

Aline DeNeuve

by

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S. L. McShane *Canadian Organizational Behaviour*, 5th ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2004); S. L. McShane & M. A. von Glinow, *Organizational Behavior*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005); S. L. McShane & T. Travaglione, *Organisational Behaviour on the Pacific Rim*, 1st ed. (Sydney: McGraw-Hill Australia, 2003)

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Aline DeNeuve has just been promoted to director of training and development at Consolidated Inc. from her previous position as manager of special projects. This assignment took her from the Calgary regional office to the regional office in Montreal. Aline had only been on the job for a few weeks when she was invited to a corporate retreat designed to cultivate harmonious working relationships with co-workers and to help the vice president prepare a report on approaches to improving employees' attitudes.

Prior to assuming her new position, Aline had designed and delivered a training program on employee diversity with a fairly high degree of success in the Calgary and Edmonton offices. There was little resistance and, based on the feedback received, employees felt satisfied with the outcome. The Calgary office was staffed by older workers and baby boomers. The demographics of employees in the central Canada offices were considerably different. In fact, it was once said that Consolidated's employees in Central Canada looked like the United Nations. They included ranged from generation-Y (under 25) to people born before World War II.

Aline has a no-nonsense managerial style. She does not believe that managers should socialize with employees because friendly relations with subordinates would undermine managers' objectivity and compromise subordinates' respect for their bosses. She also does not believe in cultivating friendly relations with her colleagues because she believes that close friendships usually lead to undesirable compromising outcomes. Before she finalized the plans for the retreat, she decided to talk with a variety of employees chosen at random about their experiences from the first retreat and to secure their views about attending another retreat. She met with each person individually. She spoke with Heather, Jack, June, Alison and Richard. She encouraged each person to speak candidly and in confidence without any fear of retribution.

Heather, an administrative assistant, said she would prefer not to attend because she does not like retreats. She still resents Jack, her supervisor for not promoting her six months ago. She believes that she was overlooked because she is an Chinese and Jack does not like foreigners. (Consequently, she has been taking off an unusually large number of sick days). She felt that interpersonal relations could be improved because most staff members do not socialize with one another. And they seem to tolerate each another only to complete job task requirements. However, she felt that three-day retreat held once per year will not solve the anti-social atmosphere which exists. She wondered whether it is possible to change the situation considering the diverse background of employees and their different belief systems.

Jack, a certified management accountant, is manager of marketing. He does not want to attend the retreat. He is upset that he was not promoted to director, (the position Aline

now occupies). He feels that he was passed-over because he is black. Jack suggested that the organization should use the money it plans to spend on the retreat to strengthen security because he is concerned that staff have been taking home a lot of office supplies. He also believes that the organization should do a better job designing an orientation and socialization program for new employees to ensure a smoother transition into the existing workforce. He also felt that such a program would help to promote and stimulate greater workplace harmony.

June, manager of customer services is not keen on attending because she feels that the last retreat was a waste of time. She confided to Aline off-the-record that she does not like working at her job any more because the job has become too stressful. Senior management, she said, keeps promising to hire more customer service representatives for more than two years, but they have not yet hired anyone. June further indicated that she has grown tired of answering one customer question after another and many of these customers were overbearing, arrogant, highly demanding and many of their inquiries were just downright stupid. She felt that if half the customers who called simply used their common senses they could easily solve their own silly problems. She said that the new computer system combined with the new headsets has increased substantially the number of calls and customer problems she has to resolve each day. June also confided that her increased workloads and the high traffic flow (volume of calls and complaints) that she is currently dealing with has contributed to ruining her marriage. She said when she gets home in the evenings, she is very tired and feels very depressed. She also said that the job is ruining her nights and weekends. Thus, she is often terrified of going to work some days. "The last thing I want to do at this stage is to go on a retreat to listen to a bunch of boring, two-faced, pompous big-shots who think that they are better than everyone else," she complained. "I would prefer to spend my time visiting her friends and family in eastern Europe. At least over there I know who my friends and enemies are."

Alison, who is supervisor of employee benefits and services, also expressed reservation about attending. She believes that some of the males and females think that retreats are equal opportunity sojourns for hitting on one another. She felt that until the organization develops a policy regarding inter-office dating, then it should not promote ventures of this type. Alison holds strong religious views and feels that there are certain behaviours that should not take place in the workplace but should be confined to the proper environment. She felt that management's silence on the matter is an expression of condonation.

Richard, the last person selected for the retreat, said he would be pleased to attend because he has always felt these events are very good for morale, interpersonal relationship and to socialize with senior management.

Aline was astonished by the attitudes of the staff with whom she spoke. On further reflection, she wondered how morale could have gotten so bad and why management has not moved more aggressively to deal with it.