



**KING COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS**

**REPORT ON THE  
2006 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY**

**HELPING EMPLOYEES MAKE ETHICAL DECISIONS  
TO ENSURE THE PUBLIC'S TRUST IN GOVERNMENT**

## **2006 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY REPORT**

### **2006 ETHICS QUIZ AND SURVEY – DESCRIPTION**

As part of its on-going awareness campaign, the Board of Ethics conducted the third annual ethics quiz and survey on October 16, 2006. Produced by the ethics office, the quiz is designed to raise awareness among county employees of the ethics code, the board and its office, and the services they provide. The board understands that education is an effective tool for encouraging ethical practices in King County, and that knowledge about the ethics code allows employees to follow its road map for fair dealings. The result is public trust and confidence, which are essential to the work performed by all King County employees.

This year's quiz not only tested employee knowledge of the code, but also allowed participants to give their opinions on ethics in King County. Individual responses are kept confidential, but are summarized in the following report.

### **DISTRIBUTION METHOD AND RESPONSE RATE**

Executive Sims announced the quiz on October 16<sup>th</sup> via a countywide global email inviting participation via web link. All county employees having computer access were able to take part. The initial announcement was followed on October 23<sup>rd</sup> with a reminder announcement in another employee global email. The survey remained open for completion for two weeks until October 31<sup>st</sup>. The vast majority of responses came on October 16-18<sup>th</sup> with some additional responses on October 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.

The quiz was designed as an online intranet format, meaning that only computers with county access could take part. In order to enable employees who have shared access through a common computer (for example at field facilities), there were no unique identifiers or restrictions placed on access to the quiz. Although there is a very slight possibility that someone might enter the quiz site more than once, given the number of overall responses, any multiple would have had a minimal impact on the summary results.

Of 11,000 county employees with computer access, 1851 or 17% took the quiz. The online response rate has declined over time with 25% response rate in 2004 and 21% in 2005.

Because the primary purpose of the survey was educational, rather than as research or as part of an evaluation, the survey was sent to all county employees with computer access. This means that the responses were voluntary, not randomly assigned, and that the survey population may or may not represent the county employee population as a whole. The results are however indicative of employee knowledge and opinions,

especially employees with ready computer access and does not represent the knowledge and opinions of field personnel without access.

### **EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO QUIZ QUESTIONS**

The following are the quiz questions, showing the percentage of correct responses and the correct answer. Percentage numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

*#1. You open your email to find a broadcast message from one of your staff who cannot use his tickets to The Greatest Show On Earth. He's offering his tickets at a good price. How do respond? **94.3% chose the correct response***

Answer: Use this as an opportunity to inform and educate your agency on appropriate use of county resources.

*#2. A vendor has done a great job for the county and, since you are the project manager, they ask you to write a testimonial for their use. How should you respond? **94.1% chose the correct response***

Answer. Tell them you will be happy to be listed as a reference for future jobs, but may not write a testimonial.

*#3. How do I know if I have a potential conflict of interest in my county work? **86.5% chose the correct response – the most inclusive of the four options***

- a. Your personal interests overlap with your official job responsibilities. (1.4% chose this answer)
- b. You speak with your supervisor or the Ethics Help Line about an ethical dilemma in the workplace. (6.6% chose this answer)
- c. Your financial interests overlap with your official job responsibilities. (5.5% chose this answer)

Answer. All of the above will tell you whether you have a potential conflict of interest.

*#4. While you are conducting an inspection at a swanky restaurant, the manager offers you a free meal for you and your family? May you accept? **99.3% chose the correct answer***

Answer. No. We may not accept gifts or meals from those doing business, or seeking to do business, with the county.

*#5. A county employee wants to add a second personal line on her county cell phone. May she? **96.9% chose the correct answer***

Answer. No. Adding a personal line to a county phone is use of county resources for personal convenience.

*#6. In your spare time, you serve on the board of a non-profit organization that accomplishes Great Things. You learn that it is applying for a grant from your agency. What do you do? **89.0% chose the correct response – the most inclusive of the four options***

- a. Call the Ethics Help Line for information and assistance. (8.3% chose this answer)
- b. Email your supervisor right away for direction about these circumstances. (2.1% chose this answer)

c. Ensure that your supervisor responds quickly in writing to resolve the matter and to give you the direction you need. (.6% chose this answer)

Answer. All of the above.

**#7. Why do we have a Code of Ethics anyway? 96.3 chose the correct response – the most inclusive of the three best options**

b. To help ensure the public's trust and confidence in county government. (1.6% chose this answer)

c. To provide guidance to county employees and elected officials. (1.0% chose this answer)

Answer. Both b and c.

**#8. I was hired by King County last month. Before that, I worked for ABC corporation. Now I've been assigned as project manager on developing a contract with ABC. Is this a problem? 99.3% chose the correct answer**

Answer. Yes. You are being assigned to contract matters related to your former employer and you should notify your supervisor right away.

**#9. My boss and I share an interest in real estate and we've set up a small business outside of our work at the county. Are there any ethical concerns about this? 94.8% chose the correct answer**

Answer. Yes. Supervisors may not engage in an outside business with anyone who reports to them.

**#10. Someone left "Support I-123" fliers on everyone's chairs last night after work. Is this okay? 98.5% chose the correct answer**

Answer. County employees may not take part in campaign activities using county resources.

