Hey you — buddy! Are you the contact? The codebreaker? See, I’ve got my hands on this rare bit of data: supposedly, on the other end of this encrypted message, is the **be-all, end-all solution to *any* municipal ethics problem**. Seems too good to be true, right? But my sources are reliable. If only we could break that code...such a resource would be invaluable!

OK, Step One: we’re gonna use COIB’s [Plain Language Guide](#) to build a database of ethics-related codewords. Fill in each blank to discover the words you’ll need for Step Two.

1) It is a misuse of position to obtain a private benefit for oneself or an _____ party.

2) Public servants should not use City resources for a non-City purpose, especially when that purpose is a business or _____ one.

3) Public servants may not accept anything valued at $50 or more from any person or firm that they know or should know is doing, or seeking to do, _____ with the City.

4) When a City employee accepts compensation from anyone other than the City for performing their official duties, this is a violation of the prohibition on _____.

5) If a City employee is moonlighting at a firm that has business with the City, they will need a _____ from the Board to continue to hold that outside job.

6) Public servants may not own any part of a business they know or should know does business with the City. Nor may their _____, domestic partner, or unemancipated children.

7) Public servants may not disclose _____ City information or use it to obtain a private benefit, even after they leave City service.

8) Public servants may not act as a _____, either paid or unpaid, or paid expert witness against the City’s interests in any lawsuit brought by or against the City.

9) Public servants may not, for _____, communicate with any City agency or appear in matters involving the City.

10) Public servants may not enter into any _____ relationship with their superiors or subordinates.

11) After leaving City service, former public servants may never work on a _____ matter they personally and substantially worked on for the City.

12) Causing, trying to cause, or even helping another public servant violate the Conflicts of Interest Law is a violation of the prohibition on the _____ of others.
NYC CONFLICTS OF INTEREST BOARD

Now that we’ve got our bank of COIB-related words, it’s time to take on the main cypher — it’s a reverse word search, which means we’ll have to find and circle ALL TWELVE WORDS from Step One inside the puzzle. Once all the words are found, the remaining, unused letters should spell out some sort of message. Allegedly, this message is related to some sort of secret superweapon that City employees can use to resolve their conflicts of interest. But what could it be...?
NYC CONFLICTS OF INTEREST BOARD

So did you decipher the message? Apparently it’s of the highest importance to public servants — especially those engaging in conduct where there might be a conflict of interest. If we just look through the letters we didn’t use, they should fit this pattern...

“_ _ _ _    _ _ _    _ _ _ _ _!”

Wait a second: did that tree just move? Doesn’t that woman seem to be reading that tabloid suspiciously? Does that man’s comically oversized Texas-style hat have a secret camera in it? I think we’ve been compromised! I’ve got to exfiltrate immediately! If you don’t hear from me again: email the passphrase to Contest@coib.nyc.gov by December 15th! It’s your only chance of escaping this mess as a Public Service Puzzler winner!

LAST ISSUE’S BIG WINNER: KELLAN STANNER

So, what do you do for the City?
I am a Project Development Coordinator for NYC Parks GreenThumb.

What’s that like?
I oversee a range of property management issues in community gardens across the five boroughs. I coordinate with other agencies and contractors working on our infrastructure (sidewalks, fences, water main connections) and also externally, with private property owners who need Parks construction permits to access our gardens.

Cool! How long have you been with the City?
I just had my one-year anniversary with the City in November!

Congratulations! OK, public service is great, but what’s something you do in your free time?
I’ve been training in Brazilian jiujitsu for the last few months, and aside from being a fantastic exercise, it’s really helped me learn to manage stress and doubt in difficult situations.

That’s awesome! May your guard be as strong and unbreakable as your commitment to government ethics!