

Gender issues for first-level managers

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Case Study: A Day in the Life of an HR Manager

8:04 I drop my daughter at the childminder and I arrive early to work specifically to make a start on the recruitment campaign we are running for the new positions in the finance team; however I find that Ben T is waiting outside the HR office, furious. He is clenching his fists and actually looks like he might punch the door. Apparently, Ben and the other operations managers went to a bar last night and Ben learnt during their discussions that Tom has recently had a significant pay rise.

As Ben and Tom's line manager isn't picking up my calls, it falls to me to discuss this with Ben and at least calm him down. I explain to him that he is in a different pay band to Tom, and that we had recently reviewed salaries in that team. This seemed to placate Ben, who left after this taking up 40 minutes of my time.

8:50 The receptionist lets us know she needs to attend to a minor accident (she is a first aider). A couple of visitors arrive: I call to announce their arrival and make them both a drink.

9:00 I have a meeting in the Production Office –this involves crossing the production floor, for which I have to put on safety boots, a fleece and a high-viz jacket because of health and safety rules. The clothes are very masculine and look ridiculous with my dress. One of my colleagues whistles at me as I cross the production floor. I know he means it in a friendly way. He then says 'Looking hot there!' which I am clearly not. I mouth 'Shut up!' at him while smiling.

During the meeting, I review the training and development plans for the production team leaders with their manager, Paul. Paul mentions that he would like to arrange some assertiveness training for Sophie. Paul says that Sophie has lots of great ideas but doesn't speak up about them. I want to point out to Paul that he might just need to consider how he organises his meetings, but he is usually so against allowing his direct reports time for training and development, I don't want to risk him going off the team development plan altogether. I agree to arrange the training for Sophie.

9:45 Ben and Tom's manager has still not returned my calls and isn't picking up. I can see he is logged onto the system.

9:50 The HR Director arrives on site. She says: "Ben T has asked for a ridiculous pay rise, he's asked for 6k more, even though we've just been through the pay review." I explain what had happened earlier that day. She replies, "Well, I don't know what they thought they were all doing, discussing their pay, but we have decided to give Ben T a 3k rise, so could you make sure that goes through asap?" I am a bit annoyed by this. But not really surprised.

10:00 – 3:00 I spend this time in a performance capability meeting, two interviews and run a training session for new managers on absence management. I skip lunch but come back into the HR office to pick up some papers between meetings –my two HR Assistants are taking their lunch break in the office, and are looking at wedding dresses online. I worry how this will look as people will not know they are on their break and think they are wasting their time. I decide to discuss this with them later in the day

3.00 I ask the HR Director if I could have a quick word about my pay. I explain that I am finding it hard to accept my lack of pay rise while I am processing pay rises for colleagues above their 'pay bands'. The HR Director points out that Ben T is going to be taking on more responsibility, and the rise is in recognition of this. I highlight the extra responsibilities I have taken on (four new business units). The HR Director tells me that she can't make the argument for paying me more. Epic pay rise request fail.

3.30 I have to travel to one of the other business units to hold a consultation meetings regarding a proposed restructure. I think about my discussion with the HR Director and am a bit tearful. I pull over at the garage on the way, buy a huge packet of Maltesers, and eat the lot before I arrive back at work at 6.00. I need to leave work to collect my daughter from the childminder so I decide to work on the recruitment campaign for the finance roles at home after putting her to bed.