

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS -- CASE CLUSTERS

The following are groups of cases that can be used for in-class discussion or at-home writing assignments revolving around specific subject areas, as the instructor sees fit. For each cluster, I will discuss the content and possible angles to explore with students. Obviously, instructors could opt to use just one or multiple cases for analysis.

Although I am listing specific questions for each case cluster, you might prefer to start off discussion on a more open-ended note by requesting general reactions to the case(s) at hand.

TRANSITION: Student to Employee	Page
Dead Last	120
The World Doesn't Revolve Around You	156
Late Night E-mails	39
Due Diligence	145

This first cluster of cases revolves around the student making a role transition from student to employee. The cases illustrate how the student's interactions with their co-op/internship educator represent *opportunities* to build relationships and to practice professional behavior for future workplace situations. Whether taking a class, completing a practice interview, or even corresponding via e-mail, the student can work on honing opportunities that will pay off in the workplace.... Or not, as shown in the first three cases above. The fourth case is a tough reminder of how working in the real world means adjusting to the fact that all actions, positive or negative, have consequences far greater than many young professionals anticipate.

Discussion Questions

1. How is the role of student different from the role of employee?
 - *A student is a customer; an employee is a service provider. As such, it's less acceptable for an employee to make demands about an employer or to complain about less enjoyable duties.*
 - *The student lifestyle often revolves around unusual hours with relatively little supervision; an employee usually has regular hours with supervision.*
 - *An employee's good or poor performance affects other people to a greater degree than a student's good or poor performance affects others.*
 - *An intelligent student can have a "sprinter mentality," procrastinating and then working in bursts while performing well in many instances. An employee benefits more from a "marathoner mentality," performing steadily for long hours for many consecutive weeks.*

2. To what degree would you agree with the following: “A good student is more likely to be a good employee than a poor student.” Why would you guess that is true or false?
 - *Although it may seem counterintuitive, there is no proven correlation between academic performance and job performance. Good grades may indicate aptitude to some degree, but aptitude is often less important than work ethic, attitude, interpersonal skills, and ability to work in a team in a job environment.*
3. Do the behaviors shown in these cases reflect ways in which you have seen students behave on campus?
4. Having read these cases, what are the lessons you can apply to your relationship with your co-op coordinator and with your future supervisor?

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR – Basics	Page
Marathon Man	169
Building Visibility	172
From Rookie To Veteran	174

These cases are good ways to show how becoming a superstar in the workplace is not a magical transformation for most students. It is an incremental and fairly complex process that requires a variety of behaviors.

Discussion Questions

1. From these cases, list several specific steps that can help a completely inexperienced individual can go from having no reputation in an organization to exceeding expectations and earning the reputation of being a professional superstar.
 - Going above and beyond on ANY assigned tasks; assisting others even it's outside one's assigned duties; figuring out your supervisor's quirks and accommodating them; being nice to people; developing a good reputation and connections with influential individuals; finding a good mentor; attempting to find better and more efficient ways to complete tasks, etc.*
2. In “Marathon Man,” Tony Lam tells an interviewer that he’d be willing to work for minimum wage to work for that employer. What sacrifices would you be willing to make—whether they relate to pay, relocation, a long commute, extremely long hours—if it meant getting a terrific job instead of an okay one?

3. After reading these stories, write down your top five priorities, in order, in terms of what behaviors you will need to engage in to start your job off on the right foot on the way toward getting a great evaluation at the end of co-op?

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS: Self-Fulfilling Prophecies	Page
A Vicious Circle	36
A Supposedly Bad Job	38

These cases show two sides of the same coin, namely the concept of “self-fulfilling prophecy.” This psychological phenomenon describes how people often live up—or down—to their own expectations in various situations. Thus a person who goes into a job expecting it to be interesting and worthwhile is more likely to have a better experience, while someone who expects the worst may get exactly that!

