

THINKING ETHICALLY

HOW SHOULD AN EMPLOYER WEIGH CONFLICTING VALUES?

One of the largest relief organizations in the United States recently struggled with HR policy. As a religious (Christian)-based organization, it may use religion as the basis for employment standards. This organization has developed policies in an employee conduct manual intended to ensure that employees demonstrate the beliefs and morals of its founders' faith. Among those requirements is "abstinence before marriage and fidelity in marriage."

The problem for the organization's board of directors was that some states—including Washington, where it is headquartered—have made same-sex marriage legal, so the organization could potentially receive job applications from people who have married a partner of the same sex. To respect the values of employees and donors who hold traditional religious views, the organization had been denying them employment.

The board decided that religious views in the United States had become diverse enough that it should begin to allow people in same-sex marriages to work for the organization. However, when the board announced the decision, many donors became upset; by some reports, about 10,000 child sponsorships have ended. The board quickly reversed its decision. The organization's

president expressed regret for not having consulted more with its community of supporters.

The organization tries to set high ethical standards for its employees. Neither the decision to allow hiring of workers in same-sex marriages nor the reversal of that decision violated the law as it applies to a religious-based organization. However, it did create embarrassing publicity for an organization that was trying to broaden its appeal and keep the focus on charity.

Questions

1. In this situation, whose rights were affected? What basic rights were at stake?
2. How well do you think the organization applied standards for ethical behavior? Explain.

Sources: Troy Anderson, "Why World Vision Changed Its Mind on Hiring Gays," *Charisma News*, March 13, 2015, <http://www.charismanews.com>; Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Analysis: World Vision's Gay Marriage Flip-Flop Reflects Evangelical Angst as Culture Shifts," *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 28, 2014, <http://www.sltrib.com>; Joel Connelly, "World Vision, in Reversal, Won't Hire Christians in Same-Sex Marriages," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 26, 2014, <http://blog.seattlepi.com>; Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "World Vision to Recognize Employees' Same-Sex Marriages," *Washington Post*, March 25, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.