



Tech Whistleblowing Essentials: Conducting a Personal Assessment

This resource is meant to help you make informed decisions, to give a balanced and concrete overview of the possibilities and pathways, and to remove some of the uncertainty that so many former whistleblowers experienced in order to build your own overall strategy.

These are questions to consider when you are thinking about speaking out regarding wrongdoing at your company. Not all of them will apply in every case, and you shouldn't feel you need to answer positively to all of them before speaking out. These questions are helpful to assess where you are and what you are willing to go through in order to speak out.

“One of the most important pieces of advice is that the world may not believe that the issue has the same significance that the whistleblower thinks it has.” **Ben Wizner, Director of the ACLU Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project**

My objectives

1. What do I hope to achieve by speaking out? What are my intentions? What impact do I want to have? How realistic is it that I will make this impact? What are the paths/leverages to achieving my goals?
2. What level of risk (professional, financial, legal, personal, etc.) am I willing to take to achieve my goals?
3. Would I be okay if the information I revealed didn't have the impact or achieve the objectives I wanted it to?

“Sometimes whistleblowers' valid objective is to do the right thing so they can live with themselves, regardless of the impact.” **Tom Devine, Legal Director of the Government Accountability Project**

4. What would I like my life to look like after speaking out? What would I like to see happen to be at peace with my decision so that I can move on?
5. Why is speaking out externally the best option over an alternative solution (i.e., internal reporting, speaking with colleagues, talking to the board, etc.)?

The Signals Network is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that enables whistleblowers and international journalists to work seamlessly together to hold powerful interests accountable. As you read these legal considerations, remember that there is no one right way to speak out. This resource doesn't and is not intended to provide specific legal advice, and the considerations discussed herein are not universally applicable. This is not a roadmap to bring the whistleblowing path to zero risk.



Whistleblowing process

1. Is this objectively misconduct? Am I in a position to know that what I see as misconduct really is a misconduct? Does my job position provide sufficient insight to ensure my conclusions are not the mistaken product of tunnel vision, even if my information is accurate?
2. Will knowledgeable peers and colleagues support my concerns, and help to expand the record from my personal knowledge?
3. Have I read other accounts of whistleblowers to understand what the process can be like?
4. Am I willing to commit to a multi-year endeavor (one year, three years, five years, or more) and what support will I need to do so?
5. Am I willing to invest significant amounts of time working with lawyers, educating NGOs, government investigators, Congress, and the media?
6. Do I understand how to engage properly with the media?
7. How do I feel about repeated public speaking engagements?

Emotional support

1. Do I have an emotional support system? Who do I turn to for emotional support? (Partner, family, friends, religious mentor, professional mentor, therapist, etc.)
2. Are there other people at the company who would help me in this effort without getting me in trouble?
3. Do I have a plan for countering retaliation or negative things the company may say about me?
4. Can I remain sufficiently centered and detached to emotionally withstand inevitable smear campaigns?
5. Who are my allies and who are the people who would work against my effort?
6. Am I prepared for the potential trauma caused by whistleblowing?
7. Do I have a system of evaluating who I can trust with sensitive information?
8. Do I have pre-existing medical conditions that could be aggravated by stress?

Legal support

1. Do I know where to find legal support for my case? What type of lawyer do I need to reach out to (i.e., employment lawyer, whistleblower lawyer, healthcare fraud lawyer, etc.)?
2. Do I have a secure way of reaching out? Personal phone/computer? Signal Messenger app? Protonmail?

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3. Do I have a way to pay for a lawyer if they do not work fully on contingency?
4. Do I have a friend or a family member who is a lawyer? To advise me? To find the right lawyer? To help read my lawyer engagement letter, etc?
5. Have I prepared a concise summary of my case, and a timeline of key events to have ready for initial interviews with prospective lawyers?

Employment

1. Will I try to find another job before revealing the information?
2. What is my exit plan for my current role? Should I resign? What happens if I get fired? What will happen to my immigration status (if applicable)?
3. What other kinds of jobs would I like to have?
4. Would I be okay not working in this industry again?
5. Would I be okay not working in a similar role again?

Finances

1. What benefits will I need to cover (health care, child care, education repayment, etc.) if I lose my job? What is my plan for paying for those? (See the [Budget Template](#) to help assess what costs you'll have coming up)
2. How much savings do I have?

Whichever path you choose — anonymity or public disclosure — be decisive. The worst approach you can take is to remain semi-anonymous.” **Tom Devine, Legal Director of the Government Accountability Project**

Considerations about staying anonymous

1. Will an anonymous internal disclosure effect change? Or will it give the wrongdoers an opportunity to cover up the problem?
2. Does the anonymous channel, such as a hotline, operate with credible, effective technology to prevent exposure?
3. Will remaining anonymous sustain my access to ongoing evidence and developments that the institution is trying to conceal?
4. Can I prove my allegations with information/documents that do not require my public explanation?
5. Can this information/documentation be traced back to me because only a small group of people have access to them or because my copies are uniquely marked? (Beware of trace-backs through printers' identifications or email trails.)

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6. How likely is it that I will be the focus of suspicion because of my previous efforts to raise concerns?
7. Can I act nonchalantly when these documents are disclosed so as not to attract suspicion?
8. Do I feel comfortable and justified in being evasive or not telling the complete truth if confronted by my boss about the disclosure?
9. Am I prepared for the possibility that somehow my anonymity is broken without my consent?

Considerations about going public

1. Are my family and I financially and mentally prepared for a protracted public fight with my employers and exposure to attacks to prove my allegations? And to try to retain a job?
2. Am I mentally ready to have my fellow workers and perhaps some friends turn against me because my public disclosures threaten the institution's health and their jobs?
3. Will going public cut off support from witnesses who would otherwise back my charges in official proceedings?
4. Will going public cut off the flow of evidence necessary to prove my charge or more effectively make a difference, and, if so, are the benefits from public solidarity more significant?
5. Am I ready for personal attacks against my character and to have any past indiscretions made public?
6. Do I have enough evidence to prove my charges without having to go back to my workplace?
7. Even if I can prove my initial allegations, would I be more valuable if I didn't go public and kept my access to new information?
8. Am I sure that my motivations are to expose the wrongdoing on behalf of the public interest and not just for revenge, a quest for financial gain, or public attention?
9. Am I financially and mentally ready to risk my career?
10. Am I ready to have the professional reputation of someone who attacked their employer?

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