Discussion Questions

1. To what degree do you believe that an individual’s attitude has a direct impact on how positive or negative their experiences turn out to be?
2. Do you believe it’s possible to change one’s attitude in order to avoid the possible downside of having a poor attitude?
3. What positive and solution-oriented steps could the pair of students in “A Vicious Circle” have taken to improve their situation? Would these steps have made a difference?
4. Sometimes students who get poor evaluations or get terminated tell us that if only they had been given interesting work to do, then they would have done a great job. What is your reaction to that belief?

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS: Paying Dues	Page
The Closet Office	31
"Everything I Didn't Expect"	32
Earning The Learning	10
Into The Driver's Seat	63

These cases illustrate the fact that most co-ops/interns/young professionals often are not viewed as “instant heroes” in the workplace. At many organizations, full-time employees might start off with the assumption that you’re unable and willing to do a great job... until you prove otherwise. The big question: Do you have the patience and

attitude to do lower-level work and bide your time until you earn a great opportunity in the job?

Discussion Questions

1. As in the case of “The Closet Office,” let’s say that you get a terrible office or cubicle in your first job. You might have to share a cubicle or work in a common area. How would you keep your physical environment from having a negative impact on your attitude and performance?
2. Some full-time employees may assume that you have little to offer when you’re first hired. Does that assumption bother you, or is it reasonable that full-timers will expect you to prove yourself and work your way up the ladder?
3. In “Earning The Learning,” a co-op gets fired because he didn’t bother to do his basic job duties. How would you explain his behavior? Do you think he could have got what he really wanted if he changed his behavior from day one?
4. In “Into The Driver’s Seat,” the co-op suddenly seizes an opportunity and actually seems to like the fact that people believe he will fail. Do you prefer going into situations where people have high expectations that will be tough to meet... or low expectations that will be satisfying to disprove?

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS: Sexy Jobs	Page
All Work and No Pay	103
The Next Theo Epstein	106
A "Sexy" Job	119

These stories will be interesting to those who are mesmerized by the so-called sexy industries—fashion, music industry, film, television, sports management, etc.—all the fields that attract thousands of young men and women in the 18-30 age range. The first two cases show individuals who were willing to make the sacrifices necessary for success in these fields, while the third case shows someone who got his heart’s desire and then found he didn’t like it! These cases can be good ways to help students assess whether they *really* want to pursue jobs in these fields.

Discussion Questions

1. In “All Work and No Pay” and “The Next Theo Epstein,” you read about some people who were willing to make substantial sacrifices in order to get a foot in the door in competitive fields. What sacrifices would you be willing to make—whether

they relate to pay, relocation, a long commute, extremely long hours—in order to get a so-called dream job?

2. Some people thrive on working long hours in intense, demanding jobs. Others are okay with that earlier in their career but want to “downshift” later to lead a more balanced. Still others believe that it’s important to have work-life balance throughout life, even as a co-op or new hire. Where do you stand on that issue?
3. When you read these cases, were you excited to find that it is indeed possible to build a career in competitive fields? Or did you feel depressed or disillusioned to find how hard it really is?

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR - Advanced - Exceeding Expectations	Page
Unpaid Evenings	64
Special Recognition	68

These cases revolve around “above and beyond” behavior but which also raise questions about boundaries between professional and personal life.

Discussion Questions

1. Most salaried employees are not compensated for working extra hours. How willing are you to work unpaid hours or assist your employer with duties that may cut into your evening or weekend hours? These cases show how such efforts can lead to greater career opportunities, special recognition, and a greater sense of professional identity. As a result, do you now feel more inclined to be opened to going way beyond your expected duties and hours?
2. Are their limits to how much time and energy an employee should put into a job? If so, how can one determine what is “right” for him or her?
3. In “Special Recognition,” the nursing co-op was criticized to some degree for investing too much energy into the patient and her family. Do you think she did the right thing? In her shoes, would you be able and willing to do the same?

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR - Advanced - Handling Peer Pressure	Page
Changing of the Guard	56
Going The Extra Kilometer	58
Fired During The Last Week of Work	13

These cases revolved around how the actions and attitudes of our fellow employees can influence our own behavior in the workplace. Discussion of these stages can be useful in delineating when it's helpful to heed others' opinions and when to ignore them.

