

“Help My Boss File Questionable Expense Reports?”

The company I work for only covers certain expenses on business travel, such as only breakfast and dinner, but not lunch alone (without a business purpose). I think they figure that if you were home you would have to buy your own lunch no matter what --- but breakfast and dinner can't be at your home on the business trip so the company should pay. My boss believes his solo lunches should be covered by the company and that it can easily afford the modest lunches he orders (\$15 usually). Therefore, he tells me to expense his solo lunch charges as dinners, or as dinner appetizers. The people that process these expenses in India have no way of telling if the charge is lunch or dinner and as a result, my boss always gets reimbursed for an expense that the company says they will not cover. These are little expense issues in a large company, but I am curious what that dollar amount adds up to each year. I feel like my role is to serve my boss rather than rebel but I'd like some advice on this.

--RD

Dear RD

I think what's going on is wrong and you need to get out of doing it as soon as you can. It's true that the primary responsibility is your boss's and he is ordering you to do this. It is true that the harm to the company seems minor. But let's think about why it is wrong and why it can't go on. Then let's strategize about how to bring about change.

As a Christian you know how consistently we are told that God detests “lying lips” (all through the Proverbs), that we must “not bear false witness” (the 9th commandment), that Satan is “a liar and the father of lies” while Jesus is “the truth” (John 8:44; 14:6), that we should “put away falsehood and speak the truth” (Ephesians 4:25), and so on. So you don't want any part of that out of respect for God alone. In addition, business (like all human relationships) is based on trust and trustworthiness. Even if it seems small, a habit of fudging the truth corrupts your character and inevitably leads to further, more serious compromises. And as soon as your dishonesty is discovered, it will undermine people's trust in you. Finally, on a practical level, you need to realize that as long as you go along with this you are also guilty of assisting and covering up wrongdoing. You could be fired. The company has a stated policy and you are helping someone violate it.

So what to do? It depends somewhat on your relationship with your boss. Telling him that your own faith and values totally prohibit you from doing this anymore, warning him about the trouble and difficulty he (and you) are flirting with . . . great if you are strong and secure enough to approach him one-on-one. I would be sure my small group was aware of what I was doing and praying for me and ready to support me, emotionally and spiritually and maybe even financially, if I get fired for bringing it up. I would be ready to write up the situation and give detailed evidence to HR if my conversation didn't go well. I might confide in a trusted senior colleague at work and ask them to be with me when I speak to my boss if I am nervous. I might actually approach him by email to try to create a “paper trail.” I would urge the boss to reimburse the company for what he had wrongly collected.

Then I would offer to work with my boss on articulating a strong case for the company to change the policy so it includes modest lunch reimbursements. Create a positive, win-win outcome.