

Fun, Fearless

# WORK

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Um, we think  
we see your  
fallopian tubes!

## She Did What at Work?!

Spend enough time in any workplace and you're bound to witness someone in a "seriously, WTF?" moment. Let's just make sure that person isn't you.

BY SARAH BRUNING

It can be hard to know what passes for acceptable behavior on the job these days...if Mark Zuckerberg can wear flip-flops, why can't you? Still, the higher-ups we talked to agree that certain things are just never okay—for you and Mark alike. You know not to sleep with your boss (right?) or steal office supplies (well, maybe the odd Sharpie). But other no-nos might not be on your radar yet. Read these cautionary tales, cringe, and learn.

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## SHE CAME DRESSED FOR THE CLUB

"I had an MBA hire at a Fortune 500 retailer who dressed for work in four-inch stilettos (granted, she was short), skintight pants, and plunging necklines. When it came time to award special projects and promotions, our male CFO wouldn't even entertain her name for consideration. He couldn't believe she had anything more to offer and didn't trust her judgment—she didn't dress appropriately despite having role models all around her."

—Sharon Knight, founder of Avik Ventures investment firm, San Francisco, CA

### LESSON LEARNED

"In order to move up the corporate ladder, analyze why your boss's attire works for her," says Kristina Moore of the blog *Corporate Fashionista*. Celebs like Emma Stone and Kerry Washington can serve as inspiration—watch their morning-show appearances to get officeworthy ideas. Invest in key pieces (like a sophisticated leather handbag), and use an app like Stylebook to plan outfits.

## SHE'S A LADIES'-ROOM TYRANT

"I have a legal assistant who once cornered a female attorney and berated her because her 'dumps smell like dead people and stink up the whole office.' The assistant tattles on support staff when she thinks someone doesn't wash her hands enough. If I don't intervene, she starts a screaming match with that person. Everyone uses the bathrooms two floors down just to avoid confrontations with her."

—Attorney at a law firm, Portage Lakes, OH

### LESSON LEARNED

It's not your job to police coworkers when they leave dishes in the sink. Instead, mention your concerns politely to the person who oversees this domain. She can send a note asking people to respect their surroundings. Above all, stay calm and collected. Starting a beef with coworkers never helps your reputation!



## SHE ABUSED WORK E-MAIL... TO SCORE SHOPPING DISCOUNTS

"We had a new, straight-out-of-college employee whose role included managing customer-feedback e-mails. New packages started arriving daily from places like Gilt. One weekend when I took over her tasks, I noticed that Gilt's daily e-mails were sent to the company's entire customer-service list. This new employee had used the account to take advantage of the 'invite a friend' discount. She ultimately left the company, and it was directly related to this incident."

—Head of marketing at a national computer-software company, Mountain View, CA

### LESSON LEARNED

Company resources aren't there to be exploited for personal gain. Show colleagues that you respect the divide between personal and professional communications. People will notice what you're doing at work, so leave the shady stuff at home.

## SHE WENT CRYING TO MOMMY

"A nurse had received a verbal warning for attendance issues, but the behavior continued, so I set up a sit-down with her. She was actually a good employee otherwise. On the day of the meeting, the woman brought her mother! I said that this was a work-related discussion and outside parties couldn't join. But the young woman didn't want to work at our hospital if her mother wasn't welcome. She left soon after."

—Nursing director at a major hospital, Los Angeles, CA

### LESSON LEARNED

Even if you're not the type to ask Mom to manage a work crisis, you should fight your own battles, learn to take criticism, and be willing to work on your shortcomings. If you get called to a disciplinary session, jot down your concerns, and note how you'll address them. You'll feel more in control, and your manager will be impressed that you came up with an action plan.

## SHE SKYPED FROM A DISASTER AREA

"I was conducting a job interview over Skype and the interviewee's home was a total mess. She had laundry and papers strewn everywhere. Once I saw how messy her space was, I questioned her competence and organization."

