

Facilitator's Guide

Myth vs Reality



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This guide is to assist equal opportunity professionals and leaders in determining the best possible solution for the related video. Strategies provided in this guide are not an all-inclusive list. Unit members should be encouraged to develop their own unique strategies based on the situation.

Training Objectives

- To discuss indicators and potential effects of observed behaviors
- To generate thoughts and ideas about how to best address this situation as a leader
- To understand different approaches in addressing concerns

What (behaviors) did you observe in the video?

- Army First Sergeant (1SG) (male actor standing in initial scene)
 - The 1SG appeared focused with a “win at any cost” attitude
 - The 1SG expressed that the women didn’t need to compete, only to distract the competition
 - The 1SG was not open to allowing the women to compete even when the female raised her desires and concerns
- Army Sergeant (SGT) and Staff Sergeant (SSG) (males sitting down at the table)
 - Both male members appeared to accept to the situation – status quo
 - Neither contested the 1SG’s viewpoint/direction
 - One male soldier validated the 1SG’s viewpoint when the female talked to him after the other members left
- Army SSG (female actor)
 - The SSG became discouraged and upset once she found out she could not compete with her team
 - The female did not have any support from her other male teammates in contesting the 1SG’s directions
 - The female felt her only option to address the situation was to contact the EO office for help

As you observed this interaction, what other assumptions could be made?

- The 1SG does not value the women or feel they can physically compete with the men in this contest
- The 1SG may not allow women to fully participate in other areas/roles where he may feel a male’s abilities would supersede a female’s
- The 1SG feels confident enough in his beliefs and actions that he would make an open statement before his subordinates and they would accept/tolerate his comments
- Other male members in the organization may feel the same way as the 1SG does because they did not challenge his comments
- The other male members feel supported in their beliefs that the females don’t belong; this is reinforced by the 1SG beliefs/comments and exhibited by their own comments towards her
- There may be polarization between males and females within the organization on their roles and abilities and their full acceptance into the organization
- High favoritism, unequal treatment (e.g. awards, promotions) based on one’s sex may exist

If you observed this interaction, what could/should you do?

- Pull the 1SG aside and give him a chance to correct his direction; inform him that his actions are inappropriate and that his actions/comments could be perceived as discriminatory towards the females by discouraging their equal participation in the events
- Talk to the males (that were sitting at the table) and inform them that by agreeing with the 1SG, they are encouraging negative behaviors and contributing to a non-inclusive environment

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- Express to the 1SG and the other males that by vocalizing their beliefs they are alienating the other members of the unit and are actually establishing a discriminatory, non-inclusive environment which may have a longer term effect on group cohesion and other factors
- Support the female soldier and openly state to the other male members that they should be given the opportunity to compete
- Assist the female in bringing this to the attention of another senior leader or by filing a formal/informal complaint

How would you prevent further occurrences such as these?

- Create women/men only competition events/categories (e.g. weight lifting) when significant physical disparities exist
- Establish combined events where all team members to encouraged to compete together or as cohesive teams
- Establish a planning committee with representation from both sexes to ensure all members are provided an equal opportunity to compete
- Educate organizational leaders on the effects and results of treating members differently based on characteristics such as an individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin
- Educate leaders/members on the potential impacts and long-term consequences of their comments and actions

Conclusion:

Some might consider the behaviors exhibited in this scenario as harmless, but they are not. If allowed to continue they have the potential to escalate and can foster a variety of individual and organizational climate changes such as, discrimination, a lack of trust in leadership, low unit cohesion, and low morale, etc. Identifying inappropriate behaviors and intervening early are crucial to developing a cohesive and professional workplace.