

A Hint of Pink among the Green

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Abstract

*The sage advises that nothing is quite like it seems! And that was the situation with Mary Rogers, a long-time employee of Silver Lake State Park--a scenic, majestic park that captures the essence of quietude. Mary was the quintessential employee: Prompt, diligent, courteous, competent and productive. Her personality did not jive with Jim Canfield, her new co-worker who was capable, but "cranky." With a change in Mary's demeanor and spirit, her manager was apprised that she was suffering from stage-four cancer, and her supervisor, Pete Waldorf, was saddened by the news. As the maladies associated with the disease grew, she went through the various stages of grief that are associated with loss, Mary continued to work, but did not have her usual resilience and strength. Some job accommodations were made to enable Mary to work, receive health care benefits and take some added rest periods. But what about Jim Canfield? Who asked him about the work-life balance responsibilities he was facing before he was terminated? Did anyone know about his wife's serious illness? And, as Pete read the obituary section of the local newspaper, it became painfully obvious of what had transpired in Jim's life. Simply: "Margaret Canfield, wife of Jim Canfield had lost her long fight with cancer..." and in lieu of flowers, condolences and contributions to her memorial fund were preferred. The case concludes with artistically written and managerially challenging set of **Questions and Instructions**.*

Keywords: Human Resources, Employee Conduct, Employee Discipline, Employee Counseling, Case Studies in Management, Leadership, and, Soft Managerial Skills.

Recommended Courses: Case Studies in Management, Human Resources Management, Leadership Studies, State and Local Government. Conflict Negotiation and Resolution, Public Administration. and, Business Management.

Introduction

Silver Lake State Park, one of the most beautiful and most visited parks in the Midwest, is exquisitely one of nature's major delights. The park is easily bifurcated into recreation zones: On the southern side, there is the family-friendly, low-key, relaxing campground and sandy beach area; on the northern side there is a completely different ambience and feel. On this side the high-speed, high-octane, super-charged recreation area for off-road vehicles is located. Visitors come to the "rough and tumble side," as locals call it and "revel "in the power of their ATV engines as they climb the dusty sand dunes formed over the millennia and with their bandannas securely tied around their heads, drag race with one another on the wind swept flats. A wide assortment of visitors, ranging from adrenaline saturated junkies who are "rough around the edges" to families setting out to enjoy a "picnic in nature," and, of course, retired couples and visitors from around the country. Their bond is a common desire to experience the beauty, adventure, excitement, of Silver Lake State Park—especially the unfathomably beautify sun bursts as nature signals the impending dusk of the day.

Mary Rogers, an employee of the park, has worked at Silver Lake State Park for six years. Given the extensive diversity of the park ecology, employees are generally assigned many duties to perform, such as shoveling sand, emptying fir pits, to staining buildings, registering campers and selling permits. Mary, a 58-year old native of the state, was no exception. Although the majority of the workers were half her age, she worked hard, never complained, and wore a natural smile on her face—always! She was the consummate employee who came to work on time, was dependable, conscientious, and no task was too mundane for her to fulfill. Everyone loved Mary, and employees and visitors alike said she epitomized the laudable and desirable attributes of a seasoned, caring park ranger.

Jim Canfield, on the other hand, stood in stark contrast to Mary. He was a newer employee to the park and in his third year. Jim, 51 years of age, had previously retired from the Army and was labeled by his co-workers as “a cranky, old man.” He grumbled while he worked, was often short with visitors who asked him questions, and although capable in his own right, rarely went beyond the minimum required to maintain what he called “secure employment.” Nevertheless, he performed the work he was tasked, but usually took several long breaks during the morning and afternoon due to “bad, aching back.” Unlike Mary, Jim complained about anything and everything at the park.

