

WHAT DID YOU JUST SEE?

DIAGNOSING HARASSMENT

Ted Rogers Leadership Centre

You are a team leader in a fast-growing software development firm. Within the software industry generally there has been a lot of bad press about gender discrimination and sexual harassment being part of everyday behaviour. Your company has decided to get out ahead of it and, in the last three months, policies have been created to address any potential bias and abuse of power, including sexual harassment, in the firm's recruitment, development, promotion and employment practices. As a team leader you have also attended a mandatory one-day workshop where you learned that if you notice any suspicious behaviour you are obligated to report it and trigger an investigation. You are told that any person in a position of any authority who fails to do so will be summarily dismissed with cause. At the end of the workshop, you sign a contract signifying that you have been informed of and understand your obligations as a team leader with respect to the new policies of the firm.

A month later, you go to the lab of your good friend and colleague, a team leader of another software development team, to pick him up for an arranged lunch appointment. His lab is a busy place with around fifteen team members engrossed at their work stations. As you walk in, you notice that your friend is whispering in the ear of and leaning close into one of his team members; his arm is around the team member's shoulder. Whatever he is saying makes the team member blush deeply and look uncomfortable. When he asks his friend about it, his friend remarks, "Oh that! That was nothing. That team member blushes at anything. I was just trying give encouragement." Feeling uneasy, you go back to your friend's lab when you know he is out at a meeting to ask the team member if everything is ok. The answer is, "It was nothing."

Have you done enough to fulfill your obligations as a leader within the firm? Why or why not?

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The Twist

A month later, your friend is being investigated as a result of three sexual harassment complaints. Your friend asks you to be a character witness. What do you say?

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