

## Help! My Company Has Fallen Victim to a Workplace Scam!



At about 1:30am last Saturday night, Johnny, the night manager at 123 Restaurant, received a phone call from a person who identified herself as Daisy, the owner of the Restaurant. Daisy told Johnny that she was in a difficult situation and needed his help.

Daisy explained that she was being blackmailed and she needed to pay the blackmailer \$1,500 within the next two hours otherwise the restaurant would be permanently closed for health violations. Johnny, afraid of losing his job, told Daisy he would do anything to help her out.

Daisy instructed Johnny to take \$1,500 out of the company safe and give the money to an employee with a vehicle. The employee would need to drive to the closest 24-hour pharmacy (which was approximately 30 minutes away) and then purchase \$1,500 worth of \$50 gift cards. Once the purchase was made, the employee would need to call the telephone number Daisy provided and read the barcode numbers to the person that answers the phone.

While the whole thing sounded a little “cloak and dagger,” Johnny did as Daisy instructed and sent Pete out to run this unusual “errand.” Pete left the restaurant with the money at about 1:45am.

By 3:30 a.m., Pete had not yet returned to the restaurant and Johnny became concerned and anxious. He kept replaying the strange conversation with Daisy in his head and began to wonder if he did the right thing. Uncertain of what to do next, Johnny called Clara, the restaurant manager, and explained the situation.

After hearing the story, Clara suspected that Johnny had fallen victim to a scam. She told Johnny to call the police and file a report. Clara then called the owner (the real Daisy) and confirmed that she had not called the restaurant that evening. After her phone call to Daisy, Clara went out to the restaurant.

Shortly after Clara arrived at the restaurant, Pete returned from his “errand.” Pete told Johnny and Clara that he did what he was instructed to do, but he was late getting back because he had a flat tire. Pete also presented Clara with the receipt from the gift card and showed her his cell phone, which reflected a 5-minute call to that number.

Clara conducted an investigation and determined that neither Johnny or Pete were “in” on the scam. Despite this finding, Clara wanted to terminate Johnny for exercising poor judgment because Johnny blindly followed “Daisy’s” instructions without questioning them.

Later that morning, Clara called an HR Professional to obtain support for Johnny’s termination and to discuss how to best handle this type of situation in the future. The HR Professional supported the termination. She further recommended that Clara develop a company procedure for handling this type of request in the future and to provide training to the entire restaurant staff on how to properly respond to a potential scam.

Clara agreed with the recommendation and, after terminating Johnny, Clara developed an official company procedure for responding to a suspicious request from management and provided training to all employees on this procedure.

**Take home for employers**

Any company can fall victim to a workplace scam. In order to protect yourself, develop procedures on how you expect your employees to respond to suspicious requests. Then provide training to all employees on how to identify suspicious requests and the proper response protocols. Finally, the number one lesson for all employees to learn – when in doubt, call your manager before providing any type of response.