Discussion Questions

1. In "Changing of the Guard," Aviad is given information from the previous co-op but basically disregards it. Is it a good idea to talk to previous co-ops or full-time employees about your job? If so, how can this be helpful? Why do you need to take their information with a grain of salt?
2. Given that many radically different behaviors may be present in one work environment, how is a new employee supposed to decide what is *really* okay in terms of e-mail, internet use, drinking alcohol, working hours, lunch hours, phone use, attire, and so forth?
3. In "Fired During The Last Week of Work," do you believe that the co-op got a raw deal given that his full-time, more experienced peers urged him to drink?
4. In general, what do you think about drinking alcohol with co-workers or a supervisor at lunch or after work?

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR - Advanced - Ethical Dilemmas	Page
Rat Trap?	81
Truth and Consequences	83
A "Friend" In Need	85
To Tell The Truth	88

These cases revolve around various ethical challenges at work, including when to alert a supervisor to a co-worker's mistakes ("Rat Trap?"), falsifying a timesheet for financial gain ("Truth and Consequences"), having a supervisor abuse power by borrowing money ("A 'Friend' In Need"), or lying when convenient to avoid embarrassment or to get out of a situation.

Discussion Questions

1. In "Rat Trap?" a co-op wrestles with whether he should tell his supervisor about a co-worker's failure to complete a task. Would you tell your supervisor about it if you became aware of a co-worker who was:
 - falsifying a timesheet or expense report

- downloading porn videos on the company network?
 - costing the company money by not doing work?
 - being very rude to customers?
 - sexually harassing you or another employee?
2. In "Truth and Consequences," the co-op is suspended for falsifying timesheets, costing him a good reference on top of a good job. Assuming you would avoid this behavior, would you do so more because it's wrong or more because of fear of the consequences of being caught? Isn't getting some extra out of a Fortune 500 company basically a "victimless crime"? If not, who are the victims?
 3. In "A 'Friend' In Need," the student loans money to his manager but ultimately feels "ashamed" about it. Should he have known better, or is that too much to ask given that his manager held a position of power over him?
 4. In "To Tell The Truth," the woman who lied to her coordinator probably never realized that her lies were found out. And her coordinator may never see her again or be asked for a reference for her. As such, how do you think she feels about these lies at this point? Is she likely to repeat the behavior again?

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR - Advanced - Work Relationships	Page
Relationship Wreck	178
Finding Love In The Workplace	N.A.

The first case is from the book; the second one is attached at the end of this packet. Both cases are basically cautionary tales about the possible perils of forming close relationships when you are relatively new to a work environment. They should be thought-provoking for students to debate.

Discussion Questions

1. Is the nursing co-op in "Relationship Wreck" purely a victim in this situation, or does she own some responsibility for what happened, as far as we can tell?
2. In general, do you agree with the nursing co-op coordinators quoted in this story who now advise students that "it can take two years to get to really know someone?" Regardless, what kinds of out-of-work activities should be acceptable for a co-op to engage in with a full-time employee? A long weekend trip together? A one-week vacation? Going to nightclubs and bars? Beginning a romantic or sexual relationship? What are the "rules" for these situations as far as you can say.

3. In “Finding Love In The Workplace,” there is a striking contrast in perceptions at the very least. The co-op believes her romantic relationship with a full-time co-worker is discreet and claims that she and her boyfriend don’t argue. Others don’t see it that way. Is the co-op lying? If not, are there other explanations for what’s happening here?
4. Regardless of whether we’re talking about co-ops or full-time employees, is it simply a bad idea for people who work together to get involved in romantic and/or sexual relationships? If your answer is that it depends, explain times when it might be okay versus when it isn’t.
5. Do you think it can be said that Katie’s manager is guilty of sexual harassment? What do you think the company did after investigating the situation following Katie’s complaint about him?

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

A Hands-On Manager

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This is a sexual harassment case in which the student was initially reluctant to make anyone aware of what was happening.

