

Complex Scenario One

Kris, a civilian professional employee, had been working in a paramilitary organization for about three years, and was putting together the annual leadership conference for supervisors through command staff personnel. Kris got a recommendation from a counterpart at the state oversight agency, for a guest speaker (Jody) to talk about the importance of diversity in the workforce, one of the topics Kris was asked to include. Although Kris hadn't heard this speaker personally, the recommendation of a highly trusted colleague was enough for Kris to book Jody as the main speaker.

Jody was scheduled to speak from 10:00 am until noon, then again for a couple of hours after the group luncheon. It was obvious after several minutes of failed "jokes" and "costume changes" that Jody was not a fit for this group. When Jody went into the audience with a "stud finder" and couldn't find any, this seemed to be the last straw.

On the break, Kris was called into a quick conference with the Director, Training Commander and Training Sergeant and it was agreed to allow the speaker to continue until lunch but then fill in with some command staff briefings after lunch. Kris and the Training Commander went to find Jody and let Jody know that while Jody could finish up through the noon hour and they would pay Jody for the whole day, they were not continuing with the afternoon portion of Jody's program. Jody became upset but said okay.

Once back in the auditorium, Kris was the sole member of the training team in the audience. The Training Commander was outside handling some business and the Training Sergeant was in the sound/video booth in a separate room. Jody got about 20 minutes into the next portion of the program, but then started talking to the audience saying, "how sorry," and "didn't mean to offend." Jody then looked at Kris, and said, "Please, Kris, can't I stay and finish my program after lunch?"

Kris, the lowest ranking person in the room, responded with "the Training Commander told you we have an alternate program for after the lunch hour." Jody, responded with, "I really want to finish my contract, please Kris?!" Kris, looked around and seeing no one who was going to answer— Kris said, "Where is a training commander when you need one?" Then Kris, observing the long silence following that remark, said, "No, Jody. Either continue your program until noon or we can break for lunch early." After an awkward, excruciatingly uncomfortable rambling 20 minutes, Jody ended the program and the lunch break started.

As the audience went into the lobby area, Kris stayed inside to apologize to some guests from other government agencies for the awkward and inappropriate program. Glad the morning had ended and more than a little worried as the person who had hired the speaker, Kris started up the aisle to leave the auditorium. Just before Kris got to the door, one of the commanders who had done some work with Kris, and had a generally high opinion of Kris, stopped Kris with a warning – "they are waiting for you, so be prepared for some ugliness. Wish I could stop it, but I can't."

As Kris exited the auditorium there was a line of several high ranking, long serving commanders waiting to tell Kris what they thought. It wasn't about the horrible, failed diversity training program, but of Kris' remark about the training commander. "Not fit to lick the training commander's boots, worth less than the criminals we apprehend, how dare you say anything negative about the training commander, what gives you the right to speak for us," and so on. These were the comments from more than a dozen law enforcement supervisors. Most delivered by screaming, red-faced, incredibly angry people who all outranked Kris.

Kris walked to lunch alone, in shock, and wondering how to recover, if Kris ever could, from this day.

(After class discussion)

The rest of the story:

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Kris met with the training commander and Kris explained what had happened, since the training commander hadn't been in the room to hear it firsthand and only had all the angry versions from longtime friends to go on. Kris apologized for making a stupid "joke" at the worst possible time, and in front of a group that was already angry about the horrible program and jokes at their expense. The training commander accepted Kris' apology and said things would work out. The training commander told Kris to stay in Kris's office and only work on assignments from the training commander for about six months. Kris was told not to go and approach anyone outside the training building, and to let people have some time. Several of the command staff, including the director, stopped by Kris' office to offer commiserations and encouragement and to share stories of the time in their own career where they had been in a similar position. Kris weathered the "cold shoulders" of the others by doing what the training commander asked and eventually earned back the respect and trust of most of the 30 even though not one of them ever spoke directly of the incident to Kris again. Kris left for a new job after 10 years at this one.

In your group, discuss the following questions and be prepared to present your thoughts to the rest of the class:

1. What are the primary pillars that have been damaged in this situation?
2. How did each person or group of people influence the damaged trust?
3. What other questions come into play?

4. What one factor is most damaging to Kris?
5. What can Kris do to rebuild trust?
6. How could Kris start the conversation to rebuild trust?
7. Should Kris start the conversation to rebuild trust with the training commander? If so, how could Kris start that conversation? How about rebuilding trust with the rest of the organization?

8. What one factor in this situation is most damaging to the trust of this organization?
9. What can the organization or training commander do to rebuild trust?
10. How could the training commander start the conversation to rebuild trust with Kris? With the rest of the organization?
11. What is the opening statement to Kris from the training commander's perspective?
12. What pillars, if addressed sooner, could have prevented this situation?
13. What impact could a Trust Edge training or coaching program have on this organization and how?