

Problem Solving & Decision Making

The Slammin' Late Night Dance

Background: It is April. Michael and Kristen are volunteers on a student committee responsible for planning monthly Late Night Dances on campus in the Commons. Kristen is in charge of the committee and Michael is the person she has put in charge of security at the dances. At the dance in March (two weeks ago) there was a problem involving an intoxicated student who gained entrance to the dance and caused a fight. Kristen sent Michael an email indicating that he was relieved of his security responsibilities as a result of the fight. When Michael saw Kristen on campus two days later he began screaming at her.

Michael can't believe that Kristen did this to him. He has done a great job all year and lost the job without any explanation. Michael is very angry because Kristen did not have the courtesy to discuss any concerns or problems with him, but instead sent a cowardly note which didn't consider all of the facts. Michael has always wondered about whether or not Kristen is prejudiced, and thinks he now has his answer. Michael knows that Kristen thinks that some of his friends are a bit rough, and it was one of Michael's friends that created the problem at the dance. Michael knows he let a friend in who was a bit too intoxicated (which he should not have done), but was counting on his friends to not create any problems. Instead, one of Michael's friends got carried away while slam dancing and got into a fight with another student. The police were called and the Dean of Students was pretty upset, but Michael knows that these types of things happen when there is slam dancing, whether or not people have been drinking.

(Notes about Michael: Michael feels that he has done a good job with security and wants to make sure the dances are successful. He very much values dealing directly with people and was

upset to receive a note. He knows he was out of line when he screamed at Kristen, and wishes he had not done that, but felt he had no choice.)

Kristen met Michael at the beginning of the year (August) and put him in charge of dance security because he seemed pretty trustworthy. Things went well for the three fall dances (September, October, and November), as well as for January and February. At the March dance, however, a student started a fight on the dance floor and the police needed to drag him away. Afterwards, Kristen discovered that the student who caused the fight was one of Michael's friends, and Michael had let him into the dance even though he was obviously drunk. This is against the policy set for campus dances. Kristen was very concerned about the security at future dances, since the Dean of Students made it very clear to Kristen that the actions of a few "malcontents" could jeopardize all of the dances for next year. While Kristen still liked Michael, she was afraid of getting into trouble with the university and decided that removing Michael from his position was the only thing she could do to avoid further problems. Kristen dislikes confrontation and did not want to embarrass Michael, so she sent him a note informing him of her decision. A couple of days later Kristen ran into Michael on campus and he began screaming at her, which really frightened Kristen, since Michael seemed full of rage.

(Notes about Kristen: Kristen did not attend the March dance, but later heard recollections from the Dean, the police, and several of her friends.) Kristen dislikes confrontation and did not want to embarrass Michael, so she sent him a note informing him of her decision. A couple of days later Kristen ran into Michael on campus and he began screaming at her, which really frightened Kristen, since Michael seemed full of rage.

Questions:

- If you were Michael, what would you have done? If you were Kristen, what would you have done?
- What could both Michael and Kristen have done/said to have a better outcome?
- Could something have been done to prevent such misunderstandings?
- What were some of the triggers that created the conflict?
- What approaches did the women take and what could they have done to improve their conflict?