

When a Prankster Employee Takes it too Far



Marla, the manager for A to Z Print Shop, recently hired Doug as a cashier. Since his hiring, Doug has proven to be a great addition to the close-knit workforce – even though at times, he can be a bit of a prankster.

Last week, Marla went on vacation. During her time off, she placed the Assistant Manager, George, in charge and provided him specific instructions on the print jobs that needed to be completed in her absence.

Upon returning to work, Marla found the shop in complete disarray. There was an obvious tension in the air that seemed to center around Doug.

Figuring that something must have happened during her absence, Marla asked to meet with George to determine what happened to cause the “tense” work environment.

George told Marla that everything was running smoothly until halfway through last week Doug decided to play a joke on Jane, the shop’s most conservative employee.

Jane has a motivational quote posted near her phone. Last Wednesday, Doug thought Jane needed to “loosen up” and decided to do something about it. So, while Jane was working on a print job, Doug replaced her motivational quote with a picture of a male penis and the caption, “Hard times don’t last!”

Doug was sure that Jane would see the humor in his prank and told the entire staff what he had done, but Doug was wrong. Instead of finding the joke funny, Jane was mortified and greatly offended by Doug’s actions. In fact, Jane was so upset that she left work shortly after seeing Doug’s sign and had not returned to work since. George explained that since that day, the shop’s environment has been tense.

After speaking with George, Marla wanted to make things right with Jane and address Doug’s misconduct. She called an HR Professional to discuss the best strategy for handling this situation. The HR Professional recommended that Marla contact Jane about the incident and reassure Jane that appropriate corrective action would be taken. Marla was also told to conduct an investigation and to speak with Doug about his conduct.

Following the HR Professional's advice, Marla called Jane to discuss the situation. She first apologized to Jane for what happened with Doug. Marla also assured Jane that she would be addressing the situation with Doug immediately and appropriate steps would be taken to prevent such conduct in the future. Jane told Marla that she appreciated the personal contact and informed Marla that she would return to work the following week.

Next, Marla spoke to Doug about the incident. To Marla's dismay, Doug was surprisingly unapologetic about his behavior. Instead of taking responsibility for his actions, Doug accused Jane of overreacting to his joke. Marla found his lack of remorse troubling and, after again consulting with an HR Professional about firing Doug, terminated Doug for violating the shop's anti-harassment policy.

In addition to terminating Doug, Marla took advantage of the training resources offered by her HR Risk Management program and held a training session with the remaining workers about hostile work environment harassment and acceptable workplace conduct.