



SONOMA COUNTY WORK-READY CERTIFICATION
WORKPLACE ETHICS SCENARIO # 1:
“JUST JOKING”

Lesson Plan Title: “Just Joking”

Concept/Topic to Teach: Avoid use of language or comments that stereotype others (WRC Skill #6)

General Goal(s): Students discuss and are made aware of issues surrounding stereotypes;
Students learn how to deal with sensitive issues (i.e. discrimination) in the workplace

Required Materials:

1. Copies of “Just Joking” workplace ethics scenario
2. Copies of Discussion Questions for the “Just Joking” scenario

Step-by-Step Procedures:

1. Write the words “stereotype” and “discrimination” on the front board and ask students to respond (verbally or in writing) about what they believe these words mean
2. Next, ask students if they believe jokes based on race or gender constitute discrimination (hold a brief discussion in which you solicit different points of view)
3. Pass out the “Just Joking” scenario and ask a volunteer to read it aloud while the other students follow along
4. Hold a brief discussion about what the students believe to be the relevant facts in the scenario and what the employee should do.
5. Pass out the Discussion Questions for the “Just Joking” scenario (you can have students complete these individually, in pairs, in small groups, or as a homework assignment)

Closure:

Debrief with all students about the importance of avoiding the use of language or comments that stereotype others and what they learned from the situation presented in the scenario.

NOTE: Students can include their written responses to the Discussion Questions in their WRC Portfolio to demonstrate Skill #6.

Just Joking

Just Joking* Scenario

Key Characters:

You—Employee

Jeff—Store Manager

Maria—Regional Manager

Scenario:

As a high school student, you recently accepted a part-time job at a clothing retail store that is part of a large, national chain. After working at the store for a couple of months, you begin to develop a good working relationship with Jeff, the store manager, who is impressed with your work ethic and positive attitude. On one occasion, Jeff confides in you that his wife is very ill and that if it weren't for the good health benefits that come with his position as store manager, he doesn't know how he would pay for her medical bills.

As Jeff becomes more comfortable around you, he begins telling jokes and making comments that are racially insensitive. These jokes and comments have made you feel uncomfortable, but you haven't said anything to Jeff for fear that it will damage your relationship and possibly your chances for a promotion or pay raise.

One day, you are notified with a confidential letter that Maria, the company's regional manager, will be coming to the store the next day to meet individually with all employees. The purpose of her meetings, you are told, is to address complaints that have been made by another employee regarding inappropriate jokes that Jeff has made while at work. The letter goes on to state that the company does not tolerate any forms of racial discrimination and that the consequence for violating this policy is immediate termination.

What should you do?

Just Joking

Discussion Questions

What are the relevant facts?

1. You are relatively new on the job.
2. You have a good working relationship with Jeff, the store manager.
3. Jeff's wife is ill and he relies on the job's health benefits to pay for her medical bills.
4. Jeff sometimes makes racially insensitive jokes or comments in your presence.
5. Another employee has complained and all employees are now being asked to meet with Maria, the regional manager to discuss the matter.

From an employee perspective:

1. Are you obligated to tell Maria the truth in regards to Jeff's inappropriate comments?
2. What other options, if any, do you have in this situation?
3. Does the fact that Jeff relies heavily on the job's health benefits factor into the decision?

From an employer perspective:

1. What should Maria do if several employees admit to hearing Jeff make racially insensitive jokes or comments?
2. Do jokes constitute racial discrimination?
3. Is it appropriate for Jeff as the store manager to share personal information about his wife's health with an employee? Why or why not?