

Chapter 7

Can Women Say “No” to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case is about sexual harassment in the workplace and how the organization handles this problem. One of the female employees working for Delta Food Company was forced to resign from her job after management claimed that her performance was below average. The top management made this decision after a thorough discussion with her direct supervisor. The dismissed employee not only suffered from poor performance accusation but also from sexual harassment in the workplace. Delta was made aware of the sexual harassment the employee was facing; however, top management insisted on firing the victim. They did not perceive her to be an asset to the organization. She believed that their actions were a direct result of her courageous behavior in reporting complaints against the harasser after keeping silent for more than one and a half years. She assumed that Delta had the legal responsibility to reimburse her for damages resulting from sexual harassment.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Delta Food Company was founded in 1980. It is a well-known brand, which manufactures products in Palestine. The company has a staff of one hundred sixty employees of whom twenty-seven are female. It considers itself a leader in the food manufacturing industry with continuous development of products of high quality with reasonable prices. Delta Food Company produces more than forty products

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through ten production lines. It identified its strategies and targets based on the principle of achieving customer satisfaction through product quality, reliability and efficient service. One of the major departments in Delta is the purchase department. It is responsible for purchasing raw materials at a cost consistent with the quality and service required, providing other departments and top management with advice and information regarding the best quality of material available in the market and its suppliers' capability and performance, as well as developing and maintaining good relations with buyers.

SETTING THE STAGE

Faten was informed by Mr. Atwan, a general manager of the Delta Company, about his decision to dismiss her. She was surprised when her direct supervisor informed her of the decision to let her go. He explained that there was a financial difficulty since the department costs had exceeded its budget.

She worked three years for Delta, as an administrative assistant for the purchase department. After passing the selection test examination and job interview, she was hired for the position based on her qualifications. According to the organization policy, employees are evaluated annually by their direct supervisors. At the end of Faten's third year, Wael, the Head of the Purchase Department recommended dismissing her in view of the fact that her performance had declined. Furthermore, the administrative cost would be reduced, as there would be no need for re-hiring for the same position. The general manager, Mr. Atwan, welcomed the decision of firing Faten, given that the organization had financial difficulties. He believed that firing the last hired employees in the department would minimize costs. However, Faten had been given a very good evaluation for her performance at the end of her first year. She believed her skills did match her job position and viewed herself as a very good asset to Delta. She wanted to continue working and possibly improve herself by getting promoted to a new position.

Faten had an opportunity to discuss her job situation with Mr. Atwan four months prior to the date of dismissal. She explained that she did not fit well with her colleagues in the department and she was looking for a new opportunity in other departments. Mr. Atwan refused Faten's request and insisted on meeting her for a second time. During the second meeting, she admitted to Mr. Atwan the real reason behind her request for transfer. She told him that her direct supervisor, Wael, had been sexually harassing her for more than a year and a half. She asked him to stop; nevertheless he did not listen. At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Atwan promised that she would be transferred at the beginning of next year.

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