**ON THE EDGE**

**Critical Incident Summary**

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**Abstract**

This critical incident describes a conflict between Lisa, a fourth-year doctoral student, and her highly published but somewhat overbearing major advisor, Dr. Littlewood. The decision point of the incident occurs when Lisa was called into Dr. Littlewood’s office, reprimanded for what Dr. Littlewood perceived to be shoddy work on a research project, and told that Dr. Littlewood was contemplating letting her go and attempting to have her removed from the graduate program. With her career in serious jeopardy, Lisa had to decide how to respond on the spot.

**Learning Objectives**

The objectives of this critical incident are:

1. Students will analyze and critique supportive methods of communication which could be used by Lisa to resolve the incident.

2. Students will identify and contrast conflict resolution strategies which could be used by Lisa to attempt to resolve the situation.

3. Students will analyze how power effects the situation described within the incident.

4. Students will analyze and evaluate strategies which individuals in a low power situation can use to deal with entities that possess high levels of power.

5. Students will identify and apply emotional competencies that can facilitate effective management of difficult situations such as the one presented in the incident.

**Application**

This incident is appropriate for use in both introductory and advanced courses in organization behavior, management, human resource management, negotiation, and in other courses that focus on interpersonal communication and conflict resolution. Major issues in the incident are conflict resolution and interpersonal communication. Additional issues include negotiation, power, social competence, and the notion of being proactive to avoid similar situations developing in the future. Student discussion should encourage creative thinking regarding approaches to resolving the situation as well as considering actions that may have prevented it from developing. An epilogue provided in the teaching note discusses Lisa’s approach to resolving the situation.

**Key Words**

Interpersonal Communication, Conflict Resolution, Power, Negotiation, Emotional Intelligence

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