

Public Relations Society of America
Board of Ethics and Professional Standards
Ethics and Standards Case Study Series

Public Relations Ethics Case Study #8
Professional Conflicts of Interest

You work in the public relations department of a major hospital. The hospital is planning an open house for a new children's center that will include field trips for students at a nearby grade school. One of your jobs is to plan and manage the children's events. To make the children's center friendly and inviting for the students, you propose hiring two professional clowns who are popular at kids' birthday parties. Your boss loves the idea and you're excited to book the clowns. You know you can count on the two you've proposed to effectively represent the hospital while they entertain the children. But one of the clowns is your brother-in-law and he and your sister own the party store that handles the clown bookings. What do you do?

1. Identify the ethical issues and/or conflicts.
2. Determine internal/external factors likely to influence your decision.
3. Choose key values that apply.
4. Consider parties who will be affected by your decision and evaluate the public relations professional's obligation to each one.
5. Select ethical principles to guide your decision making.
6. Make a decision and offer a brief rationale.

Guidance for Case 8

[Professional Standards Advisory PS-11: Professional Conflicts of Interest](#)

Conflicts of interest have the potential to undermine or compromise the impartiality, credibility or trustworthiness of a practitioner due to the possibility of a clash between the practitioner's self-interest and a professional interest, or their public interest, or their client's interest.