

After Hours

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Introduction

Had she really made a mistake? Lauren had contemplated her decision-making process regarding the past incident while she nervously sat in the office waiting to meet with Matthew, her General Manager. Lauren had come to realize that she had made a poor decision, but she thought she had done the best she could at the time with the knowledge she had. After all, the information she had to act upon was second-hand. Nevertheless, would she lose her job as a result? A single mother of two small children, she was working hard to pay her bills and needed the job.

Lauren was a hard-working employee at Triple M's Steakhouse and had been recently promoted to an entry level management position after eight years working as a server and then bartender. Lauren had been excited about this new position because she was also in college trying to obtain a management degree. Her first management experience at Triple M's seemed like a big step in the right direction. Lauren knew that it would be a great learning experience and would strengthen her resume, so she was determined to do a great job.

When Lauren started in her new position, she was able to use her experience as a server and bartender to her advantage when managing her employees. What Lauren found, however, was that her new job was not as easy as it looked. Since she had been at this same establishment for a good length of time, she knew all the employees and was friends with most of them. It had been a difficult transition for her moving from employee to manager, and Lauren had experienced a hard time gaining her employees' respect and compliance. She had never been a manager before and, in this position, she felt that she was walking a fine line between friendships and professional relationships with her staff. Through her training, some in person and some online, there had been information on subjects such as making the schedule and balancing budgets, but nothing about managing your friends -- and unfortunately none that helped her deal with the situation she encountered. Lauren had hoped this would be taken into consideration when she and Matthew discussed her decision-making process.

Background

Triple M's Steakhouse was a well-established chain restaurant around the country. A family-friendly restaurant, Triple M's strived to live up to its beliefs and principles. The company's mission statement stated that it wanted to provide high quality food, service, and a great atmosphere. It was extremely important to the owners of Triple M's Steakhouse that the mission statement be upheld and that all staff lived and worked by these principles. In order to monitor this, one of Triple M's Steakhouse's policies was to have two managers on duty at all times. Since each store only had two salaried managers, they hired shift managers to allow the salaried employees to have their two days off. These shift managers were also servers, bartenders, and hosts. Lauren was one of these hourly paid shift managers.

Some of the shift manager's responsibilities and duties consisted of front of the house duties, some of which included: table visits to guests, following up with guest issues, ensuring the host stand was running efficiently, helping in the take-away room when needed, helping servers or bartenders when needed, creating the floor plan for the shift, cutting employees when it was slow, and other tasks as needed. The shift manager essentially had the same duties as a salaried manager, just not the same amount of pay and authority. They generally did not have as much experience.

The Challenge

One night while working, Lauren was presented with disturbing information. John, an older team member with whom Lauren talked often, came to her with some astonishing second-hand information. He informed her that he witnessed their boss Ron, one of the salaried assistant managers, performing sexual acts with Amy who is an hourly employee. John had been eating dinner at another restaurant right across the street when he looked out of the window and saw Ron and Amy having sexual relations that were much more graphic than kissing. John seemed really upset about this – not only for personal reasons, but also because the image of Triple M's was at stake. It was more than just sexual acts at this point – it had been performed right across the street from Triple M's where any visitors could potentially have seen. It was clearly against Triple M's Steakhouse policy for an hourly employee and a salary employee to have any sexual relations.

Lauren realized this incident could potentially be considered Quid Pro Quo sexual harassment. She knew that Quid Pro Quo was a form of harassment in which things such as job benefits were contingent upon sexual favors and dealt with an employee and supervisor who may influence or make decisions about employment actions. She didn't know what to do, but knew she had an ethical commitment and had to react. Lauren was not sure what to think. This information was shocking to her, but she knew it was also second-hand. She had not witnessed the situation herself. Lauren told John that she would definitely look into it. Ron and Lauren were friends and she was surprised to hear this. Could what John reported even be true? Was John mad at Ron and trying to get him fired? This couldn't just be ignored and yet Ron had influence over Lauren's career at Triple M as well. His position was higher than hers.

Lauren did not have the authority to write incident reports regarding employee behavior without a salaried manager present. She knew she had a problem because she couldn't have Ron be the witness to writing a report about himself. Should she tell her other manager? The restaurant provided an anonymous incident hotline. Should she call it? Lauren ultimately decided to hold a meeting with the fellow shift managers to get their input, since she really didn't believe the information was true. All the shift managers told Lauren to ignore it because they also thought it could not be true and creating drama would not help.

This weighed on her mind, but she kept silent as suggested. A month went by and one evening, Lauren noticed a lot of flirting between Ron and Amy. She realized that John had probably been telling the truth. She felt, by keeping quiet, she had not made the right decision. As soon as she was able, Lauren had a meeting with Ron and told him the entire story. He tried to deny the incident and said he would take care of it. Ron reported back that he had talked with John and seemed like they worked out the problem. However, a few months after Lauren had the talk with Ron, upper management found out what had happened and decided to relocate Ron to another store. They felt they had to do this due to the majority of the staff knowing what happened between Ron and Amy. Matthew, the General Manager, scheduled a meeting to discuss the situation with Lauren.

What should Lauren have done differently? How does ethical commitment, decision making and power play a role in the scenario?

