

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

Public Relations Ethics Case Study #5

Plagiarism

One of your agency's largest clients is a leading international airline and the client has asked you to write a speech for the Chairman of the Board that will be delivered at an International Air Transport Association gathering in Geneva, Switzerland. Your client hopes to use the speech as a springboard to open discussion about the subsidies many airlines receive from governments in the countries where these carriers are based. Your client's position is that this creates unfair competition and lowers the subsidized airlines' standards of service, safety and security. Your deadline is immediate and you have the worst writer's block you've ever had in your life. Through some random electronic searches, you find the perfect speech on YouTube. It was delivered by a member of Panama's National Assembly who opposed the government's generous subsidies of the country's state-owned airline and was posted with subtitles. You are ready to copy it and present it to your client because it is exactly what you have been directed to write. But you're uncomfortable because you know the speech will not be your own work. The deadline is immediate. 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 Study #5

Professional Standards Advisory PS-16: Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an all too frequent practice that involves the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work. The user fails to make any attempt to attribute the work. Plagiarism can be treated as fraud or theft of intellectual property. Plagiarism is different than copyright infringement, although both are violations of another's intellectual property rights.

Copyright infringement is the expropriation of another's words, images or other creative works without approval or compensation.

Plagiarism, on the other hand, deals with falsely representing another's ideas or words as your own. It is possible to be guilty of plagiarism even when copyright permission has been granted or waived or if the material is not copyrighted. This PSA addresses just the issue of plagiarism and its ethical implications within the practice of public relations.