

TALKING THE WALK

CONVERSATIONS FOR MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES

Case Scenario

#RespectAtWork

SPECIAL EDITION

Tuesday, 11 a.m.

I'm not surprised that Brandon got the promotion instead of me, Heather says to herself. He's got the fancy degree, the charm, and he reels in the big fish. I could do the same, if only someone would give me a shot.

5:30 p.m.

Wow, Heather thinks to herself, this meeting is going really well. Brandon is surprisingly interested in my input... Her thought is interrupted.

"Heather, I'm really impressed with you," Brandon says. "You've got great ideas. You're sharp. I'm sure it's been hard for you around here. People sometimes just don't take beautiful women seriously."

Did I just hear that? Heather thinks.

As Brandon walks Heather to the door, he comments on her blouse: "It's very...attractive. Be careful. You wouldn't want to give a guy the wrong idea."

Heather can feel his gaze. He opens his office door, then guides her out, his hand on her back. It lingers a few seconds, then slides a hair too low.

Thursday, 7:00 p.m.

I wish I could have avoided it. Heather thinks. But Brandon is my boss; I had to meet with him. I just wish it had been before his assistant, Crystal, left for the day.

Still, who asks you to sit on a couch to talk about work? Who sits that close by accident? Never has my boss sat so that his knee was brushing against mine. I also don't remember any supervisor ever who felt the need to remind me over and over that he's "over me" now and that I'm "under him." All I know is that I want to go home, take a shower, and scrub off this feeling. Should I have worn a different outfit? Is this my fault? How in the world am I going to face him across the table at our team meeting tomorrow morning?

THE CHARACTERS

Heather, an ambitious employee

Brandon, Heather's new boss

Jack, Brandon's boss

Crystal, Jack's assistant

#RespectAtWork case continued

Monday, 9:30 a.m.

"Heather, are you feeling better?" VP Jack asks Heather as she passes by his office. "We missed you on Friday. How is it working with your new supervisor? Brandon's got great things to say about you. Said he sees some real potential in you. There are some management training slots opening up in the next few months, and he thinks with some extra coaching you've got a real shot. Brandon even volunteered to put in extra one-on-one time with you. Isn't that great?! I'd take advantage of that, if I were you."

"Heather, are you OK?" Jack asks. "Are you sure you're OK? You're white as a sheet."

Heather quickly excuses herself and heads to the restroom, running into Crystal. Heather doesn't know her well, but, before she even has time to think about it, Heather has told her everything.

"That b@t@rd!!" Crystal exclaims. "I can't believe him. I thought about warning you. This can't keep happening."

11 a.m.

"Come on now, Heather," Jack responds after hearing Heather's story. "I'm sure Brandon didn't mean anything by it. He's just trying to give you some advice. He's really a great guy, one of our best performers. He pushes to be the best. And he wants you to be your best. That's all."

"I know you're a little uncomfortable right now, but you're strong. You're tough. I think you have it in you to move past this."

Stunned silence from Heather.

"Listen, I don't want you to feel unsupported or unsafe," Jack continues, "I'll make sure he's taken the Sexual Harassment training module, so you shouldn't have any more misunderstandings. I don't think you should give it another thought. If you're ever going to make it as a manager, you've got to be willing to let a little unpleasantness roll off your back. Just keep in mind the big picture," he concludes.

After Heather leaves, Jack thinks to himself, *I'm glad that's taken care of. I'd hate to see Heather get all tied up over something so silly. She and Brandon both have bright futures ahead of them. No reason for a little misunderstanding to derail anyone's life.*

FROM THE ECI DATABANK

On average:

18% of US employees observe abusive or intimidating behavior that creates a hostile workplace;

7% of employees observe at least one act of sexual harassment;

37% of employees who observe any act of misconduct at work do not report it.

Even though men and women are equally likely to observe workplace misconduct (43% vs 45% respectively), women are more likely to report it (**68% vs. 59%**), and more likely to experience retaliation for having done so (**25% vs. 18%**).



85% of employees in the US say it is inappropriate to date your boss.

When organizations take steps to build strong ethical cultures where individuals are treated with dignity and respect:



Incidents of abusive or intimidating behavior are reduced by 77%;



Incidents of sexual harassment are reduced by 75%;



Employee reporting of any type of observed misconduct is increased by 30%.

Source: ECI's National Business Ethics Survey®.

Questions for Discussion

TALKING THE TALK

Working through what happened, and the suggestions we would make to the characters in the situation.

- Do Brandon's actions seem realistic? Why or why not?
 - Jack wants to see the situation as being more innocent than it is. Why? What should be an indicator to him that this is more than a "misunderstanding?"
 - At times, Heather wonders if it's her fault, if she did something to cause the situation, if she should have known better. If you knew Heather, what would you tell her?
 - What should Heather do next? What should Jack do? Crystal?
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WALKING THE WALK

The relevance of this situation to us, and the ways we might address the issue.

1. Jack offers to ensure that Brandon has taken the training on Sexual Harassment, which is likely to focus solely on conduct within the bounds of the law. Is that enough? What other issues should the training discuss?
 - Do you think people feel comfortable using these resources? Why or why out?
 2. Sometimes behaviors that don't break the rules still make people feel uncomfortable. Would each of the following make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?
 - Being asked out by a coworker
 - Meetings when there are only two people in the office
 - Suggestive jokes
 - A colleague who wears revealing clothing
 3. One part of the solution is having an environment where people can raise concerns.
 - Do we have that kind of environment?
 - Where can employees turn for help if they have a question?
 4. Sexual harassment is an egregious form of abusive behavior. What are some other kinds of abusive behaviors that occur in our workplace? Are there certain groups (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, management level, education level, etc.) who more likely to experience those behaviors?
 5. Showing respect for one another is essential if we are going to be able to work together. To show respect is to treat others with dignity, civility, and mutual consideration for the unique perspective and experiences they offer.
 - To what extent do you think that we have established a respectful workplace in our organization?
 - What can we do to improve?
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