

## CASE #5: PERSONAL RELATIONS IN THE COMPANY ENVIRONMENT WITH COMPANY PEERS

### Introduction

Workplace relationships can be complex, especially when professional boundaries become blurred with personal ones. When power differences are involved—such as between a manager and a subordinate—questions of fairness, career advancement, and harassment emerge. This case illustrates how professional respect and trust can be compromised when personal interests intersect with workplace boundaries.

### Scenario: Kate's Experience

Kate, a recent business graduate, joined Diverse Products in Boston and excelled in its competitive long-range planning department. She worked closely with her manager, John Larkin, and quickly earned the respect of her colleagues across the company.

Over time, John invited Kate to social outings that gradually moved from professional to personal. While Kate initially resisted, she occasionally accepted, including dinner and a symphony concert. John eventually expressed romantic interest, but Kate emphasized that their relationship should remain strictly professional.

John later implied that Kate's promotion to manager might depend on her openness to a closer relationship. Despite Kate's strong performance record and his earlier suggestions that she would supervise new hires, John announced that she and the new analysts would all report directly to him. Kate now faces a situation where her career trajectory and professional integrity feel compromised by her manager's personal advances.

### Questions for Discussion

1. If you were in Kate's position, how would you respond?
2. Can Kate and John realistically maintain a normal and productive business relationship?

3. What options does Kate have? Could this form the basis for a sexual harassment claim? What legal and ethical issues are raised?
4. Should Kate have acted differently earlier in her interactions with John?
5. Given the power imbalance, is it ever ethically proper for a manager to ask a subordinate on a date? If you were attracted to your boss, how would you handle such a situation, and why?

### **Closing Reflections**

“Maintaining high standards of honesty and integrity in today’s business world takes an inner toughness and resolve to persevere, often under extreme pressure or even under the threat of losing your job.” — Fred A. Manske Jr.

“Doing nothing is doing something. Some of the worst decisions are the ones that were never made.” — Michael Joseph