

# HR STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES

## “CLOAKS & DAGGERS: RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION”

Riley is the HR Director for FoodCo Inc. On Monday when she arrives at one of her stores she notices a woman wearing a long brown cloak pushing shopping carts in the parking lot. She finds it odd considering it was already turning out to be a hot day, but didn't think any more of it. As Riley approaches the store she is met by the General Manager, Todd, who has a concerned look on his face and says he needs to discuss an employee issue with her. Riley settles into her office and Todd follows. He begins to explain his employee problem.

### THE REQUEST

Todd proceeds to explain that Julie, the stock associate they just hired 1 month ago, came to him this morning indicating she needs a religious accommodation. He goes on to explain that Julie informed him she has decided to practice Dragonet, a religion about Dragons and she is required to wear a cloak as part of this religion.

Riley put two and two together and realized it was Julie she saw in the parking lot earlier. Todd explained he did not know how to handle the situation so he allowed her to continue to wear the cloak until he had a chance to talk to Riley about the request. He then went on to explain that wearing a cloak was not Julie's only request. Julie also indicated that part of her religion also requires that she carry a dagger around for protection and that she would like to have permission to carry one. Riley has heard some strange requests, but this was the first time she had heard of cloaks and daggers. What should she do next?



### THE ACCOMMODATION

Riley carefully considers the request along with reviewing company policies. She takes into consideration the requests that Julie has made and how that would impact her job performance as well as others.

Although wearing a cloak may be cumbersome, uncomfortable and hot, Riley determines that FoodCo Inc. will allow Julie the accommodation of wearing the cloak. As for the dagger, Riley considers their policy against carrying concealed weapons and determines this would be a potential safety hazard as well as a direct violation of company policy. Riley, explains her concerns with Julie about carrying the dagger and Julie, although hesitant, agrees not to wear it while at work.

### CONCLUSION

The EEOC states “that unless it would be an undue hardship on the employer's operation of its business, an employer must reasonably accommodate an employee's religious beliefs or practices. This applies not only to schedule changes or leave for religious observances, but also to such things as dress or grooming practices that an employee has for religious reasons.”

Additionally the EEOC states that “an employer does not have to accommodate an employee's religious beliefs or practices if doing so would cause undue hardship to the employer. An accommodation may cause undue hardship if it is costly, compromises workplace safety, decreases workplace efficiency, infringes on the rights of other employees, or requires other employees to do more than their share of potentially hazardous or burdensome work.”