—Juliette Feld, executive vice president and producer, Feld Entertainment, Inc., Chicago, IL

### LESSON LEARNED

Um, don't be a slob. Virtual meetings may be commonplace, but appearances matter regardless of where (or how) an appointment takes place. "I would recommend to anyone meeting over Skype that they check their surroundings beforehand to make sure they are giving the right impression," Feld says.

## SHE CURSED OUT THE CLIENTS

"I once worked with a small team that was relatively casual with each other internally, but we always put on a more formal face for our clients. One of our junior team members didn't pick up on this right away. I remember taking her to a new client's office for the first time. She was shrugging off some of their questions with responses like 'Hey, we're not totally sure, but that's why we're here, right?' And to top it all off, when some of the A/V equipment malfunctioned, she broke out in a stream of curses."

—Melissa McCreery, cofounder and editor-in-chief, TheMuse.com, New York, NY

### LESSON LEARNED

Even if your workplace is relaxed and casual, it's a good idea to err on the conservative side when other parties are involved. If the rules are unclear, keep an eye on how your supervisors behave during meetings with outsiders.

## SHE JERKED AROUND A HELPFUL CONTACT

"Early in my career, I had an acquaintance who was very interested in working where I did. I really talked this person up, but the head of HR and the VP of my group felt that she wasn't serious about the opportunity—they thought she was just trying to get an offer so she could go back to her Fortune 500 company to negotiate a better deal there. I assured them otherwise and fought for her to advance in the interview process. But then she did exactly as they'd predicted. She really let me down."

—Amy Buckner Chowdhry, CEO and cofounder of digital-research consultancy AnswerLab, San Francisco, CA

### LESSON LEARNED

If a person is willing to hook you up with contacts or provide a reference, you need to have her back too. "It's so important to recognize the political capital that others will expend to help you succeed," says Buckner Chowdhry. Don't burn the bridge if you don't have to.

## SHE BAILED FOR HER CAT

"During her second week at work, an entry-level hire abruptly left in the middle of the day, telling the receptionist that she had a family emergency. She didn't come to work the next day, and when she finally called in, she let us know her cat had died. While many of us here are fierce animal lovers, her behavior didn't make a great impression. She ended up being let go within six months."

—Aliza Bogner, vice president of finance and human resources for Alison Brod Public Relations, New York, NY

### LESSON LEARNED

If something personal is happening, keep your direct supervisors in the loop, and don't go MIA. "You can't expect flexibility from day one," says Ron Alsop, author of *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation Is Shaking Up the Workplace*. "You need to prove you're competent and trustworthy first."



## WHEN BOSSES GO BAD

### SHE PLAYED FAVORITES

"When I came back from a two-week vacation, I noticed something weird about my office—none of the stuff in the room was mine. I found out that while I was gone, my boss had given my office to another associate...a friend of hers. All my stuff ended up in a pile on a small desk in the hallway. When I politely asked her what had happened, she got defensive and swore it was temporary. It's almost a month later, and I'm still in the hall."

—Tea, 28, attorney, Los Angeles, CA

### SHE COOKED THE BOOKS

"My former boss made me complicit in sneaking company funds. She had been there for more than a decade and made a habit of submitting fake expense reports and obtaining unnecessary cash advances before work trips. Since she was irresponsible with money in her personal life, she didn't have a personal credit card either. At one point, she went on a vacation to Paris with her boyfriend and ended up charging all her dinners and souvenirs on her corporate card. When she got back into town, she forwarded me her expense report (without receipts, of course) and asked me to reconcile it with accounts payable. Must be nice to travel on the company dime!"

—Margaret, 28, publicist, New York, NY

### SHE MADE ME HER MAID

"Around the holidays, my office gets a ton of packages. My supervisor could've built a fort with all the cardboard around her desk. When she could barely see above them, she turned to me and asked that I clear out all the trash in our area. I started breaking down the cartons, but as soon as I was close to finishing, she pointed under her dust-bunny-ridden desk and told me to clean there too. She refused to move out of the way and made me tidy up around her while she just sat there."

—Lizzy, 28, assistant editor, New York, NY