

MISSING THE MESSAGE

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND BOUNDARIES AT WORK

Michael Baumtrog, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Law and Business, Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University

You are one of the few females at your ad agency, working on the creation of ad content and strategy. You have been successful in this male-dominated culture because you have a good working relationship with one of the more innovative account managers, Riley. Over the last three years, the two of you have teamed up on numerous projects, helping grow the company from its original 10 clients to its current 50-client portfolio.

Outside work, you and Riley are very different people. While you are in a committed long-term relationship, Riley tends to have many short-term romantic relationships going on at once, including several with other employees at the ad agency. Despite this, you have developed a strong friendship with Riley outside work, frequently going on double dates. And after you experience a relationship break up, you have been spending even more time at work and with Riley. The head of the agency, in fact, has noticed the increased productivity and has come to calling you both, “The Dream Team.”

Since your breakup, however, you begin to notice what is, at first, a subtle change in Riley’s behaviour towards you—so subtle you think you are just being paranoid. But this evening, as you are both getting ready to leave the office after working late, Riley moves around the table and gently rubs your back and says, “I know you probably just want to go home and veg in front of the TV, but forget that! Let’s go grab a bite. My treat.” You refuse by politely saying, “It’s been a long day and I will be happy to just get home.”

The next day, when you arrive to work, Riley is talking to the head of the agency. He is explaining something and the boss is smiling while he listens. When they see you are there, they elbow each other and laugh like they are sharing a joke. Riley, then says to you, “Good morning, darling! Did you sleep well after our session last night?”

You value Riley as a colleague and want to continue your successful working relationship together. How do you address what’s happened?

MISSING THE MESSAGE

The Twist

As you walk down a hallway the next day, Riley pushes you into a corner and kisses you. Does this change your action plan?

Keywords: team relations, harassment, workplace culture