**Ethics Case Study**

**Instructions:** Read the case study and share responses to the discussion questions.

**To Sell or Not to Sell?**

Susan Jones works for an agricultural chemical company, Agri-Cide. She is the field representative for the 100-mile radius around Alachua County. In this county, pineapples are the main cash crop that her company specializes in. Her supervisor is Alice Contrary, who is also in charge of all the field representatives in Florida.

Agri-Cide has recently introduced a controversial insecticide that targets pinyworms, the main affliction of the pineapple crop in this area. It is Susan’s job to sell and endorse this new option to the surrounding pineapple growers. Susan has reservations about the product, and decides to confront her supervisor with her fears. She walks into Alice’s office just after lunchtime, and Alice is on the telephone with the regional sales supervisor. Susan hears this conversation:

"But Bob… I know our sales are down, but the farmers have not accepted our new crop protection chemical completely," Alice said. "I know; we just need more time…yes I understand. OK Bob. All right, I will see what I can do."

Alice then hangs up the telephone and sees Susan standing before her. "Hey Susan," Alice sighs, "What can I do for you?"

"Well Alice, I have a few questions about our new chemical application," Susan said. "How safe is it exactly for the ground water? I have read up on the new product, and the results seem a little inconclusive."

Alice replies, "Well, you don’t really think we would send you out to the farmers with a product that is unsafe, do you? Of course, with any new chemical product, there are bound to be a few reservations. It is your job to sell a product, not question it."

"I know Alice," Susan says, "but I have a problem selling a product I don’t fully back to farmers who trust my word. How can I sell it if I don’t fully understand it?"

"Well the FDA approved the use of it, and that is all the reassurance you should need," Alice said. "I was just on the telephone with Bob and he is not happy with your area sales, Susan. I am getting chewed out because we aren’t up to the same level of sales we were at the previous year. I think you need to worry about just doing your job."

Susan frowned and said, "OK Alice, I will do my best."

The next day Susan went to call on a long-time customer, Bert Shoe. Bert has been an innovative farmer as long as Susan has known him.

"Hey there Bert! How is life treating you?" Susan asks.

"Just great Susan!" Bert replies, looking at her like she just brightened his day. "Have you brought me some of that stuff you said would surely clear up my pinyworm problem?"

"Sure did, Bert. I feel like I should let you know a couple of things first, though. I don’t know exactly what our product will do to the water in the surrounding area. Probably nothing, but I am not sure, so I am letting you know," Susan said.

"That’s why I trust you Susan, I know I can count on you to tell it to me straight," Bert replied. "I don’t think I will buy any of that stuff just yet. You let me know how it turns out, and then we’ll see."

This conversation was pretty much repeated throughout the day with all the other customers Susan called on. By the end of the month, her sales were the lowest in the state. Alice repeatedly asked her if there was a problem she was having, and Susan just came back with the same points she had always brought up.

Bob called Alice again and demanded to know why the sales for the new chemical were so low. Alice said, "I just don’t feel as if our employees are behind the product 100%. Maybe we should do some more training with the chemical and see if that improves things."

"We don’t have that kind of time and money to invest in that right now Alice," Bob said. "We already invested a lot of hours and money training this sales force to go sell, sell, sell. I don’t really think we have a problem. If your team isn’t cutting it, maybe you need some new players. Or maybe the team needs a new coach."

"I see what you’re getting at, and I don’t think that will be necessary Bob," Alice said.

The next two weeks went by and Susan’s sales continued to be low. She was summoned to Alice’s office.

"Susan," Alice began, "you have done a fine job here at Agri-Cide, but I am afraid I am going to have to let you go. You know the tremendous pressure we are under to keep up our sales, and for the past few months you haven’t been keeping up, despite our many talks. I will be happy to provide you with references or any other recommendations you may need. I am truly sorry this partnership didn’t work out to be a win-win situation for everyone."

**Discussion Questions:**

* What would you have done if you were Susan? Alice?
* Is there any one else Susan could have talked with about her reservations?
* Are ethics worth losing your job? A guilty conscience over firing someone?