

Ethics discussion exercise: Private blogs

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Facebook Fiasco

You are the business editor of your newspaper. Your publisher chairs the committee that's pushing for a tax break for businesses creating new jobs in your community's historic district. Of course this puts the news staff in a tough position because it's a controversial issue. Businesses in other parts of town say the tax breaks give businesses in the historic district an advantage. A taxpayer group calls the historic district a boondoggle. Of course, your development reporter is immersed in the issue and you are pleased with the balance and depth of your coverage in print and online. The publisher has been keeping a proper distance, but you are pushing for heavy coverage of the issue because of its importance to the community. A blog on the taxpayer group's web site reveals that the development reporter has been blogging about her assignments on her Facebook page. While she uses a pseudonym on the site, the photos are clearly her and in the blog she is complaining about specific assignments that she covered for you, wondering if the pressure for more coverage, which she is feeling from you, really is coming from the publisher. The taxpayer group blog trumpets this as proof that your coverage is slanted.

How do you handle the immediate situation?

What, if anything, do you do to address possible similar issues in the future?

How, if at all, do you address this issue with the public?