Discussion Questions

1. The manager’s propositions started in mid-August, but Susanna didn’t tell her co-op coordinator anything about for several weeks. Do you understand why she didn’t act immediately?
2. Try to put yourself in her shoes: Would you have done anything differently?
3. It’s a difficult decision for anyone to report such behavior to Human Resources or to another trusted authority. But if the behavior goes unreported, others may suffer from the same treatment? Would you have the courage to report this kind of behavior?

Finding Love in the Workplace

When co-op coordinator Terence Young came back from vacation, he found two very troubling e-mails awaiting him. The first was from "Katie Dalrymple," a student of his. It was a very angry e-mail to HR. Although some facts weren't clear, she basically was accusing her manager of gender discrimination. She claimed that she had been transferred to an inappropriate job that was beneath her because of this discrimination. She had been told that the move was made because another group was shorthanded, but that didn't seem to add up: A co-op from her new group was moved into her old role.

Another e-mail awaiting Terence was from his colleague, Chad Nantz, who had been covering for him while Terence was on vacation. Chad hadn't spoken to Katie, but he did speak to HR and summarized his phone conversation with two HR reps. The gist of it was that Katie apparently was having a romantic relationship with a full-time co-worker, and she and the guy in question were said to be very indiscreet about it in the workplace. They reportedly had argued in front of other workers and were proving to be a significant distraction. Yet she had not been told that this had anything to do with her being moved into another group on another floor.

Terence met with Katie a few days later to get her side of the story. She was furious at her manager, Mike Grady. Mike and one of his co-workers had been known to be making life difficult for a few female employees in their group. His reported offenses included the following:

- Mike had complained to anyone who would listen about the injustice of women being allowed to have maternity leaves.
- He had been known to make other inflammatory statements that outraged many women in the office, such as "Guys have to cheat to stay married."
- He also was known to make "Beavis and Butthead" type comments that were heavy on suggestive sexual innuendo, even though he had been told that such comments were "gross."

Terence asked Katie if she was indeed having a romantic relationship with a full-time employee in her group. She admitted that she was, reminding Terence that she was an older student and not a "naïve kid." She said that the comment about she and "Edgar" being indiscreet and having arguments was not at all true.

Terence had always respected Katie and found her whole story to be very credible. Given the manager's track record toward women—Katie's boss had quit in a huff just a few weeks before—it seemed possible that he might be lying about the alleged arguments and indiscreet behavior of the young couple.

Coincidentally, though, another co-op who worked for the same company came to Terence two days later, also wanting to complain about concerns with the same employer. However, this co-op had a different story, claiming that Katie's relationship with Edgar was *not* discreet. It was well-known that the two had been involved for months and even that they had begun living together toward the end of Katie's co-op. The co-op talking to Terence now was angry at Katie, Edgar, *and* the employer. "It was obvious that Katie and Edgar were involved; they made no effort to hide it," this co-op said. "And I know someone in their group—not the manager—who complained to me about how they would bicker about what they were going to do that night or that weekend or whatever. It was really annoying.

"But I'm also mad at the company for moving her. I had trained a co-op to replace me, and they just took that co-op and threw him into Katie's old job... and now Katie doesn't want to work in our group, so all of our planning went out the window. It really stinks."

As this was written, the company is investigating the situation. Katie is now in an entirely different group, and all parties are awaiting the outcome of the investigation as this case was written.

Discussion Questions

1. In "Finding Love In The Workplace," there is a striking contrast in perceptions at the very least. The co-op believes her romantic relationship with a full-time co-worker is discreet and claims that she and her boyfriend don't argue. Others don't see it that way. Do you believe the co-op is lying? If not, are there other explanations for what's happening here?
2. Regardless of whether we're talking about co-ops or full-time employees, is it simply a bad idea for people who work together to get involved in romantic and/or sexual relationships? If your answer is that it depends, explain times when it might be okay versus when it isn't.

3. Do you think it can be said that Katie's manager is guilty of sexual harassment?
What do you think the company did after investigating the situation following Katie's complaint about him?