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Q10

Case study. You are an honest and responsible civil servant. You often observe the following: (a) There is a general perception that adhering to ethical conduct one may face difficulties to oneself and cause problems for the family, whereas unfair practices may help to reach the career goals. (b) When the number of people adopting unfair means is large, a small minority having a penchant towards ethical means makes no difference. (c) Sticking to ethical means is detrimental to the larger developmental goals (d) While one may not involve oneself in large unethical practices, but giving and accepting small gifts makes the system more efficient. Examine the above statements with their merits and demerits.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

• **You are an honest civil servant. Examine these statements with merits and demerits:**

(a) ethical conduct brings trouble to self and family, while unfair means help career; (b) when many are unfair, a small ethical minority makes no difference; (c) ethical means harm larger development; (d) small gifts make the system more efficient even if one avoids large crimes

Revision summary

Statement (a) notes a real cost to families; it does not justify unfair means, which also ruin careers later.

Statement (b) ignores that one clean file, one model junior and one court paper are already a difference.

Statement (c) confuses speed of a photo with development that can stand a collapse inquiry.

Statement (d) mistakes a gift for efficiency; Conduct Rules treat it as a hook.

An honest officer names the pressures and still refuses all four permissions.

Introduction

Four common excuses visit every honest officer. Each has a grain of social observation. None of them is a permission to join the rot.

Body**Stakeholders**

• You, your family, and juniors who will copy your file.

- Citizens who need a clean licence, school and road.
- Colleagues who use unfair means and those who do not.
- The service and the Constitution, which hired you as a trustee, not as a careerist.

Values

- Integrity, courage, justice, and a spirit of service.
- Empathy for family fear, without making the family a veto on the Constitution.
- **Accountability:** a career built on unfair means is still a public wrong.

(a) Ethics brings trouble; unfair means help the career

- **Merit of the observation:** transfers, isolation and delayed promotions do happen to officers who block a contract. Families feel that cost. Unfair networks sometimes look "successful" on a posting chart.
- **Demerit as a guide:** a career is not the purpose of the post. **Article 14** and the Conduct Rules do not yield because a spouse is anxious.
- Unfair means also destroy careers - a trap case, a later government, a media pile. The "help" is a loan from the next scandal.
- Ethical conduct can still be a long career if one is competent, documents reasons, and uses lawful forums against a mala fide transfer.
- **Duty:** refuse the premise that the family must be fed by a dirty file. Use welfare, honesty and skill; do not use the child as an argument for a bribe.

(b) A small ethical minority makes no difference

- **Merit:** one clean clerk cannot clean a whole directorate in a week. Collective action problems are real.
- **Demerit:** this is the bystander logic that keeps a massacre and a scam going. Difference is not only a revolution; it is a licence that was not sold today.
- A minority creates a file that a court can use, a junior who has a model, and a statistic that the next reformer can cite.
- If the statement were true, every reform from RTI to direct benefit transfer would have been impossible. They began as minorities.
- **Duty:** stay ethical, join other clean officers, and use systems that multiply one person's no - e-procurement, published queues.

(c) Ethical means harm larger development

- **Merit:** a delayed environmental hearing or a cancelled illegal contract can slow a ribbon-cutting. Some politicians call that anti-development.
- **Demerit:** a flyover that falls, a dam that silts a village without consent, or a fake skill-mission is not development. It is a photo.
- **Ethical means are how development lasts:** true bills, true soil tests, true beneficiaries. The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission** treated integrity as a development input, not as a luxury.
- "Larger goals" that need a false muster are not larger; they are a private goal wearing a public flag.
- **Duty:** be efficient and ethical. Cut delay that is laziness; do not cut the hearing that is justice.

(d) Small gifts make the system efficient

- **Merit:** in a clogged office, a box of sweets can feel like oil, and a culture may call it manners.

- **Demerit:** the small gift is how a large capture begins. It creates a debt. The next ask is a file, not a sweet.
- The Conduct Rules restrict gifts from persons with official dealings precisely because "efficiency" is the usual story.
- A system that needs gifts to move is inefficient by design. The reform is process, not petty corruption as lubrication.
- Even if one avoids large crimes, the small gift trains the citizen that the State is a shop and trains the officer that a price is normal.
- **Duty:** refuse, record if pressed, and fix the delay through supervision and e-service, not through a private tariff.

What you should do

- Treat all four as social diagnoses, not as moral permissions.
- Protect the family with honesty about risk, lawful savings, and a refusal to hide a corrupt lifestyle as "the children's future".
- **Seek postings and work methods that reduce lonely heroism:** teams, digital trails, and written orders.
- Report large and small capture through vigilance channels when you have evidence; do not become a public accuser without a file.

Flow diagram

Ethics hurts career -> Career is not the telos
 Minority is useless -> REJ2 Today's clean file still matters
 Ethics blocks development -> Fake development is not development
 Small gifts oil the system -> Gifts create debt
 Career is not the telos -> Stay honest and competent
 REJ2 -> Stay honest and competent
 Fake development is not development -> Stay honest and competent
 Gifts create debt -> Stay honest and competent

Conclusion

The four statements describe real pressures. They fail as ethics. Trouble is not a licence; a minority still matters; development that needs a lie is not development; a small gift is not oil, it is a hook.

Facts & figures

Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964

Restrict gifts and require integrity; they answer the 'small gift as oil' story in black letter.

Article 14, Constitution of India

Equal treatment; a career built on unfair means is a sale of this equality.

Second Administrative Reforms Commission

Treated ethics in governance as necessary for development outcomes, not as a brake on them.

Direct benefit transfer and e-procurement

System tools that let a small ethical minority have effects larger than one heroic no.

Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014

A statutory path, however imperfect, so that an honest officer is not only a lonely sermon.

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