



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

## IEEE Cases 1999 - Not Lighting Up

### Author(s)

Stephen H. Unger

### Year

1999

### Description

A fictionalized case about an engineer who was fired for refusing to cut corners on a building project.

### Body

Will Morgan, a licensed electrical engineer, worked for a state university on construction and renovation projects. His immediate manager was an architect, and next in the chain of command was an administrator, John Tight, a man with no technical background. Tight, without talking to the engineers, often produced estimates on project costs that he passed on to higher university officials. In those cases, not infrequent, where it became evident that actual costs were going to exceed his estimates, he would pressure the engineers to cut corners.

One such occasion involved the renovation of a warehouse to convert some storage space into office space. Among the specifications detailed by Morgan was the installation of emergency exit lights. These were mandated by the building code. As part of his effort to bring the actual costs closer to his unrealistic estimate, Tight insisted that the specification for emergency lights be deleted.

Will strongly objected on obvious grounds. When he refused to yield, Tight brought

charges against him, claiming that he was a disruptive influence. Although his immediate superior, the architect, did not support these charges, he did not fight for Morgan, who was ultimately dismissed by the university. Morgan is now suing for wrongful discharge.

## **Notes**

Author: Stephen H. Unger, Columbia University.

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## **Discipline(s)**

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Electrical Engineering