

While attending Santa Clara University, Ginny Erickson had a sales internship with a large radio corporation. Her job focused on selling advertising to untapped resources around the Bay Area. To find new business, she was advised to look for small, local companies that hadn't thought of advertising on the radio. The company's informal philosophy for its sales staff, as she learned from others on staff, was, 'Do the best for us, not for the client.'

Ginny struggled with the company's motto. The radio station had a young audience base, yet they were asking her to convince family-owned restaurants and other small business owners to advertise with them. The station was willing to do anything to make a profit. Ginny knew that these family-owned restaurants and other targeted companies shouldn't be interested in placing ads with such a young audience, but she was told to convince them anyway. To her, this philosophy was just dishonest.

Ginny was also told to "use whatever incentive, whatsoever." For a young female, this included pushing the limits of accepted, respectable business attire to attract customers.

She had a target to reach and, as a low-ranking member within the company, Ginny didn't voice her concern about the business practices to any of her superiors. With the lofty quotas they set, she felt she had no choice but to use their unethical practices. Besides, she needed the sales experience and a good reference to put on her resume.

*By Jessica Silliman, a 2006-07 Hackworth Fellow at The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics.*