

## **Workplace Harassment**

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**Case:** Mrs. Nirmala Shirke has recently joined the school as a principal. This being her first assignment as a principal she is very strict and expects the teachers to follow her dictum. Most of the teachers are finding difficulty to match with her leadership style. Invariable Mrs. Shirke becomes the topic of discussion. Five teachers were selected by the management of the school to be sent for a one day refresher course conducted by the state board at Mumbai. The school hired a local taxi for the occasion. The teachers were in a lighter mood and light discussions, leg pulling, cracking jokes, school politics, were the topic of the day and the time flew. On the return journey Reema took the initiative and decided to play antakshri. Reema, Bhavana, Tulsi, Alok and Yogesh (not the real name) all of them actively played and thoroughly enjoyed the return journey.

Next day the principal called Mrs. Bhavana in the cabin and expressed annoyance at the behavior of the teachers on their way back journey. She said it is not expected from the teachers who are supposed to be the role models for young students to behave in an immature way, singing songs insinuating vulgarity. Bhavana apologized right then and there and left the cabin. In the evening Mrs. Shirke called an urgent meeting of the entire staff to discuss a point of grave concern which has come to her notice.

Principal- Teachers on official assignment are supposed to be the brand ambassadors of the school. I have come to know that yesterday our teachers who had gone to attend a refresher course failed to maintain their professional decorum. Singing vulgar songs, discussing colloquies, cracking jokes in front of outsiders are serious issues and not in correct taste.

Reema: Madam, since I was a part of this team, to my knowledge none of us indulged in this behaviour, I would want to know who has brought this to your notice.

Principal: Mrs. Reema, I do not have to give you details but since you are keen to know the name of the teacher involved, it is Ms. Tulsi, the Sr. teacher who accompanied you on this trip. She has clearly told me that the songs picked up were vulgar and you were all enjoying them. She felt uncomfortable and out of place. She has specifically taken yours and Mrs. Bhavana name.

Alok: Yes madam, there was nothing like this, it was light bantering and no seriously implied.

Reema: Moreover Madam, if Ms. Tulsi had any objection should have told us right then and there, we would have immediately stopped the game.

Ms. Tulsi: My interference at that moment would have been taken otherwise and created a scene in front of the taxi driver, more over we are all matured and understand our role.

Yogesh: We are sorry if we have hurt your feeling by our behavior, we will definitely take care in future.

Reema: Why are you saying sorry, what have we done. It was just a light enjoyment. Ms. Tulsi for your kind information 'antakshri' does not give you time to select songs and Principal Madam, latest songs are such types.

Principal: Reema kindly understand the seriousness of the issue, I expect in future you all will take care and this will not be repeated. Please see me in my cabin immediately, so saying Mrs. Shirke left the meeting hall in a huff.

Reema reported as asked by the principal where she was given a memo and was asked to give a written explanation. Reema was annoyed and enquired why only she was given the memo.

Principal: Reema, you have failed to conduct yourself properly and moreover your behavior is very childish.

Reema: Madam, I am a mother of two young kids, this is the first time I am being told that my behavior is childish. I beg to defer.

Principal: I have already explained myself, if there is nothing to add kindly leave as I have important office work to do.

Reema was extremely disturbed by this whole episode and immediately reported in writing to the management that she is being singled out. Since the principal does not like her blunt behavior she has been put into this harassment.

The chairman of the school called the principal to his office; he expressed his annoyance towards handling the case and asked her why Reema was singled out in this case.

Principal: Sir I took this action based on the Sr. teacher's complain, Ms. Tulsi had mentioned that Mrs. Reema was spearheading and on my enquiry I found her very adamant.

Chairman: Did you also check up with the others?

Principal: I thought Ms. Tulsi must be correct and I also called staff meeting where this issue was discussed in detail. Here also she was arguing and not accepting her mistake.

Chairman: Madam, do you have any written prescribed code of conduct to be followed?

Principal: No. but being in this profession, I expect the teachers to know their boundaries and limit.

Chairman: If there is no written code of conduct how do you expect them to tow the line . It is very essential to first frame the code of discipline and then establish deviation. Sorry madam, but considering your seniority I expected you to have a more rational approach. Things are getting out of hand so kindly drop this issue.

Next day the principal again called the staff and made it very clear that she has not liked Reema complaining to the management and is serious on the explanation.

### **Teaching Notes**

#### **Insight:**

Work harassment is one of the most frequently-discussed topics in employee relations today. There is good reason for that: no other kind of claim has quite the scare and stress value than work related harassment claim carries. That is because most people associate harassment with sexual overtures, such actions are usually accompanied by promises of favorable treatment at work or by threats of unfavorable treatment. However, that form of sexual harassment is rare compared to the much more frequent situation of a hostile work environment. A hostile work environment arises from any conduct in the workplace that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a person's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. In many ways, employers have a harder time dealing with the latter type of sexual harassment because it can be so hard to spot, whereas the former variety of sexual harassment, the so-called "quid pro quo" harassment, is fairly easy to recognize.

In the area of "hostile work environment", Isolated harassing comments, even though offensive will support a harassment claim and cause liability, if repeated and has a demonstrably harmful effect, continually subjecting an employee to derogatory language will make an employer liable for damages.

Victim management and open robust communication are key.

