

An Ethical Termination...

A couple of weeks ago, I was introduced to Mr. [] a software engineer by profession but in recent years has switched over to a more entrepreneurial path. His most recent set-up is comprised of an e-cigarette business.

On meeting [] a few matters became fairly certain: He was ambitious, had a focused mind-set but lacked business acumen. He pitched his product very well, highlighting the cost benefits and the low overhead costs that would sustain the business for the initial thirty-six months. What he needed was clear: a distribution channel. Although he had a decent relationship with his manufacturer, a packaging company and a moderate level of funding, he was short of a logistical system that would sell his products beyond local bars and taverns.

I flooded him with questions, occasionally to test his commitment to the business as well as to understand the (unknown to me) e-cigarette industry. After pursuing the matter further and doing some research on my own, I figured out how the product works. In brief, there's a cartridge that has some flavor in it and it promotes the inhaling process with the help of a battery.

I have always been opposed to smoking, but this was a product that was supposed to help people control or quit! Being the excited twenty-one year old that I am, I got to work. I got in touch with a few of my clients (from when I interned with Citigroup). One of them owned a line of gas stations down in []. I personally flew down to [], met with the chairperson, Mr. [] and gave him a few samples to test out; the

flavors included Chocolate, Mint, Tobacco and Cinnamon. Once the trial was successful he placed his first order: 2500 boxes. Each box retailed at \$19.99, I sold them to Mr. [] at \$11, buying them from [] at \$6.50. For each box that I distributed, I made a margin of \$4.50. I was proud.

~~I decided to call my father and blout about my latest conquest. His very first comment made me shrink. He asked if this was how I wanted to make money. He questioned if I had thought about the consequences of eventually distributing these cigarettes in all eighty gas stations. These remarks hit me so hard that I had to reconsider my priorities.~~

In a world where we are trying to cure cancer, I would be distributing it: wrapped in a layer of chocolate. My thought process was governed by cash flows rather than simple ethics, my judgment was clouded by the paycheck. Come to think of it, the e-cigarette industry cannot be one that would help people reduce or quit smoking: How can a successful business model be one that eventually dies out? If people stop using their products, they are no longer profitable; it would be ridiculous to believe that the purpose of the industry is to eventually stop consumers from consuming! Even if we decided to control the distribution by not marketing to children, not selling near schools, not selling flavors that appeal to kids, how long before I am no longer in control of what goes on.

I was not satisfied being the one responsible for even a single cancerous patient. One cannot put a price on someone life, it is the most basic principle of humanity. We must act responsibly no matter how high the reward is to do otherwise. Luckily for me, it wasn't too late. I terminated the distribution channel, being completely honest with both parties. They both seemed to grasp the gravity of my decision. This obviously did not stop [] from

manufacturing more e-cigarettes but it gave him something to think about. More importantly, it helped me understand that sometimes not doing something can add more value to society than doing something wrong. Money is simply a material object; I believe that responsibility, honesty and integrity, complemented with compassion are far more treasured. I thank my family, my friends and my university for always having my back. I do not regret my decision and I can state with the utmost confidence that I will not be the one add misery to this world.