or ask for official authorization from the King County Council to solicit for specific events. (K.C.C. 3.04.020)

6. I'm a new manager and want ethics to be a part of everyday work life for my employees. What are some of the activities that I can employ to inspire and inform my staff? (n=2349)

- a. Lead by example by following the rule and spirit of the law: 11 (.47 %)
- b. Encourage discussion of ethical issues by taking questions and complaints seriously: 5 (.21 %)
- c. Take immediate action to address and resolve ethics issues: 3 (.13 %)
- d. All of the above: 2330 (99.19 %)

d. All of the above.

Explanation: In the 2006 ethics quiz, the ethics office asked employees what advice they would give to county management to help strengthen ethical conduct. Their responses included a, b, and c, but they also suggested that managers: publicize positive role models within the agency; include ethics discussions in management and staff meetings; ensure all employees receive required ethics training; communicate ethics policies and practices orally and in writing; include an ethics question in promotions and hiring and in manager evaluations; and fairly enforce high standards.

7. You're approved to work from home for the next 6 months, a savings for you and the county. You're issued a county computer that includes Internet access. After a long day, you take a moment, check your stocks and make a couple of trades on the county computer. Is there an ethics issue here? (n=2345)

- a. No, you've worked hard all day and now this is on your own time: 16 (.68 %)
- b. Yes, you are using a county resource for profit which is prohibited: 2078 (88.61 %)
- c. No, the use is brief and infrequent so there shouldn't be a problem: 251 (10.70 %)

b. Yes, you are using a county resource for profit which is prohibited.

Explanation: Even though the use doesn't take much time and is after work hours, you are still using a county resource for a profit motive. Taxpayers want to know that county property is being used for the public's benefit and not for employees' personal financial benefit. You should use your own computer for this kind of activity and, if you have questions, contact your supervisor or call the Ethics Help Line at 296-1586. (K.C.C. 3.04.020)

8. I think I might have a conflict of interest between my county job and my personal interests. What steps should I take to address the situation? (n=2348)

- a. Disclose the matter in writing to your supervisor right away: 442 (18.82 %)
- b. Insist that your supervisor resolve the issue and respond to you in writing: 9 (.38 %)
- c. Make sure that your supervisor keeps a copy of that resolution in his or her file: 4 (.17 %)
- d. All of the above: 1893 (80.62 %)

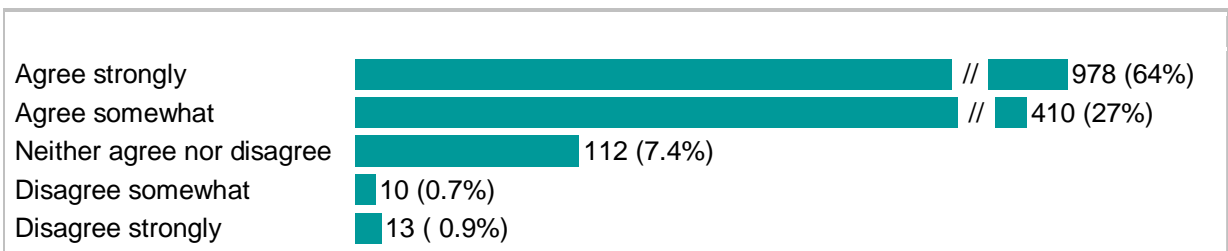
d. All of the above are required to help prevent conflicts of interest.

Explanation: Experience shows that when ethical dilemmas are identified and resolved promptly and routinely, ensuing problems are minimized. These three steps for both staff and supervisor are required by law and – when followed – safeguard the reputation and integrity of employees, agencies and the county. (K.C.C. 3.04.037)

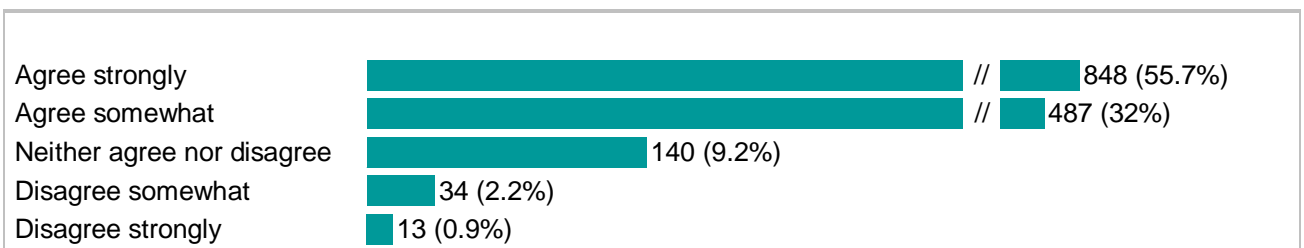
9. I have attended the following ethics trainings at King County within the last three years. (Check all that apply): (n=2314)

- New Employee Orientation: 684 (29.55 %)
- A presentation at a staff meeting: 528 (22.82 %)
- An agency-wide training: 369 (15.95 %)
- A half-day seminar for supervisors: 290 (12.53 %)
- Other: 223 (9.64 %)
- I have NOT attended ethics training at King County (skip to #14): 800 (34.57 %)

