

CASE 8

Shipping and Receiving

Background Information

Midge Watson had been working in the Bookkeeping Department of the Best Fits Sporting Goods Manufacturing Company for the four years since she graduated from high school. She was bright, attractive, and popular, and had done well in the company, as her recent promotion to senior bookkeeper proved.

One of her new job responsibilities required Midge to go to the warehouse once a week to check on and verify various inventory and shipment information. This meant that she often worked for three or four hours at a time in the Shipping Office. In order to reduce the noise from the operations around it, the office was completely walled in. On these trips to Shipping, Midge worked closely with the shipping clerk, Susan Adams. Susan, a veteran employee of ten years with Best Fit, was divorced. Susan maintained all the shipping and inventory information as it was processed.

Since Midge had never before worked in an actual manufacturing and warehouse operation before, she was nervous at first. However, she was very relieved to find that Susan was very nice and helpful. Midge found Susan easy to talk to because Susan seemed so interested in what Midge was thinking and doing.

During her fourth visit to the warehouse, Midge and Susan were talking as usual about the week's shipping activity. As they were talking, Susan casually walked to Midge's side of the desk and sat on the edge of the desk right next to Midge.

Midge tried not to feel uncomfortable with Susan so close. At a break in the discussion, Susan looked at Midge very seriously and asked her: "Do you like to go dancing?"

Midge, a little surprised by the question, replied evenly: "Well, I like to, but I have a difficult time getting my boyfriend to go. He'd just as soon go drink—"

Susan interrupted: "I wasn't talking about your boyfriend. Would you like to go dancing with me?"

Midge, not sure what Susan was getting at, laughed and said: "Well, sure, maybe sometime...." Her voice trailed off. She was trying to be polite but did not really want to commit herself.

Midge picked up a file and brought their discussion back to shipping information. She finished her work, then returned to her department. She was uneasy about Susan's behavior and invitation.

When she returned to her desk, Midge's supervisor, Mike Polski, noticed that she seemed to be distracted, and asked if everything was OK. Midge ex-

plained what had just occurred and wondered if Susan had some ulterior motive for asking her to go dancing.

Mike, not sensing a problem, shrugged off what happened. "I wouldn't give it much thought. You're probably reading something into Susan's comments. Don't be concerned," he advised Midge.

Next week, at her regular time, Midge returned to the warehouse. As she walked into the Shipping Office and closed the door, Susan jumped up from her chair and walked briskly over to Midge, smiling. She put her arms around Midge and hugged her tightly. After stroking Midge's back and patting her on the rear-end, she looked into Midge's eyes and told her: "Midge, I really missed you. I'm glad you're back."

Midge was completely startled, shocked, and afraid. She wiggled free and began to cry. Dropping the file she was carrying, she ran from the office back to her department. By the time Midge arrived, she had calmed down to some degree, but was still upset as she entered Mike Polski's office to describe what just happened.

CASE QUESTIONS

1. Is this a case of sexual harassment?
2. Does the company have a responsibility and/or liability?
3. What should the supervisor do now?