Public Relations Ethics Case Study #4

The Worldwide Widget Co. (WWC) has a non-disclosure policy that's set in stone. Smythe & Smythe Public Relations has just won the WWC account and all the account personnel working on the account have signed WWC's non-disclosure policy form. The forms are on file in WWC's Law Dept.

Three weeks after work for the new client has started, the account team is given a briefing about a new product that will revolutionize the widget market. The new widget model is half the price of conventional widgets and does the work in half the time. In addition, secret tests show that it lasts twice as long. The account team is cautioned not to say a word about this to anyone – not even other S&S PR employees or family members.

After a month of work on a dynamite new public relations program that could preempt the market, S&S PR staffers are invited to a fund raising party for the Newtown Symphony Orchestra. The top echelon of influential Newtown citizens are at the function, where food and wine flow like – food and wine! An S&S PR junior staffer assigned to the WWC account lets the wine flow **too** freely and, before anyone can do anything about it, he discloses all he knows about the new widget to an editor with the *Newtown News*. You are president of S&S and hear him blab the final piece of information to the editor. You pull the staffer aside.

What are your next courses of action? With the staffer? With the editor? With your client?

1. Define the specific ethical issue and/or conflict.

2. Identify internal/external factors that may influence the decision.

3. Identify key values.

4. Identify the parties who will be affected by the decision and define the public relations professional's obligation to each.

5. Select ethical principles to guide the decision making process.

6. Make a decision and justify.