

Interviewer: If you could have the perfect leadership role, what would it be?

Respondent: I'd like to be the chief executive of a little not-for-profit that's doing something really valuable in the community. That's always been my goal like next step from this job, what will I do? But this job never stops changing and so I'm still here because I don't usually -- in my past roles of last three years and I've got bored, but this job continues to throw out challenges like buildings and SMS projects. But that would be my ultimate -- that would be fantastic if I could find one that I really liked that they'd give to me.

Interviewer: Sure. Fair enough, fair enough. Can you think of a problem that you had to deal with in your past or present job? And tell me exactly what happened and how you handled it.

Respondent: What sort of problem are you talking about?

Interviewer: Problem in terms of dealing with people and dealing with their behaviors, specifically dealing with them socially in the way that they conduct themselves. So for an example, people who are more focused on having sidebar conversations, having the water cooler conversation, by the photocopier or in the washroom.

Respondent: We had a really big one here and when you were talking about vexatious gossip, it's the textbook example of it. We had a manager who's actually died now but had left the university before she died who got into her mind that she wanted to make some changes with her people, and she started to create some -- I'm not quite sure what the right word is -- she always created a situation around one of her staff that she wanted to get rid of. So she brought it to me and our HR manager. The two of us, we've done it together. But what happened was that she became very vexatious. She reached out and she built a community around here. It was a very classic example actually. One of them was one of my staff, and one was somebody who worked in a department in the school as well. And between them there was a lot of this going on, very one-sided, very negative. I think a lot of it was probably against me, but I never heard what it actually was. But she built up this community of support around her to the point that when she did die and she left the university probably three or four years ago, they all went to her funeral and celebrated her life which was quite interesting actually. I mean I don't begrudge that. It sounds wrong.

Respondent: What we had to do to manage it was continue to be really professional, to continue to challenge the claims that she was making because we couldn't see the evidence and all that, so we were trying to find the evidence of this person's poor performance. It escalated into being -- what we discovered was that she had a whole team that was dysfunctional. In the end, we had a split team. We had two people who were on her side, and the others were trying to survive. They did finally talk to us. They reached out and came to us because none of them were in the union, but one of them had a sister who was in the union. So she stepped in and came to see me, and we managed to break it that way in terms of finding out what was really happening because nobody had laid a complaint against her.

So they spoke up. They broke the nastiness that was going on -- well, not break it but they exposed the nastiness that was going on which gave us the opportunity to do something. We ended up in mediation which I didn't go to but my boss did, which was kind of weird because I was the person that she was aiming at, but it was George who had to go to the mediation. That ended up with some kind of negotiated relationship with peer and stuff like that. But within two months of that, one of her staff tried to commit suicide because of how she was being bullied at work. So just like that. We had a reason to get her out of the university and university finally -- it dragged on over two years which was not particularly -- that was awful actually. My HR manager is just probably one of the best ones in the university. She's very, very good. But even she, even now we still talk about it. She struggled as well. It was a really hard situation. But the hardest part of it was all the stuff that was going on, and some of that we couldn't counter because we didn't know what was being said. But we couldn't also say that this person who had tried to take her life, we couldn't talk about that so we couldn't counter some of the stuff that was out there.