

HR STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES



Untangling an Employee's Web of Deception

Every Monday morning, Serena, the HR Director at New Salem Escape, checks the online reviews that guests posted over the weekend. On Monday, she finds the following post ...



Theresa Donovan

New Salem Escape is truly a piece of paradise. I'm not sure what I loved more... walking around the beautifully maintained property, the comfortable and spacious rooms, or the excellent dining. It had everything I needed for a wonderful stay.

The service was exceptional with one glaring problem, the concierge, Chad. He was horrible and had no interest in contributing to the guest's experience. Any comment was met with an eye roll and a rude tone. Chad should not be in hospitality. It is in spite of my interactions with Chad, that Escape receives a 5-star rating.

This is not the first time a guest has complained about Chad. In fact, Chad is currently on a Performance Improvement Plan because of past complaints. Serena quickly begins an investigation after this latest negative review.

Serena speaks with Ben, the Escape's manager, about the customer review. Ben took the reservation, however, he denies knowing anything else about this particular guest.

Next, Serena speaks with Chad. Chad informs Serena that Ben went to college with this guest (Theresa) and that they are Facebook friends. In fact, Ben has many posts on his wall from her. Chad also tells Serena that he thinks Ben asked Theresa to post the negative review so that Chad would be fired.

While Serena thinks that Chad's "conspiracy theory" is a little far-fetched, she accesses Ben's work email account to look into it further. There she finds several email chains between Theresa and Ben. In one of the emails, Ben is suggesting language for a negative review that is similar to the one posted by Theresa.

After this discovery, Serena questions Ben about the Facebook posts and emails. Ben claims that his Facebook account was hacked and he did not know anything about the posts from Theresa. With respect to the emails, Ben admits that he might have exchanged a couple of emails with Theresa, but continues to deny knowing Theresa. He also denies suggesting the language for the negative review.

Serena is taken aback by all the information that she has received over the course of the day, but feels that she has gathered enough information to conclude her investigation into the Chad/Ben situation.

She decides that the complaint made against Chad was false, and it will not be held against him.

Ben is not so lucky. Due to Ben's conduct during the investigation, Serena no longer trusts Ben and questions his ability to perform his job as manager with the honesty and integrity that is expected of him. For these reasons, Serena decides to terminate Ben.

Best Practice

Always act with due diligence when conducting an investigation and do not approach any investigation with preconceived notions. Things are not always as they seem in the workplace and even your best manager could have a secret plan to sabotage a subordinate employee. Also, refer to the investigation toolkit, available on our website : Login → Click on **HR Tasks** → Click on **Harassment and Discrimination**, look under **Conducting Workplace investigations** and consult with an HR Professional to discuss any findings before taking any adverse action against an employee.

(*This incident really happened; but, names and other details have been changed.)