

HR STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES* THREE IS A CROWD—NO DOUBT!



We demand our managers exercise good judgement at work, but what happens when our managers go out with employees *after* work? Can we still expect good judgment? One HR manager decided that, yes, the company's expectation extended beyond the workplace – at least when it comes to interacting with subordinates. See if you agree.

The Invite

Two managers at a retail store were working very late one night finishing up the annual inventory. Long days had made them tired and wanting some “fun.” Sensing their need, a subordinate took a chance and asked them to join him and other employees for a late night party. The two managers, one female and one male, decided they deserved a break.

The Party

The two managers followed the directions given to them by the employee. They arrived to a house full of retail store employees. No other managers were present. As they approached the door, the male manager looked at the female and asked, “Do you still think this is a good idea?” She nodded her head yes and the two entered.

The employees greeted the managers with full pitchers of beer and shot glasses full of Tequila. The drinking continued throughout the night. No one is certain what exactly happened, but in the morning the two managers awoke in a bed together with the employee that had invited them to the party. The three were lying naked in the bed and extremely hung over.

The Accusation

Two days later, the female manager walked into HR and asked to speak to the HR manager. The manager proceeded to tell the HR manager about the party, the drinking, and the little she remembered had happened before she apparently passed out. The female believed the male employee had aggressively propositioned her all night at the party and had purposely served her a lot of drinks to get her drunk. The manager asked HR to conduct an investigation and fire the employee.

HR's Decision

The HR manager stared out her window and tried to digest what she had just heard. Two drunken managers, a naked employee. The HR manager was tempted to open up the window and make a run for it! This was truly a mess. Resisting her flight instinct, she decided to talk to the male manager and the employee.

The male manager admitted to the party, the drinking and his decision to get in bed with another manager and an employee. He apologized and admitted it wasn't his “finest moment.” When asked about the employee, he said the female manager seemed to welcome any, and all, of the employee's advances.

The HR manager then went to speak with the employee. The employee admitted to inviting the managers and to providing both of them drinks. The employee did not, however, remember anything about how the three individuals got into the bed or ended up naked.

The HR manager walked back to her office and looked at her notes. She placed her head in her hands and took a deep breath.

The manager sat in front of her computer and began to write two termination notes. Who did she decide to terminate? The employee? The female manager? The male manager?

What would you do?

The End for Two

The HR manager decided to terminate the two managers. Why? This all happened after work and off the worksite, right? Yes, but these managers clearly lack a key characteristic of a manager – good judgment! Accepting an invitation to party with subordinates is a recipe for disaster. What if one of the employees had complained that the managers had harassed them during the party? What if something had been said by the managers during the party that could have been construed as discriminatory?

These managers made extremely poor decisions and put the company at risk. Termination was the only option.

Feedback

Questions? Comments? Let us know by emailing us at terrytraynor@eplaceinc.com.

*These examples are based on an actual incidents however, names and other organizational details have been changed.