

Competencies for Early-Career HR Professionals

Case Study

When the Boss Doesn't Like Her

Anna is the office manager for a Grocery Distribution warehouse in Ft. Myers, Fla. Anna's facility is part of a large Atlanta-based conglomerate that wholesales and distributes gourmet specialty food products throughout the southeastern United States. Anna has been at Grocery Distribution for four years, starting as an administrative assistant in the sales department. She was promoted to office manager 18 months ago and reports directly to the district manager, Justin. Anna likes her job. She enjoys her co-workers and hopes to make a long-term career at Grocery Distribution. As a single parent of two young daughters, she was delighted with the salary increase that came with her promotion. Justin is a new district manager for the Ft. Myers facility. He has made some changes in the structure of the organization, which, for the most part, have been well received by the staff.

Janet is the receptionist. She works at the front desk, greeting visitors, scheduling appointments and taking care of the mail. Anna is Janet's supervisor. Janet recently went through a difficult divorce, and now that she lives alone, Anna knows that Janet struggles to make ends meet on her receptionist's salary. Outside of work, Janet is active in community theater. At Janet's most recent opening night, Anna and several other Grocery Distribution employees were in the front row of the theater cheering on Janet's starring performance. Janet had some rough patches during the divorce, when she was understandably distracted, but overall, Anna is pleased with Janet's work. Janet has received positive performance appraisals.

Justin does not like Janet. He claims that she is careless and makes far too many mistakes, and with her casual attire, she doesn't "look good" at the front desk. "Besides," he says, "she's not really that interested in her job. That community theater thing takes way too much of her time." When Janet asked to take the morning off the day after her opening night, Justin commented that now she is undependable and insisted that Anna talk to Janet about it, even though Janet seldom misses work and her absence that morning was easily covered by other staff.

Friday morning, Justin calls Anna into his office. It has been a busy week because Justin is getting ready to leave for a two-week vacation. Several projects must be completed or offloaded to other staff before he leaves. It was decided that Anna would take care of some of Justin's projects while he is gone, and she is confident things will go well in his absence.

While Anna is gathering up her papers at the end of the meeting, Justin says, "There's just one more thing, Anna. While I'm gone, I want you to document Janet's poor performance and write up an appraisal on her. Have the paperwork on my desk and ready for me to sign when I get back, and then you can terminate her. I want her out of here within the next 30 days."

Anna is stunned. She knows Justin dislikes Janet, but she is not sure how she can document Janet's "poor" performance because she believes Janet is a good employee. Any time she has talked to Janet about Justin's concerns, Janet has tried to improve. Janet knows Justin does not like her, and she has made it clear to Anna

that if Justin has any problems with her work, she wants to know immediately so she can correct the problem. "I don't want to lose my job," she has told Anna. Anna wonders what to do. Grocery Distribution has a published code of ethics, and there is an HR department at headquarters in Atlanta, but there is no HR representative at Anna's facility in Ft. Myers.

What would you recommend to Anna? What consequences may occur as the result of her actions?