Workplace Accommodations

Given the divergent personalities of Mary and Jim, it was easy to detect when some sort of change had come into Mary’s life; for her personal demeanor would completely change. She began to look and act tired at work and her “chipper-yet-sassy” attitude that everyone adored was quieted. As one of her team members said “The little song bird in Mary’s soul has, sadly, fluttered away.” Her other co-workers talked about the changes they had observed in their colleague and Pete Waldorf, park manager, noticed the change himself and became concerned, but not alarmed. He told others that he considered Mary as “part of the family” and believed she was one of the most trustworthy and loyal people in the park. Knowing something was askew, Pete finally pulled Mary aside and asked her about the abrupt change he had noticed in her demeanor. Mary was blunt with Pete, and as she broke down and with tears bursting from her eyes, told him she had been diagnosed with stage four breast cancer and would have to leave the park—a job she had grown to love. Pete, understanding the complexity of the situation and realizing Mary had a lot on her mind, said he would be willing to make some adjustments in her work if she decided to continue working or if she wanted to return to work after her treatments were completed. After a few weeks had passed, given Mary’s overall disposition, the rumor mill had geared up, largely out of caring concern of what had befallen her.

Pete Waldorf and Mary sat down and discussed what options would be available for her at Silver Lake. They talked about reducing hours, giving plenty of time off and limiting duties at the park. Since there was no long-term leave option currently available at the park and any time off would have to be unpaid, there were not many options. As Pete stated, “Mary, I’ll make as many reasonable accommodations as possible,” and given the ebb and flow nature of the park, I can shift some of the duties assigned to seasonal workers while you are in treatment and recovering.” Mary also knew that she would now have to rely on the health care policy she had with the state, which was considered good by most community standards and she would also be eligible to participate under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) without, of course, receiving pay.

What About Jim Canfield?

Coincidentally, Jim’s life was changing as well, but it was not as easily recognized since his demeanor remained constant, but his work performance abruptly changed. Illustrative of his change was his poorer than usual attendance record, his increased tardiness, and his state of tiredness. Unbeknown to the park management and his co-workers, his wife had also been diagnosed with cancer. He began to “zone out” for extended periods of time, and although his language was usually “hard and rough,” he began to bark orders at his co-workers, even though over which he had no authority, and allegedly had cursed at a tourist who asked for directions to the nearest restroom. In response to his uncivil and disruptive behavior, Pete brought Jim into the office and talked to him about his work performance and what changes in attitude, performance and, in general, behavior, would be required. Instead of informing Pete of his wife’s condition, he said, “Get me away from all these damn kids!” and left it at that. Pete, unaware of what was going on, decided to give Jim more solitary work assignments doing maintenance around the shop, and for the time being, this change seemed to resonate well for him and his co-workers.

As expected, when the cancer began to more fully develop, and the treatment began, Mary started missing more work. Once the chemotherapy took hold, Mary lost her hair; she became embarrassed about her appearance and felt uncomfortable at work. Once more she approached Pete and told him she would have to quit.

In response, Pete came back with the same offer, saying her position would be available if she changed her mind, and “reasonable accommodations” would be gladly made on her behalf. Around the same time, Jim started requesting weeks of leave at a time and even missed work on those days he was scheduled to work. To make matters worse, when he did come to the shop, the other workers said he would just sit around and be lazy for the majority of the day. Not long after these incidents had become habitual, Pete had no choice but to terminate Jim’s employment—his progressive discipline had run its course and to no avail and now it was time for the “long goodbye.”

Several months had passed when Pete got a phone call from Mary. She had made it through the worst part of the treatment and was on the road to recovery. She told Pete that she was “getting to feel better and was getting back on her feet again”. She still had no hair, but a fancy new wig helped her regain her confidence and although she still wasn’t back to her old self, her attitude had been restored and she wanted to be around people more than anything. Once again, Mary and Pete had a private discussion. Due to her loss of strength, she would not be able to perform many of the essential duties throughout the park. However, instead of returning to the duties and tasks associated with her old job description, Pete and Mary came up with a new title, something in the nature of a secretary and permanent camp attendant. She would be limited to normal business hours, instead of the many rotating swing shifts she once had, and she would always be within the comfort and safety of a ranger station.