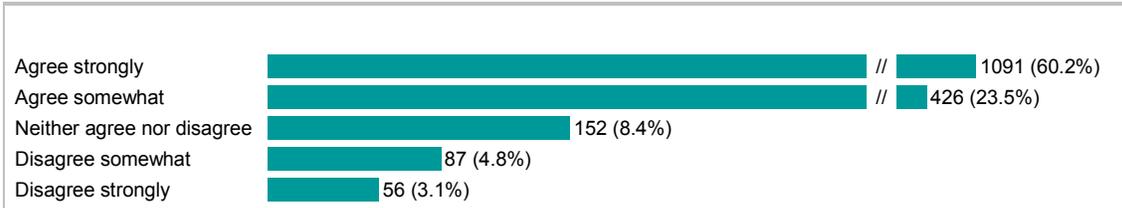
**#11. "I know where to turn to discuss ethical concerns or seek information." If true, please list all places or people you would turn to with ethical concerns or to seek information.**

Of the 1,400 employees who responded, they chose these places or people to turn to in order of frequency:

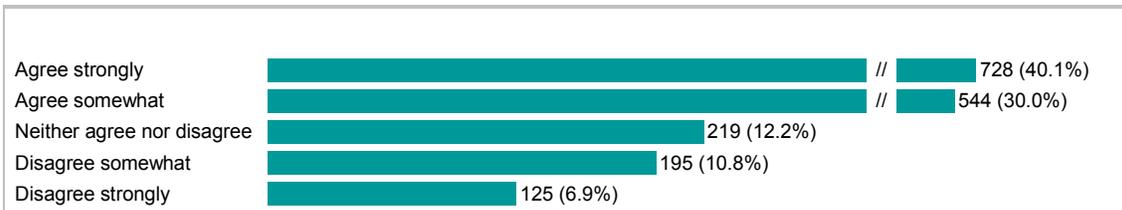
- Supervisor – manager
- Ethics Help Line
- Board of Ethics
- Experts in specialized fields (e.g. human resources, prosecuting attorneys office, employee assistance program, contracts, civil rights, ombudsman)
- Ethics office and staff
- Publications (e.g. ethics brochures, county policies and guidelines)
- Ethics web site

## **EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS**

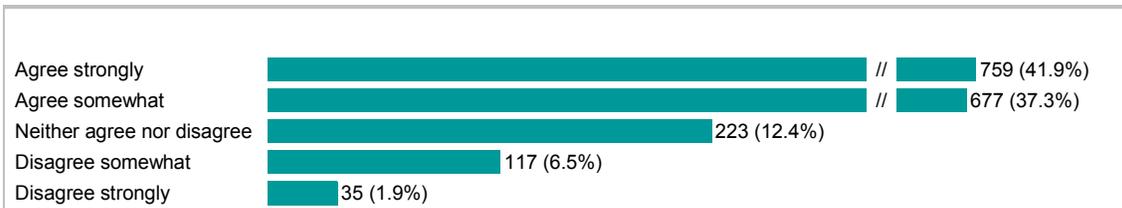
**#12. If I had an ethics-related question or concern at work, I know management would take it seriously. 83.7% agreed strongly or agreed somewhat to this question**



**#13. I feel confident that I could report an unethical practice without fear of retaliation. 70.1% agreed strongly or agreed somewhat to this question**



**#14. Overall, I think King County has an ethical work environment. 79.2% agreed strongly or agreed somewhat to this question**



## **EMPLOYEE ADVICE TO COUNTY MANAGERS**

**#15. What advice would you give to King County's management to help reinforce or strengthen the county's commitment to ethical conduct?**

Over 750 employees responded, offering this advice to management; responses are listed in order of frequency:

- Continue to communicate on ethics issues and provide resources (fliers, blogs, pamphlets, quizzes, more quizzes, newsletters with ethics scenarios, FAQs, computer pop-ups, etc.)
- Hold regular ethics presentations and trainings – in formal classes and in staff meetings – for managers and staff
- Lead by example
- Hold everyone – elected officials, managers and staff – equally accountable

- Provide consistent communication on ethics values and expectations
- Listen openly to employee concerns and take timely and appropriate action
- Enforce the rules and policies
- Deal fairly with employees on disciplinary ethics issues
- Continue what you're doing!
- Hire and promote skilled individuals into management positions

**DEMOGRAPHICS – PARTICIPATION BY DEPARTMENT AND SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES**

Do You Supervise Others?

Yes: 29.3%

No: 70.7%

What Is Your Department?

Department	% of employee to total county employees	% of total respondents
Adult and Juvenile Detention	6%	7%
Assessments	2%	2.6%
Community & Human Services	3%	3.4%
County Council	1%	1%
Development & Environmental Services	2%	3%
District Court	1.5%	2%
Executive's Office	.5%	2.4%
Executive Services	10%	9%
Judicial Administration	1%	2%
Natural Resources & Parks	13%	18.4%
Prosecuting Attorney's Office	4%	2.5%
Public Health	12%	16.5%
Sheriff's Office	7%	7%
Superior Court	3%	3.2%
Transportation	34%	20%

Generally, the number of respondents per department matched the department's relative employee population within county government, especially considering certain departments have a significant number of employees without access to computers (such as Transportation).

## CONCLUSIONS

- The high number of employees voluntarily taking part in the ethics quiz and survey indicate that employees have a continuing interest in workplace ethics.
- Employees have a solid, basic understanding of the King County Code of Ethics demonstrated by the high percentage of correct responses to questions.
- Employees generally seek out and trust their managers when asking about and reporting on ethics concerns in the workplace, and have a high regard for ethics in the workplace overall. The lower response rate about fear of retaliation indicates that this topic might be an area for further education and communication.
- When giving advice to managers on strengthening ethics in the workplace, employees stressed several themes: open communication and informational resources, education, strong leadership, and fair enforcement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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- **Michael Jacobson**, Performance Management Director, Executive's Office. Mr. Jacobson provided valuable consultation on the quiz and survey development, as well as the reporting methodology.