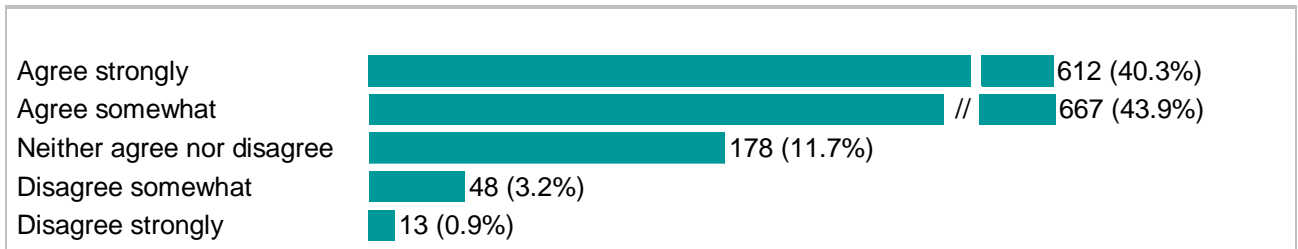
10. The session included information on the county's commitment to ethics in the workplace. (n=1523)



11. The session covered practical examples of real-life situations that individuals may encounter on the job. (n=1522)



12. The session provided me with enough information so that I know how to resolve an ethical dilemma or situation. (n=1518)



13. The training I received helped me resolve an ethical dilemma in my workplace. (n=1543)

- Agree strongly: 257 (16.66 %)
- Agree somewhat: 358 (23.20 %)
- Neither agree nor disagree: 385 (24.95 %)
- Disagree somewhat: 35 (2.27 %)
- Disagree strongly: 20 (1.30 %)
- I haven't encountered any appropriate situations: 488 (31.63 %)

14. Are there any additional tools or information that you would like to be a part of a future ethics training or education session? (n=396)

The categories with the highest number of response are:

- None
- Miscellaneous questions, complaints and comments
- Periodic reminders with real-life situations (e.g. newsletters, email messages)
- Additional staff training with management participation
- Commendations for the quiz and survey*
- Various ethics code provisions (e.g. conflict of interest, outside employment)
- On-line training
- Information on resources for questions, complaints and reporting
- Refresher courses

*Commendations included:

- "An annual ethics quiz . . . is a good reminder to employees about ethics issues, keeping the topic within our awareness. It was challenging, also!"
- "Keep the surveys coming . . . they keep me on my toes about making the right choices."
- ". . . having this annual test/reminder about the Code of Ethics is a great tool to help King County staff stay alert to ethics . . ."
- "I think these surveys are a great training tool – keep it up!"
- "This survey format is excellent!"
- "Keep up the good work."
- "These quizzes are fun!"

15. I think my agency would benefit from an ethics presentation. (n=2273)

Yes: 1488 (65.46 %)

No: 785 (34.54 %)

16. Your department: (n=2340) Listed in order of highest participation:

Department of Public Health (DPH): 525 (22.44 %)

Department of Transportation (DOT): 403 (17.22 %)

Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP): 334 (14.27 %)

Department of Executive Services (DES): 279 (11.92 %)

Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD): 179 (7.65 %)

King County Sheriff's Office (SHERIFF): 142 (6.07 %)

Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS): 82 (3.50 %)

Prosecuting Attorney Office (PAO): 72 (3.08 %)

Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES): 72 (3.08 %)

King County Superior Court (KCSC): 58 (2.48 %)

Department of Assessments (DOA): 50 (2.14 %)

King County District Court (KCDC): 46 (1.97 %)

King County Executive Office (KCEO): 38 (1.62 %)

Department of Judicial Administration (DJA): 35 (1.50 %)

King County Council (KCC): 25 (1.07 %)

Generally, the number of respondents per department matched the department's relative employee population within county government, especially considering certain departments have a significant number of employees without access to computers (such as Transportation).

17. Do you supervise others? (n=2331)

YES: 603 (25.87 %) NO: 1728 (74.13 %)

CONCLUSIONS

- The high number of employees voluntarily taking part in the ethics quiz and survey indicate that employees have a continuing interest in workplace ethics; comments about the quiz indicate employees enjoy and learn from the quiz and that it should be continued.
- Employees have a solid, basic understanding of the King County Code of Ethics demonstrated by the percentage of correct responses to questions; however, employees could benefit from additional education about discussing future work with consultants over whom they have responsibilities, and about soliciting goods and services from county businesses for workplace initiatives. In both prohibited situations, 30% of county employees mistakenly thought such actions were acceptable.

- Training and education content and practical application delivered by the ethics staff received high marks:
 - over 90% of respondents agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that the sessions included information about the county's commitment to ethics in the workplace;
 - 88% of respondents agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that the sessions covered practical examples of real-life situations they might encounter on the job;
 - 84% of respondents agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that the session provided enough information so that they knew how to resolve an ethical dilemma;
 - 40% of respondents agreed strongly or agreed somewhat that the training helped them actually resolve an ethical dilemma (32% had not encountered such a situation).

- Employees welcome additional ethics education and training; two-thirds of respondents think their agency would benefit from an ethics presentation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Board of Ethics and executive director wish to acknowledge the following county employees for their work and support of this initiative.

- **Al Boss**, Web Developer, Office of Information and Research Management. Mr. Boss provided essential technical development and resource support related to the quiz and survey.

- **Michael Jacobson**, Performance Management Director, Executive's Office. Mr. Jacobson provided valuable consultation on the quiz and survey development.

- **Christine Lange**, Communications Manager, Department of Executive Services. Ms. Lange worked to ensure necessary technical support and placement on the ethics Web site.

- **Peter Toliver**, Administrative Specialist, office of the Board of Ethics. Mr. Toliver provided support and data management to ensure accurate information for this report.

Helping Employees Make Ethical Decisions