

Seeing the Light or Tilting at Windmills? The Case of Richards-Townshend

Keith Hunter, University of San Francisco
Monika Hudson, University of San Francisco
Karl Boedecker, University of San Francisco

Abstract

As a result of complying with a request made of all law firms to investigate gender equity, by his Bar Association, Merle Richards obtains evidence that his firm's environment may not be gender neutral. A consultant's report indicates confusion about the criteria for attorney retention and promotion, a perception of gender bias, rifts between female associates and female partners, and high dissatisfaction among most female partners. Meanwhile, the firm's Board of Directors is divided regarding the wisdom of taking any conspicuous action to verify and address these issues. Students are asked to put themselves in Merle's position as he tries to make sense of the consultant's findings as well as make the right recommendation to the Board of Directors. Should Merle recommend that the firm openly examine gender bias in the workplace?

Learning Outcomes

In completing this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Evaluate the implications of the multiple issues that are associated with perceived gender inequities within the workplace.
2. Distinguish between the possible interests and positions of stakeholders.
3. Determine how communication between organizational leaders and members should be leveraged as a means of resolving the presented situation.
4. Assess possible approaches that decision-makers might take in response to the nuanced and multi-faceted situations embedded in this critical incident and explain possible outcomes that may result from those decisions.

Application

This critical incident is most useful for graduate coursework in management, organizational behavior, or organization development. This is due to its emphasis on analyzing, synthesizing, developing and evaluating nuanced decision alternatives from the practitioner's perspective. However, this critical incident may be appropriate for undergraduate courses where content and format are conducive to bridging gaps in maturity and experience. Where internal business operations are emphasized, this critical incident may be useful for legal education.

Key Words

gender equity, organizational communication, leadership, decision-making

Contact

Keith Hunter, Department of Organization, Leadership and Communication, University of San Francisco, 2103 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA, 94541. Email: kohunter@usfca.edu . Phone: 415-535-9488.