#### **The Root Cause:**

- **Leadership failure-** The principal portrayed a poor leadership style. She acted more like a dictator rather than, leader .The purpose of the study is to explore and understand the principal's role as a strategic leader. It also aims at understanding the role of the principal's practices and position with futuristic lens. The principal's role is essential for strategic development in schools and strategic planning is fundamental to move towards the strategic direction. Strategic role of the principals is important for the educational development she should focused on developing successful learning communities. Successful learning communities are places where people care for each other as individuals, and they deal with change more effectively.

- **Poor strategic planning-**The principal should have acted as a problem solver. She failed to strategies the process in the right direction, wasting time un-necessary action can be dreadful to the organization. The Part of what we do is resolve and clarifies these conflicting management issues by helping management focus, developing staff and emphasizing that we've been there before and know the way out of the problems they face.

- **Communication gap-**Communication plays a very important role in fostering professional bonds. It should always follow a two way process. Failure to communicate effectively and promptly on issues that matter corrodes trust and fosters fear. Always remember, silence in the face of controversy, uncertainty, doubt and contention is toxic to organizational culture and leadership success. The lack of written code of conduct also proves that in absence of clear laid down policies, the confusion prevails and there are no guiding marks.

- **Workplace Stress-** Stress at work is a relatively new phenomenon of modern lifestyles. The nature of work has gone through drastic changes over the last century and it is still changing at whirlwind speed. They

have touched almost all professions, starting from an artist to a surgeon, or a commercial pilot to a sales executive. With change comes stress, inevitably. Professional stress or job stress poses a threat to physical health. Work related stress in the life of organized workers, consequently, affects the health of organizations.

Work-related stress is an issue of growing concern in developing countries due to important developments in the modern world; two of the most significant being globalization and the changing nature of work.. Work-related stress is a pattern of physiological, emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions to some extremely taxing aspects of work content, work organization and work environment. When people experience work-related stress, they often feel tense and distressed and feel they cannot cope. Due to globalization and changes in the nature of work, people in developing countries have to deal with increasing work-related stress. The experience of stress is intensified if no support or help is available from colleagues or supervisors. Therefore, social isolation and lack of cooperation increase the risk of prolonged stress at work. Conversely, work tasks with a high degree of personal control and skill variety, together with a work environment which includes supportive social relationships, can contribute positively to workers' well-being and health. The implementation of such intervention is the role of the Leader of the organization.

- **Bias attitude-**As a leader of the organization, not only the internal stakeholders but external also look up to the leader of the organization and scrutinizes his/her decisions. In this case the principal was bias towards Mrs Bhavana as she only targeted Mrs Reema during the meeting, although all 5 were party to it. This kind of approach instills mistrust, fear and tarnishes the image of the leader as well as organization.

- **Poor understanding of Group dynamic-** The team of teachers involved in the issue come from different backgrounds, age groups, genders, and thus are different personalities.

- Understanding group dynamics can be useful in decision-making behavior, creating effective therapy techniques, and following the emergence and popularity of new ideas and technologies. Group dynamics are at the core of understanding racism, sexism, and other forms of social prejudice and discrimination.\_ Group dynamics has a consistent, underlying premise: 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.' the positive and negative forces within groups of people.

- **Forthright diplomacy-** Assessment combined with coaching can create dramatic shifts in behaviour through increasing the subject's self-awareness and designing behaviour and attitude changes that work with their personality and preferences.

Mrs. Shirke's frustration was that when she stopped herself from solving her subordinate's problems, she had nothing else do to and felt she was merely holding back and not contributing. With her experience, she could have seen many problems arising and help the team. The solution was to find some way to be active but without taking responsibility for other's roles. She could have focused her attention on positive actions that would contribute to the solution. The principal should have realized that she could use her strengths in 'enlisting cooperation' and 'forthright diplomacy' to move the team forward without taking over their roles. Since the actions she chose to focus on were her preferred traits. By focusing on her strengths, the principal could have moved her team to learn how to do their jobs, while still retaining control of the results.

- **Poor administrative control-** Educational administrators are no longer expected to be merely good managers but leaders of schools as learning organizations. Effective school leadership is increasingly viewed as central to large-scale education reform and to improved educational outcomes. Effective organizations learn continuously, not just as an aggregation of individuals, but also collectively as a group. Leaders of and in such learning organizations grasp that their organizations are rapidly changing, complex and interconnected systems. They are able to have and articulate clear mental maps of where they are going, to see the "big picture" of their organization, to understand how different parts of it are connected to each other and the whole, to connect their personal learning to the organization's learning, and to employ processes that provide swift feedback and learning of how the organization or initiatives in it are proceeding, so future action can be taken that is effective and appropriate

#### **Conclusions:**

One of the causes of Principal's behavior was that she was trying to stop doing something rather than doing something. When she stopped herself from following the chairman's verdict, she felt it would be merely holding back and not contributing with her inexperience, she could see not many problems arising and found it very difficult to hold back and leave it to the team. The solution was to find some way to be active,

making the team understand without making them defensive, controlling the situation at the right time and taking responsibility for the action.

- It is more effective to focus on taking positive actions, rather than on stopping behaviors.
- People can more easily begin actions that rely on their preferred traits.
- Different preferred traits can be used in different situations to get the desired results. Therefore it is possible to customize behavioral solutions for different personalities, based on their personal preferences, as identified by Harrison Assessments.
- Abusive, coercive, bullying behavior needs to be dealt with conclusively, constructively, and very quickly. The more promptly the organization acts with directness, compassion, and common sense, the more manageable the problem will become.