

CROSSING THE LINE  
Or  
TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

By Fred Stielow & Howard Zogott

Seated around a long table is ALA's Professional Ethics Committee.

		<u>Chair</u>			
(Jeffrey)	(Walt)	(Simon)	(Nick)	(Harry)	(Trevor)
(Connie)	(Tess)	(Sally)	(Kate)	(Priscilla)	(Elizabeth)

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CHAIR

As Chair of the Professional Ethics Committee I call this meeting out of recess. Still on old business, we need to make a decision on the second skit for the "Ethics R Us" program at Annual. On the floor now for discussion is Walt's skit, "Crossing the Line." I'm sure Walt will be here shortly to answer your questions. . Anyway, has everyone read Walt's skit?

*(Grunts, Groans, Nods, Shrugs)*

What do you think?

*(Everyone speaking at once)*

*(Chair taps gavel lightly)* One at a time, please. Trevor.

TREVOR

Crap!

*(From SR, Walt enters, mumbles apologies for arriving late and sits)*

CHAIR

Glad you could make it, Walt. We're just getting started talking about your skit. And—

WALT

Good. I've made a few changes that I think really improve it. When I read it again, it just didn't seem to have any *oomph*! I mean this is a vital ethical issue. I want the audience to stand up and cheer for the workers. I think that the changes really clarify the ethical issues.

CHAIR

I think it might help us if you explain what the ethical issues are as you see them and how the skit will stimulate discussion on the ethical issues of the story.

WALT

You all remember, of course, the last Annual Conference and the picketing at the Conference Hotel. The lowest-paid employees were picketing the Hotel trying to get guaranteed—

TREVOR

One of the bastards spat at me.

WALT

You crossed the picket line! I mean that's what this skit's about—Librarians who work in unionized Libraries crossing a picket line. What could be more unethical than that?

TREVOR

Frankly, I don't think it's a Library issue at all.

KATE

I can see where it might be a Library issue, its just not as important as issues that hook into Intellectual Freedom issues too like filtering.

CONNIE

Maybe we need to decide what's a proper ethical issue for Libraries.

HARRY

I think I agree with Connie.

CHAIR

OK, what are proper ethical issues for Librarians?

*(All speaking at once, but the following can be distinctly heard):*

*“Censorship,”*  
*“Filtering,”*  
*“Crossing picket lines,”*  
*“Expensive dinners with Vendors,”*  
*“Favoritism,”*  
*“Mistreating subordinates,”*  
*“Outsourcing,”*  
*“Privacy,”*  
*“Confidentiality,”*  
*“Racial-profiling,”*  
*“Suspicious-looking people using the Library,”*  
*“Notifying the FBI.”*

TREVOR

Regardless of whether I think it’s a Library issue or not—and I don’t—it’s old history, finished, over and done with and I think it’s unnecessary to rake us and the Association over the coals.

HARRY

The Hotel staff told me it wasn’t really a picket line. Those weren’t hotel workers, but outside agitators.

WALT

Of course, they’d say that. But even if it wasn’t hotel employees, it was an informational picket line and union members are morally and ethically bound not to cross it—even Librarians!

KATE

I’m still not sure this is an issue for us. I mean, no one expected this. We all know that the Association was bound by contract—

WALT

Does that mean that we as individuals are permitted to behave unethically?

CONNIE

Look, if the Association cancelled the meetings there, they forfeit a tone of money.

TREVOR

Its over, live with it.

WALT

This union refused to cross our picket line at the Library. I didn’t cross theirs. And you shouldn’t have either.

CONNIE

Does it have to be about crossing a picket line? What about book mobile service to factories.

TREVOR

Their drumming kept me up half the night. How's that informational?

HARRY

A skit addressing labor disputes at a Library might very well be pertinent to a work-a-day librarian—

KATE

I wonder if it's the Association's ethics that we ought to look at. Is there an ethical distinction between us in our role as Librarian and our role as Association member?

WALT

I think that's a valid topic for discussion—for another skit. This one needs to be about Librarians crossing a picket line.

TREVOR

Even if they're not union members?

WALT

That doesn't absolve you from ethical behavior.

CHAIR

Walt, something you said sticks in my mind. You said you want the audience to stand up and cheer for the workers.

WALT

Absolutely!

CHAIR

How does that stimulate discussion? It seems to me it would need to be rather one-sided to have that effect.

WALT

By workers I meant Librarians too.

TREVOR

Those are old battles.

WALT

That's insensitive.

KATE  
Where's the intellectual freedom angle?

WALT  
This is about social responsibility!

CONNIE  
Where's the ethical issue?

WALT  
Isn't it self-evident?

HARRY  
How 'bout something less controversial.

WALT  
Where's your conscience?

TREVOR  
It's not a Library issue!

CHAIR  
Please, can we all not talk at once!

*(This last single line/short sentence section is repeated over and over with the speed of delivery gradually picking up until all is chaos and a cacophony of unintelligible words and sound. Throughout, the Chair is trying to restore order by banging his gavel, but to no avail, finally...)*

CHAIR  
*(SHOUTING)*

QUIET!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Thank you. Since we can't agree on whether this issue is an ethical issue for Librarians, worthy of a skit, and since we raised a number of questions concerning this issue—let's see what the audience thinks.

*(Facing and addressing the audience)*  
Well, what do you think?