

Gender Equity Case Study

Last week, one of your direct reports and a long-time friend, Gerry Watson, came to you to share parts of a conversation he had had over coffee with a highly regarded senior director who reports to a member of the leadership team. Gerry tells you that the individual is a female and has worked in the division for less than five years, a profile which could describe a number of employees. He says he'll refer to her by the fictitious name, "Jane" to honor her request for confidentiality.

Gerry explains that during the course of the conversation, Jane asked about the seriousness of the commitment to diversity issues especially as it relates to women within the Administration and Finance area.

Jane's perception is that women in the Administration and Finance division are generally not treated in the same way as men in hiring and promotion decisions, or with regard to professional development, and she made reference to the departure of several women with great potential for more advanced positions elsewhere.

She explained that she also saw numerous gender inequities and insensitivities in day-to-day work practices such as a preoccupation with sports in the workplace. She referred to frequent conversations about the outcomes of sporting events, common use of sports analogies in meetings, the annual divisional softball game, and occasional afternoon golf outings, all of which are primarily "men's events." She also noted the fact that informal meetings are often scheduled before the beginning of the work day at times when women with families typically find it difficult to attend.

Jane also thinks that men speak considerably more and for longer periods of time in meetings than women, and she believes this is because men are more likely to be asked for their opinions and more likely to have their perspectives and suggestions taken seriously by senior leaders. Additionally, she commented on the nonverbal communication during meetings, sharing her observation that men, regardless of their roles, are far more likely to position themselves at the head of conference tables or in other positions of prominence in meetings.

The director's view is that the marginalization of women she described is probably not intentional or conscious, but it's troublesome nonetheless. She concluded her comments by noting how ironic it is that these problems would be prevalent at RMC and in this division given the ideals and philosophies of the institution and its leaders. For women, she said, "the rhetoric and reality simply don't seem to match."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you have a follow-up discussion with Gerry after you've collected your thoughts?
2. Do you ask Gerry to urge the director to talk to you personally?
3. Do you talk with members of your leadership team about the allegations and core issues and values involved? If so, do you discuss the matter with the members individually or as a group, and how would you frame the discussion?