The plan worked perfectly! Mary’s new duties allowed her to get back to serving, educating and entertaining the public without getting too tired throughout the day or worrying that she wasn’t getting enough work done. If she needed a break, she could take it. This job accommodation was exactly what Mary needed to make the extra cash needed for the heavy financial burden of medical bills, regaining her employment status, and what was possibly more important than all the others, giving Mary back that feeling of accomplishment, worthiness, and dignity.

Management Learns "...the rest of the story"

Pete was pleased with his decision after seeing how happy Mary performed her duties in her new setting. As he was sitting at his desk, he picked up the local newspaper. While flipping through the Metro Section, something caught his eye. He swallowed hard, there it was, he thought! In the obituary section, was a picture of Jim and his wife Margaret. In the caption below the picture, it simply read, “Margaret Canfield died after a valiant, five-year fight with breast cancer. She was preceded in death by her twin sons, Joseph and William and is survived by Jim-- her husband of 34 years Jim--the only remaining member of her family. Memorial services will be held at the Hills Funeral Home and internment at the Glencove Cemetery. Online condolences may be sent to www.Hillsfuneralhome.com and in lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Margaret Canfield Memorial at Silver Lake State Park—a park that she received respite and comfort from for many years.”

Questions and Instructions:

1. With the information he had, did Pete Waldorf make the right decisions or were there other steps he could have taken with Mary Rogers and Jim Canfield? Please explain.
2. Was there any evidence presented in the case of age or disability discrimination? Please elaborate.
3. What rights, if any did Jim Canfield have as an employee and as his wife’s major care provider? Please explain. Were other options available to Mary Rogers that were not broached in the case? Please explain.
4. Are there any legal ramifications that could come from this case with either Jim or Mary? If so, what are they? Please be specific.
5. If you were Pete Waldorf, would you revisit the case of Jim Canfield and although he was terminated, make him eligible for park employment in the future? If so why and if not, why not? Please be specific.

Case Title: A Hint of Pink Among the Green

Name:

Case Log and Administrative Journal Entry

This case analysis and learning assessment may be submitted for either instructor or peer assessment

Case Analysis:

Major case concepts and theories identified:

What is the relevance of the concepts, theories, ideas and techniques presented in the case to that of public or private management?

Facts — what do we know *for sure* about the case? Please list.

Who is involved in the case (people, departments, agencies, units, etc.)? Were the problems of an “intra/interagency nature? Be specific.

Are there any rules, laws, regulations or standard operating procedures identified in the case study that might limit decision-making? If so, what are they?

Are there any clues presented in the case as to the major actor’s interests, needs, motivations and personalities? If so, please list them.

Learning Assessment:

What do the administrative theories present in this case mean to you as an administrator or manager?

How can this learning be put to use outside the classroom? Are there any problems you envision during the implementation phase?

Several possible courses of action were identified during the class discussion. Which action was most practical by the group? Which was deemed most feasible? Based on your personal experience, did the group reach a conclusion that was desirable, feasible, and practical? Please explain why or why not.

Did the group reach a decision that would solve the problem on a short-term or long-term basis? Please explain.

What could you have done to receive more learning value from this case?

Source: Case Log and Administrative Journal Entry reprinted with permission, Millennium HRM Press, Inc.

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Suggested Websites:

The Employee’s Guide to the Family and Medical Leave Act - <https://www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/employeeeguide.pdf>

Quirky Question # 182, Accommodating Employee with Disabled Spouse - <https://quirkyemploymentquestions.com/disability-discrimination/roys-analysis-of-quirky-question-182-accommodating-employee-with-disabled-spouse/>

Can family responsibilities get you fired? - <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/can-family-responsibilities-get-you-fired/>

The “association” Game: How a Spouse’s Cancer May be Covered by the ADA -

<https://www.ctemploymentlawblog.com/2014/12/articles/the-association-game-how-a-spouses-cancer-may-be-covered-by-the-ada/>

Employer Best Practices for Workers with Caregiving Responsibilities - <https://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/caregiver-best-practices.html>