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CBC's editor-in-chief says Evan Solomon didn't meet ethics standard



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CBC fired host Evan Solomon after the Star reported that he was taking secret commission payments related to art sales involving people he dealt with as a host.

By: Cassandra Szklarski The Canadian Press, Published on Wed Jun 10 2015

The editor-in-chief of CBC News says the public broadcaster represents the “very highest standard of journalistic conduct and ethics” and former host Evan Solomon did not meet that benchmark.

Jennifer McGuire issued a statement to CBC employees Wednesday, a day after it fired the host of *Power & Politics*.

That move [came in the wake of a Star report that alleged Solomon secretly brokered lucrative art sales to wealthy contacts he also approached for interviews.](#)

McGuire said she could give few specifics on the Solomon case but added the decision to cut ties to the host was made shortly before the Star piece was published.

She called it “another difficult week” for the CBC, which has been engulfed by a series of controversies involving high-profile hosts.

“A decision like this is never pleasant,” stated McGuire.

“CBC News represents the very highest standard of journalistic conduct and ethics. We live up to that every day. In this case, that standard was not met.”

Solomon has said he never intentionally used his position to promote the private partnership and that he was “deeply sorry” for any damage his activities had caused.

In her memo, McGuire noted that a journalist had recently written that TV news was “shooting itself in the foot” as it faced scandal after scandal.

“People have questioned the integrity of our news. And that of CTV, Global, NBC and ABC.... The sad reality is that any ethical lapse reflects badly on the entire profession,” she said in the memo.

“It’s time for every single professional journalist and media organization to stop providing ammunition.”

Earlier, a CBC spokesman said the public broadcaster didn’t know the full extent of Solomon’s dealings when he alerted bosses to a side business two months ago.

Chuck Thompson said the full picture only came together after an “internal review” earlier this week revealed “additional details.” He declined to reveal what was uncovered and how.

Thompson said Solomon told the CBC in April that he and his wife were in a business relationship with an art dealer but that Solomon himself was “not an active partner.”

Thompson added that senior management made it clear “that the business arrangement could not intersect with (Solomon’s) work at CBC.”

CBC’s code of ethics demands employees “not use their positions to further their personal interests.”

“At some point you’d like to believe you can take people at their word,” Thompson said Wednesday.

“As soon as we found out about what we did, over the last two days, we moved swiftly and decisively.... We made a decision to terminate Evan’s employment at the CBC.”

The public broadcaster is still reeling from a damning report that chastised bosses for how they handled sexual assault allegations involving former radio host Jian Ghomeshi.

Ghomeshi was fired after CBC executives saw what they described as graphic evidence that he had physically injured a woman. Ghomeshi has admitted to engaging in rough sex but said it was consensual. His lawyer has said Ghomeshi will plead not guilty to several sexual assault charges.

Labour lawyer Erin Kuzz was loathe to compare the two cases, but noted they both point to a supposed “host culture” brought to light by the scathing report.

“That may be where you can draw the closest parallel, the whole concept of host culture and (the notion that) either: ‘What people don’t know won’t hurt me,’ or ‘I can do what I want because I’m a very well-regarded host,’” said Kuzz, a founding member of the Toronto firm Sherrard Kuzz LLP.

“This may be the second significant wake-up call that the CBC has received on that and they may need to look at making some internal changes.... If these two terminations don’t bring a change to that host culture, I don’t know what will.”

Solomon’s exit from the CBC comes a few months after conflict-of-interest allegations were directed against fellow network personality Amanda Lang, who was ultimately cleared by a CBC review.

In early January, media website Canadaland alleged that the host of *The Exchange with Amanda Lang* tried to “sabotage” a 2013 story about the Royal Bank of Canada and its use of temporary foreign workers.

The report said the bank sponsored some speeches or events at which Lang spoke and that Lang had a “serious relationship” with a bank board member. The CBC backed Lang in the wake of the report.

Kuzz said it seemed that Solomon was held to a different, harsher standard.

“Which is part of what makes me wonder if there isn’t more than we’ve heard,” she said.

“There does seem to be an inconsistent treatment.... Certainly the allegations surrounding Lang were attention-getting and this on its face doesn’t seem to be significantly worse. But that’s just based on what we read in the newspaper report.”

Thompson said the “circumstances are different” with Lang.

“We’re not going to re-litigate a matter that we dealt with through a thorough internal investigation that most notably found that no, that the journalism was not compromised,” he said.

Kuzz said anything that merely raises the reasonable perception of a conflict is enough to demand action.

“It’s one of those things where — particularly for a journalist or other public figures — not only being free of conflict but (seeming) to be free of conflict or influence are incredibly important.”