

Whistleblower Attorney Suspended for Misconduct



Summary: *An attorney in a whistleblower case against her former employer has been suspended for 60 days for disclosing information to multiple groups.*

A lawyer in a whistleblower case has been suspended for 60 days after releasing confidential information to reports and regulators. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals handed down the punishment to attorney M. Adriana Koeck, now known as Adriana Sanford, according to the ABA Journal.

Sanford, a lecturer at Loyola Marymount University, is not the only lawyer in trouble. Lynnee Bernabei of Washington D.C. is receiving an informal admonition and G. Robert Blakey, a [Notre Dame Law](#) professor, was informally admonished three years ago.

Sanford worked for General Electric before being fired in 2006. She was concerned that GE was assisting customers in Brazil avoid value-added taxes by falsifying the regions to where the goods were shipped. Sanford improperly divulged information to a newspaper reporter, the U.S. Attorney's office, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Brazilian government. The original ethics complaint accused Bernabei, who represented Sanford in the whistleblower case, and Blakey of helping Sanford of misconduct for helping disclose the information.

The National Law Journal and the Legal Profession Blog reported that the Court of Appeals decided on the suspension in an opinion Thursday. She was not part of the disciplinary proceedings and did not contest anything. The opinion stated:

In this case, the Board of Professional Responsibility has adopted the Ad Hoc Hearing Committee's uncontested findings that respondent M. Adriana Koeck violated Rule of Professional Conduct 1.6 (a) when she improperly disclosed confidences and secrets of her former employer to a newspaper reporter. In addition, the Board has determined that respondent violated Rule 1.6 (a) by making separate disclosures of confidences to the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois, the government of Brazil, and the Securities and Exchange Commission. Based on its determination that Respondent committed four separate rule violations, the Board has recommended a sixty-day suspension with a fitness requirement. Respondent did not participate in these disciplinary proceedings at any stage, and she did not file any exceptions to the Committee's report or to the Board's Report and Recommendation.

Bloomberg News stated:

A prominent attorney to whistle-blowers was admonished by a Washington disciplinary panel Aug. 30 for helping a fired General Electric in-house attorney leak damaging information about GE to law enforcement officials and journalists. The admonition – issued by the District of Columbia Board of Professional Responsibility and directed at against plaintiffs' lawyer Lynne Bernabei – could bring an end to a trio of consolidated discipline cases that has drawn the ire of the D.C. whistle-blower bar. The proceedings arose out of Bernabei's representation of Adriana Koeck, who was also a responded in this case. The ethics charges against Bernabei, Koeck, and a third lawyer – Notre Dame Law Professor G. Robert Blakey – were tied to events that occurred after GE fired Koeck in 2006.

Do you think people should get in trouble for publicizing illegal or unethical practices? Share your thoughts with us in the comments below.

To learn more about whistle-blowers, read these articles:

- [Martin & Seibert Whistleblower Sues for Wrongful Termination](#)
- [Doral Bank Charged with Murdering a Whistleblowing Bank Executive](#)
- [NSA Whistleblower Snowden Emerges from Hiding to Discuss Extradition](#)

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