Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Tokenism and Promotion

Author(s)

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1992

Description

On the face of it, Darnell, Inc. has a strong commitment to affirmative action. Five years ago less than 1% of its professional and managerial staff were women. Now 8% are women. However, few of the women are in senior positions. Partly this is because most of the women have less seniority than the vast majority of men. But it is also because, until recently, there has been widespread skepticism at Darnell that women are well suited for the responsibilities that attach to the more senior positions. This may now be changing.

Abstract

This case is one of thirty-two cases which address a wide range of ethical issues that can arise in engineering practice provided by the Center For the Study of Ethics in Society, Western Michigan University.

Body

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because most of the women have less seniority than the vast majority of men. But it is also because, until recently, there has been widespread skepticism at Darnell that women are well suited for the responsibilities that attach to the more senior positions. This may now be changing. Catherine Morris is one of the leading candidates for promotion to Chief Engineer in Quality Control at Darnell.

Although they work in different areas of Darnell, Judy Hanson and Catherine Morris have gotten to know one another rather well in the few months Judy has been with Darnell. Judy likes Catherine very much, but she has serious doubts that Catherine is the right person for the promotion. She does not think that Catherine has strong leadership qualities or the kinds of organizational skills that will be needed. Furthermore, she is worried that if Catherine fails at the job, this will only reinforce the prevailing skepticism at Darnell about women's ability to handle senior position responsibilities. Rather than being a mark of women's progress at Darnell, it will be, Judy fears, a setback--one which will take its toll on other women at Darnell.

1. What, if anything, should Judy do?
2. Suppose Judy overhears several male engineers talking about Catherine's possible promotion. They remark that she will never be able to handle the job--and that this will show once and for all how foolish, and potentially harmful, affirmative action in the workplace is. What should she do?
3. Suppose, it is Tom Evans, not Judy, who overhears the conversation in 2)? What should he do?
4. Suppose Tom and Judy overhear the conversation together.

Notes

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Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

Parent Collection

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Discrimination in the Workplace
Diversity
Employer/Employee Relationships
Organizational Climate
Workplace Ethics

Discipline(s)

Engineering
Research Ethics

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