

# THE ROLE OF SECRETARIAL PROFESSIONALS IN TACKLING CORRUPTION

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## ***Abstract***

*Various measures and strategies have been taking by different government in order to tackle corruption. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the categories of corruption, the causes and forms of corruptions adopted by the secretaries, the role of secretaries in tackling corruption. Secretarial profession is a career with technical skill that helps to achieve standard when code of ethics of the profession are properly followed. Therefore, for a secretary to tackle corruption must maintain the rules of his professional ethics code of conduct.*

## **Introduction**

Corruption has a devastating effect on government and private organisations, especially corruption in the public service. Corruption costs the government millions every year, money that could have been spent on delivering services. Corruption also means that some people get an unfair advantage because they can afford to bribe officials to do them special favours. An effective and efficient Service is easily undermined by poor ethics and corruption.

## **The concept of corruption**

Wikipedia:- define Corruption is as a form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit. Corruption may include many activities including bribery and embezzlement, though it may also involve practices that are legal in many countries. Government, or 'political', corruption occurs when an office-holder or other governmental employee acts in an official capacity for personal gain.

The Transparency International defines corruption as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain or the use of public office for private gain. In other words, use

of official position, rank or status by an office bearer for his personal benefit constitutes corruption. Therefore, corrupt behavior would include, bribery, fraud, stealing the public resources, partiality, favoritism, seizure of public assets for private use etc.

Oxford dictionaries also define Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery.

## Meaning

Corruption is a term with many meanings, but generally it entails misusing one's office for a private gain or unofficial end. It involves both a monetary and non-monetary benefit. Bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, scams, fraud, 'grease money', and opportunism readily spring to mind. Usually, the very work environment and culture either foster or discourage corrupt practices as the following two scenarios indicate:

You work in an organization where everybody steals. Would you join in? If you do, you will probably not be caught since investigators are busy chasing other thieves, and even, if caught, the chances of prosecution and a severe penalty for such common crime will be low. Therefore, you too steal. As everyone is now stealing, more goods to replace those stolen have to be acquired. Production costs rise and these are passed to the consumer in the form of higher prices. Also, as new recruits join the organization, they too are trained how to steal, and the cycle continues. On the other hand, if you work in an entity where theft is rare and the chances of your being caught and punished are high, you will most definitely choose not to steal.

### Here are few different forms of corruption:

- **Bribery:** Taking money to give people preferential treatment. Example: Secretary accepting bribes to favour someone who is not qualified to be employed.
- **Embezzlement:** Stealing money or resources that are supposed to be under your control.
- **Fraud:** Making false claims for benefits. Example: applying for false social grants and pocketing the money.
- **Extortion:** When a secretary forces someone to give him/her benefits in exchange for acting/ not acting in a particular way.
- **Abuse of power:** Secretary using one's power or position of authority to improperly benefit or discriminate against another person. Example: a lecturer asks for sexual favours in return for passing a student.

- **Abuse of privileged information:** Using information you have access to because of your job to benefit someone who can make money from it.
- **Favouritism:** Unfairly providing services or resources to friends. Example: a head of department makes sure that all her friends in the department go overseas with her on official trips.
- **Nepotism:** Giving jobs or services unfairly to family members. Example: giving a contract for training to a company owned by your spouse without going through the proper procurement procedures.

All the above actions are illegal. They are covered by a law and abuse of professional ethic and code of conduct. A secretary is not allowed to accept anything from a client or member of the public that is meant to make them favour that person above others.

No property of the organisation may be misused or used for the benefit of someone not entitled to it. It is also a corruption to offer anything to a secretaries that is meant to influence the way they perform their duties.

