# Education executive cleared after defending drug-laced emails as Wolf of Wall Street banter



An education executive who faced severe scrutiny due to emails laced with references to cocaine and strippers has been cleared of wrongdoing after invoking the fictional character from *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Tom Crombie, 40, appeared in London's High Court this week as he defended himself against charges of 'fraudulent misrepresentation' and gross misconduct stemming from communications with a senior executive at Inspired Education Group. The transaction at stake involved a potential £9 million sale of a stake in his venture, My Online Schooling, which services over 90,000 students across multiple countries.

The allegations against Crombie highlighted ten email exchanges that Inspired claimed displayed 'highly offensive, obscene, vulgar, racist, sexist and discriminatory' content. They argued that these communications warranted a significant reduction in the stake's value, potentially costing Crombie as much as £4.5 million. However, Crombie's defence relied heavily on the notion that his emails were nothing more than 'banter,' drawing humour from the infamous lifestyle depicted in the Martin Scorsese film.

One particularly notable email referenced 'fine powder,' implying cocaine, in a contextually playful manner. Crombie stated that the parody of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, which showcases a culture of excess, was intended to be humorous. As he explained, "The storyline is about two guys running a business who get into the world of drugs and other related trouble." His defence resonated with Mrs Justice Joanna Smith, who concluded that the exchanges were a fraction of the wholly professional communications shared over a two-year span.

Justice Smith recognised the emails as reflective of a close friendship, describing them as light-hearted, albeit immature, banter shared between colleagues. She stated that the mere act of sending unprofessional emails did not itself constitute gross misconduct, thus acknowledging the fine line between professional appropriateness and personal expression. More controversially, the court dismissed claims that Crombie's use of the term 'tidies' as derogatory to women, affirming that it is commonly used in Scotland to refer to attractive women.

The case draws intriguing parallels to the commentary surrounding Jordan Belfort, the real 'Wolf of Wall Street,' whose life and actions have been widely chronicled. Belfort's journey through the financial world is one marked by excess, indulgence, and a subsequent fall from grace. Interviews with Belfort have often revealed reflections on the culture of excess that characterised his world, exposing not only the moral repercussions of his actions but also the entrenched misogyny prevalent in the financial industry during his rise.

Just as Belfort's narrative has sparked dialogue about the ramifications of such behaviour, Crombie's case brings to light the discussion around humour in professional settings and the complexities involved in navigating modern corporate cultures. While Crombie's defence centred on the intent behind his statements, the implications of making light of serious issues like drug use and gender-based language remain contentious. In the broader context, such revelations challenge societal norms regarding professionalism, reminding us of the necessity for evolving standards as workplace dynamics continue to transform.

In reflecting on this case, it becomes evident that discussions about conduct, language, and humour in the workplace are increasingly relevant. The adjudication serves as a reminder that while humour may play a role in stress relief among colleagues, it must be approached with an understanding of the potentially broader implications of such exchanges, ensuring that light-heartedness does not obscure the need for respect in a professional context.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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