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The Real Workplace

The heat of the Florida sun was only a memory on this mid-summer day. The dust and smell of paint stripping chemicals which permeated every square inch of the hanger on this particular Monday afternoon was not present here in the super opulent management offices at the fixed base operator. The polished wood and the arctic air were unknown to those who performed the physical labor. The office was centered around a very nice writing desk, adorned with a rack of collectors writing utensils, some worth more than five thousand dollars each. More than six months hard work had preceded this encounter with the management, and every person with whom there was contact, had been congratulatory upon hearing that a substantial raise had been granted with the six-month review.

“Sit down, there is something I would like to discuss with you.”

“Certainly,” replied the worker.

“Everyone says that you are a great worker, and that you are always on time.”

“Thank you.”

“Two of the men on the night shift have come to me with something that I must speak with you about.”

The two other men in the room, both standing, one the department supervisor, the other, another of the top management, stood silently, arms folded in front of them.

“The two mechanics from New York said that you used a racial slur, and that you called

the maintenance supervisor a ‘sandnigger’”, said the head manager with a slight blush as controlled laugh, “I would like an explanation.”

Having already spoken with a confidant within the company, this did not come as a surprise.

“No, I did not,” replied the worker, “I was responding to a comment and discussion the two men were having about persons who should be shot because they are Muslim. The two men asked one another why Cat Stevens, a famous musician, would want to convert to Islam. My comment to them was that maybe he had heard the word ‘sandnigger’ one too many a time.”

With a bit of indifference and prejudice the manager stated, “Well if this was anyone else but you, you would be fired, you know that. Your supervisor will write up a comment for your file, which you will review and sign. Do you have anything to say?”

“This was two weeks ago, why have the two just now come to bring this forward? It was last Friday, that I was in the mechanics library using the computers, and was subjected to those guys’ usual disgusting conversations. This conversation, which referred to what one wanted to do with his foot and his friend’s wife’s vagina was so bad, that I told both of them there on the spot that they are offensive, and very unprofessional. Their response was to ask me if I was joking, as if I had done something wrong, and then, after seeing that I was in fact not, began to belittle me with explication. After I told them that I should write a letter to someone regarding their actions, I was belittled further.”

“Well, I will have a talk with them. Thank you that will be all.”

Feeling befuddled, the worker, knowing that he had been proverbially railroaded, and that

false witness had be brought upon him, left the office bewildered, and perplexed beyond explanation. Having been the brunt of sexual jokes, as well as having had to verbally request from the department supervisor, that the profane and disgusting comments of the other workers be toned down to an minimum, it seemed as though there would be no fairness, and justice in this entire situation. The profane language used by all at the hanger was so bad, that this created perceptible changes in people who did not want to be subject to the obviously condoned sexual connotation and idioms. These would be discussed, but conveniently forgotten later on.

Later in the afternoon on the same day, the supervisor called the worker into the office, were there was a reprimand which was to be signed.

“I will not sign that.” stated the worker.

“I will have to tell the manager” was the reply.

The two months following were very, very busy. Much overtime was worked, and the worker, already having agreed to work the second shift, was burdened further. There were instances that were very strange, such as being banned from certain areas, as well as being the brunt of further very disturbing sexual jokes. However, being in school, needing the income, and having so to speak been ‘warned,’ the worker was not about to rock the boat. The work being completed in record time and with no further contracts on the horizon, the worker was layed-off, although there were others there who had not been there as long, nor had the better work ethic. The workers thoughts: “The money one earns is not for work accomplished, but rather for having to endure the fellow workers.”