### **The Techniques or Forms of Corruptions by Secretaries**

- Falsification of records, issuance of false documents
- **Alteration of records:** Wittingly makes any false entry, or erases any work or letter, or changes any record etc.
- **Official misconduct:** Using confidential information for personal benefit or to harm another.
- **Embezzlement of public property:** Secretary lawfully or unlawfully comes into possession of any public moneys or public property and knowingly converts any of such public moneys or property to his own use or to any use other than the office use authorized by law.
- **Discloses confidential information:** gained in the course or by reason of their position for personal financial gain.
- **Improper gifts:** Receiving a gift or compensation for the performance of the duties and responsibilities of his official position. Or a person knowingly gives, offers, or promises any pecuniary benefit that the purpose of the donor in making the gift is to influence the Secretary in the performance of his official duties.

### **The Role of Secretary in Tackling Corruption**

The role of secretary required a high degree of self-motivation, excellent interpersonal skills, a demonstrated commitment to the institution, tact and diplomacy and unquestioned personal and professional integrity. The extent of trust in the role, in their view, extended to the whole institutional environment, where the secretary might be expected to act, 'as an honest broker in his place of work Oloyede

Jamiu 2013. The code of conduct of the secretarial profession is one of the key instrument in tackling corruption in his/her profession.

Lal Balkaran added that secretary can tackle corruption being the first set of gatekeepers to ensure that transactions are valid, at arms-length, captured, and properly recorded according to established standards. And “as professionals with a duty to protect the public interest, they are bound by rigorous codes of professional and personal ethics calling for the highest levels of integrity and objectivity.” Thirdly, “their key strategic positions within an organization mean that they very often have access to highly privileged and confidential information.

**Therefore secretary must:**

- ❖ Establish and maintain an ethical culture of his profession and that of the organisation in tackling corruption
- ❖ Assess the risk of fraud and corruption in their area of work
- ❖ Put in place policies, strategies, processes and procedures to prevent possible fraud and corruption
- ❖ Put the necessary controls in place to ensure compliance with these policies, strategies, processes and procedures
- ❖ Work with the code of conduct of his profession and that of the organisation to tackle corruption.
- ❖ Report any corrupt act to the relevant authority
- ❖ Use the **Whistle-blower's**

**Secretary and Professionalism In tackling corruption**

Professionalism is the conduct, aims or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or professional person; it implies quality of workmanship or service. Every organization knows that a professional reputation is the difference between success and failure and they seek to keep their most professional staff. Professionalism is all about success and influence; having a reputation for excellence and being thought of as someone who exhibits professionalism under any circumstances can open doors for you either in the workplace or in your personal ambition.

**Below are some professional service that can be used by secretaries to tackle corruption:**

**Always strive for excellence;** this is the first rule to achieving greatness in whatever endeavor you undertake this is the quality that makes you and your work stand-out. Excellence is a quality of service which is unusually good and so surpasses ordinary standards, it should be made a habit for it to make a good impression on your

bosses and colleagues.

**be trustworthy;** in today's society trust is an issue and any employee who exhibits trustworthiness is on a fast track to professionalism. Trustworthiness is about fulfilling an assigned task and as an extension- not letting down expectations, it is been dependable, and reliable when called upon to deliver a service. In order to earn the trust of your bosses and colleagues, worth and integrity must be proven over time.

**Be accountable;** to be accountable is to stand tall and be counted for what actions you have undertaken, this is the blameworthiness and responsibility for your actions and its consequences- good or bad.

**be courteous and respectful;** courteousness is being friendly, polite and well mannered with a gracious consideration towards others. It makes social interactions in the workplace run smoothly, avoid conflicts and earn respect. Respect is a positive feeling of esteem or deference for a person or organization; it is built over time and can be lost with one stupid or inconsiderate action. Continued courteous interactions are required to maintain or increase the original respect gained.

**be honest, open and transparent;** honesty is a facet of moral character that connotes positive and virtuous attributes such as truthfulness, straightforwardness of conduct, loyalty, fairness, sincerity, openness in communication and generally operating in a way for others to see what actions are being performed. This is a virtue highly prized by employers and colleagues, for it builds trust and increases your personal value to all.

**be competent and improve continually;** competence is the ability of a secretary to do a job properly, it is a combination of knowledge, skills and behavior used to improve performance. Competency grows through experience and to the extent one is willing to learn and adapt. Continuous self development is a pre-requisite in offering professional service at all times.

