

the real deal

TRUE-LIFE BUSINESS SCENARIOS FOR YOU TO SOLVE

THE CASE OF THE NEW SALESPERSON

JOE DONALDSON has been a bench jeweler at the two-store Angelis Fine Jewelers for over 12 years. Though he's had his share of disagreements with the store's owners, Mark and Carrie Seebring, he has always been satisfied with his job, earning a good living while learning, growing, and contributing to the success of the business. In fact, Joe's faith in the company was strong enough that, when his step-daughter Amanda and her husband told him that they were moving back to their small, Southwestern home town after several years of California living, Joe recommended she apply for the open sales position at Angelis. With several years of jewelry sales experience, he felt Amanda was a natural fit.

The Seebrings had reservations about hiring the family member of another associate, but felt they owed Joe the courtesy of at least talking to Amanda. In the interview, they were impressed with her experience, personality, and bright and attractive appearance. A second interview with the Angelis general manager, Jack, confirmed their initial impressions — and despite their significant concerns, Amanda was hired to fill the open sales position at Angelis' new, second store. Family or not, it wasn't often that good salespeople fell from the sky in their small town.

Amanda's employment started off reasonably well, though Jack had concerns about her maturity, and how little she seemed to know about product and basic jewelry store procedures. As time went on, Jack's concerns became more pressing as Amanda's sales production began to deteriorate. Coaching Amanda proved useless, as she immediately became defensive, pointing out everything that everyone else in the store was doing incorrectly. On several occasions, she even went to her step-father with complaints about Jack's "picking on her". Joe repeated her concerns to the Seebrings, and expressed his disappointment in Jack's management style and lack of professionalism in dealing with Amanda. While the Seebrings were familiar with the situation and were supportive of Jack, they were hesitant to take a stand against Joe (and Amanda), as the only thing harder to find in their town than good salespeople was a good jeweler.

At the new store one day, a part-time associate approached Jack and asked to talk with him. She said she had proof that Amanda was having affair with the store's senior sales associate, Drew — and that Amanda and Drew were planning on leaving their respective spouses and moving in together. After talking with the Seebrings, Jack confronted Drew and Amanda with the allegations. They admitted that it was all true. Within a week, they had each left their homes and moved into a small apartment near the store. Despite the scandal in town, Mark

and Carrie were at a loss for what to do. They had no policy prohibiting related family members from working in the company, and none prohibiting fraternizing among employees. They decided that the best they could do under the circumstances was to separate the couple by moving Amanda to the main store and to ask both Amanda and Drew to keep their personal lives out of the company's business.

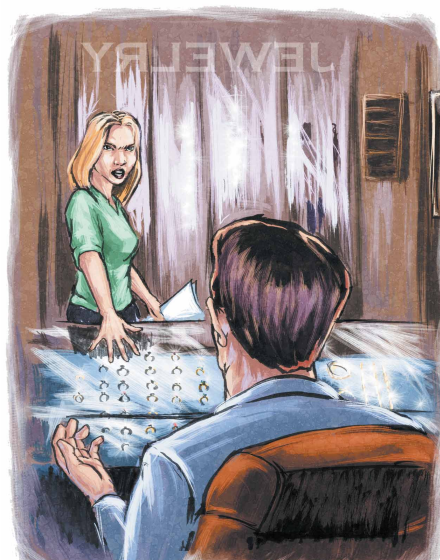
After several months of continued performance monitoring and coaching (during which Amanda's sales continued to deteriorate), Jack felt disciplinary action was needed. With the Seebrings' support, he delivered a written "performance action correction" to Amanda, and was met with the same defensive posturing as always. Joe immediately became involved, threatening to resign if the Seebrings couldn't control Jack's obvious professional bias against his step-daughter. Two days later, the Seebrings received a registered letter from Drew in which he accused Jack of sexually harassing Amanda, and threatened to take the issue to the authorities if Jack wasn't fired immediately.

After seeking professional advice, the Seebrings launched an independent investigation of the allegations, which proved to be false. The Seebrings must decide how to proceed. Joe is convinced that the investigation was tainted and is very unhappy with the company. Any action against Drew or Amanda could be construed as retaliation, which could present serious problems for the store — despite the fact that Amanda's sales performance has fallen off dramatically and Drew's attitude has become highly disruptive and negative. Jack is devastated by the entire episode, and his own productivity is suffering as well.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR.

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AMANDA SAID JACK WAS PICKING ON HER; JACK SAID HER PERFORMANCE WAS POOR. WHO'S RIGHT?

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Mark and Carrie can clearly see that they have to do something — but any choice they make will undoubtedly cost them at least two employees, if not three or even four. Is there any sensible way out of this — and how can the Seebrings — or any other owner, for that matter, protect against this sort of thing happening again?