

Staff Zoom Meeting

Directions: You will be given a scenario that describes a complex situation. Please read it carefully, considering the various factors at play. It is unlikely you will have time to address all the discussion questions, so feel free to explore them in any order you prefer.

Scenario

During a Zoom staff meeting at a predominantly white academic library, team members are engaging in a lighthearted start to the meeting, sharing their pets with each other. When it's his turn, a senior staff member, who is older than many of the team, brings his cat to the camera and, with a playful tone, says to his pet, "Look at the Black librarian." While the senior staff member may have intended the comment as innocent, it left several team members, especially younger and racially diverse ones, feeling uncomfortable or unsure about how to respond.

Since it was the start of the meeting, not everyone had arrived or heard the comment. It wasn't addressed in the meeting. An email was sent later by another staff member (not a manager but a BIPOC faculty librarian) to everyone at the librarian council meeting about what had occurred. Since this is an academic library, the rules of hierarchy operate differently and individuals can bring concerns directly to the group. Many people agree that this is the type of emotional labor that marginalized staff members should not have to do. The director thanked the BIPOC librarian for bringing it to their attention and mentioned that these are the types of topics that we'll talk about at the annual retreat in six months. One week later, there has been no visible movement yet who knows what is happening behind the scenes.

Professionalism, in this context, requires discretion—it means a coworker is not expected to expose their colleague's misconduct publicly, even though the effects of their behavior ripple through the team. While such discretion is intended to maintain a respectful work environment, it can sometimes feel like it shields wrongdoing from broader scrutiny. The institution's response, too, must remain confidential, and whatever

sanctions, if any, were imposed, occurred behind closed doors. This lack of transparency leaves a void that's often filled by uncertainty, doubt, and frustration.

When disciplinary actions are hidden, it leaves others wondering if the institution genuinely enforces its stated values of equity and respect. There's a lingering question: if I speak up about harmful behaviors in the future, will my concerns be taken seriously? Will I feel validated, heard, and seen, or will these issues be brushed under the rug for the sake of professionalism?

Discussion Questions

1. Initial Reactions

- What were your initial thoughts and feelings when you heard this scenario?
- How do you think different staff members might have felt in this situation?
- Why might this comment be problematic or offensive to some?

2. Impact of Unconscious Bias

- In what ways could this comment reflect unconscious biases, especially given the racial dynamics in the workplace?
- How might the predominantly white setting of the institution influence the way comments like these are interpreted?

3. Generational and Cultural Perspectives

- How might generational differences play a role in how this comment was perceived or in the way it was said?
- What are some strategies we can use to bridge generational and cultural differences to create a more inclusive environment?

4. Responding in the Moment

- How might someone respond in the moment to address this comment in a way that is constructive and respectful?
- What role could a team leader play in this moment to set the tone and address the discomfort?

5. Building a More Inclusive Environment

- What steps can our organization take to address and prevent similar issues from arising in the future?
- How can we promote greater cultural competence and awareness of racial and generational sensitivities within our team?