**Always be ethical;** ethical behavior is acting within certain moral codes in accordance with the generally accepted code of conduct or rules. It is always safe for a secretary to “play by the rules”. This is always the best policy and in instances the rule book is inadequate, acting with a clear moral conscience is the right way to go. This may cause friction in some organizations but ethical organizations will always stand by the right moral decisions and actions of their employees.

**Always be honorable and act with integrity;** honorable action is behaving in a way that portrays “nobility of soul, magnanimity, and a scorn of meanness” which is derived from virtuous conduct and personal integrity. This is a concept of “wholeness or completeness” of character in line with certain values, believes, and principles with consistency in action and outcome.

**be respectful of confidentiality;** confidentiality is respecting the set of rules or promise that restricts you from further and unauthorized dissemination of

information. Over the course of your career, information will be passed on to you in confidence – either from the organization or from colleagues- and it is important to be true to such confidences. You gain trust and respect of those confiding in you and increase your influence within the organization.

**Set good examples;** applying the foregoing rules helps you improve your professionalism within your organization but it is not complete until you impact knowledge on those around and below you. You must show and lead by good example. Being a professional is about living an exemplary live within and without the organization.

Professionalism is highly valued by every organization today and professionals are hardly out of work. Apply the professionalism to tackle corruption and enjoy a wonderful, professional and prosperous career.

### **Secretaries and Ethical in Tackling Corruption**

Ethics can be defined as the moral values of human conduct and the rules that govern the way we should behave. Each profession has its own ethics that define the correct way of behaving. For example the secretary is always expect to respect confidentiality as part of secretarial Professional ethics and code of conduct.

We have dealt with corruption and the ethics involved, but there are many other kinds of ethical behaviour that apply to all workplaces – for example don't accept bribery because it's buys one's conscience and the right to say no and not being rude or abusive to your boss. Since ethics are about moral behaviour they cover the whole range of our actions at work. The Constitution guide us about the ethics that are specific to our service.

The secretary have a key role to play in prevention, detection of corruption. The responsibility and accountability for fraud and corruption can never be delegated, but the secretary can combat corruption by the following:- Secretaries can make use of expert advice and help from others such as internal auditors and legal advisers. Managers are also the role models for ethical behaviour and have to deal firmly with unethical behaviours among their staff.

### **Reporting Corruption**

There is a special law to protect people who report corruption in their offices. It is known as '**the Whistle-blower's Act**'. It ensures that whistle-blowers cannot be victimised or dismissed for reporting corruption, especially if their managers are involved.

There are many other practices that are a form of corruption, but which may not lead to a jail sentence if you are caught. They will however be dealt with by boss, and may lead to dismissal. These include things like misusing government resources (like cars, copiers and computers).

Corruption costs the government millions of naira's every year. Corruption can happen at any level in the public service, and can involve managers, secretary, staff, suppliers and the people they serve. The more power and access to resources people have, the higher the risk that they may be tempted into corrupt or unethical behaviour.

Secretaries are often very high risk because they work with executives who make decisions and they understand the system. Staff who work in front offices, where they directly deliver services or take money from the public, are also high risk. The people they serve may be corrupt and try to pay for special favours. Suppliers and contractors may also be corrupt and try to subvert the proper tender processes or deliver less than they are supposed to.

While every public servant and member of the public has a role to play in watching out for, and reporting corruption, there are special staff dedicated to rooting out corruption. They are people like secretaries, auditors, security staff and compliance officers.

## **Conclusion**

Tackling corruption starts at the top with clear commitment from Leadership to the culture of integrity and the fundamentals of good fairness, accountability, transparency, and responsibility. Boards of directors, who are ultimately in charge of the organisations, ministries and companies overall strategy and conduct, must set the course accordingly.

Yet, in order to be effective, the principles of corporate governance and business ethics and professionalism need to be translated into daily operations and internalized by employees at all levels.

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