

COSC 3050, Spring 2016

Harassment

Case 1:

Robert is in his second year working with Amanda Baker, a director in his department, who has been supportive of him since he was hired. Robert is given a large assignment by Amanda on which both he and Amanda decide to meet every other Friday afternoon to review the progress. As the deadline for the project nears, Amanda suggests they meet every Friday in order to “make sure the deadline is met.” One meeting runs well past 5:30 and everyone has left for the day. As Robert gets up to leave, Amanda tries to seduce him. Robert rejects her advances by mumbling some lame excuse (“I’m tired”) and leaves immediately. For the next couple of weeks, Amanda avoids Robert. Robert submits weekly updates and eventually sends Amanda a final draft a day before deadline, but gets nothing back from her. About a month after the deadline has passed, staff evaluations are due. Amanda meets with Robert and Robert is incredulous to read Amanda’s assessment of his work - that “he lacks initiative and recently submitted a substandard report on a lengthy and important project... Robert’s work performance is barely acceptable.”

- What should Robert do or have done?
- Is Amanda guilty of harassment? Why or why not? If so, what type?
- Is the organization liable?

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Case 2:

A Project Lead and a Research Associate attend a professional meeting out of town and have a one-night sexual encounter. Both are in long term relationships and agree that the affair will not continue when they return home.

Imagine that you are the Project Lead.

- What should you do next? Why?
- What if word of the affair spreads through the department and other members of the group complain that the Research Associate is getting preferential treatment?
- What if, six months later, you decide to terminate the Research Associates position?

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Case 3:

Jack is seated between Tom and Judy at a dinner meeting of a professional software engineering society. They are all employed in the same group. Jack and Judy have an extended discussion of a variety of concerns, many of which are related to their common interests. At the end of the meeting, Jack turns to Tom, smiles, and says, “I’m sorry not to have talked with you more tonight, Tom, but Judy’s better looking than you.”

Judy was stunned by his remark to Tom, however innocently it may have been intended. She has been in the group for almost a year and she is the only women. Is this another case where Judy is not begin taken seriously as a software engineer because she is a woman? Is it some attempt by Tom to make a pass at her? Or is he just trying to be funny because he slighted Jack for the entire dinner?

- How should Judy respond to Jack’s remark?
- Should she say anything?
- Assuming that Tom understands her perspective, what, if anything, should he say or do?

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Case 4:

While walking by a co-worker's cubicle, you see that he is looking at sexually explicit photos on the Internet. He takes no notice of you as he browses from site to site. You know this is inappropriate behavior, you know that it could lead to a reprimand or termination, and most importantly you know that many people would be offended by this if they should see it.

- What should you do?
- Is this behavior sexual harassment?
- If not, can it become sexual harassment?

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Case 5:

You work in a mid-sized software development company. Tomás is a software engineer who works in the QA department. As a Project Lead, you interact with the QA people on a regular basis. You have no issues with the rest of the QA folks but Tomás uses foul language and racial epithets all the time. It has gotten worse since he separated from his wife. You are extremely uncomfortable any time you have to interact with him. But Tomás is not completely out of control. He never uses any of his bad language when in meetings with any of the managers, including his immediate boss. He only talks this way when he is around individuals who cannot directly effect his job.

You have really had enough and others on your team also have a problem with the way Tomás chooses to express himself. They have all come to you to ask you do something about Tomás. What do you do?

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Case 6:

Sherman is a good boss. He's not perfect but he sticks up for the "troops". He is also great at explaining project goals, and his expectations for people's performance. You have recently been assigned to Sherman's group and have heard nothing but good about him. You've worked in the group for 4 weeks now and everything seems to be going well. You get along well with your new co-workers and have made a new friend with whom you share a hobby. Sherman complemented you on your completion of your tasks for the new software project 1 week early.

It is Friday evening and Sherman announces to the group that it is Happy Hour at La Cantina. Because the project is going well, he is buying. This presents a problem for you. You do not like the atmosphere of the La Cantina, it is basically a run-down bar. You not drink alcohol and you avoid bars because you are an alcoholic. And, your son has a soccer game right after work. You mention your son's game to Sherman, say thanks for the offer and that you will see him on Monday.

Monday, you find out that you have been transferred to another group. The new group leader, Marsha, calls you in to her office. She does not ask you to sit. She then explains that she is unhappy that you have been "shoved" off on her and that she really does not know what she is going to do with someone who is not a team player. Marsha tells you that you had better straighten up because one more problem and you will be fired. What to you do or say?