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That Time I was Harassed by the Man in the Corner Office

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That Time I was Harassed by the Man in the Corner Office

Abstract

Last summer I worked as the marketing intern in my father's office, keeping mostly to myself in a small cubicle that I was proud to call my own and conversing daily with the female marketing director. Aside from her and the vice president of human resources, the office remained a sea of trimmed white hair and casually tucked in dress shirts. Within a few weeks in the office, both of these women took me aside to explain that they were careful never to overstep the line between aggressive and passive. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

career, Gettysburg College, Harassment, sexism, women

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement

Comments

Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com. Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

THAT TIME I WAS HARASSED BY THE MAN IN THE CORNER OFFICE

April 10, 2018



Last summer I worked as the marketing intern in my father's office, keeping mostly to myself in a small cubicle that I was proud to call my own and conversing daily with the female marketing director. Aside from her and the vice president of human resources, the office remained a sea of trimmed white hair and casually tucked in dress shirts. Within a few weeks in the office, both of these women took me aside to explain that they were careful never to overstep the line between aggressive and passive.

As the marketing intern, it became one of my tasks to place orders for new merchandise. This meant I constantly dealt with men belittling my age after hearing my not-adult-sounding voice on the other end of the line.

"Oh, *you're* Claire!" they would say after I gave my mini introduction. "I won't lie to you, I was expecting someone much older."

There came a point where I was instructed to order customized M&M's. They were to be different shades of green and grey, all marked with the company logo. A 10lb bag cost close to \$400. Not cheap for candy. I received multiple orders of these 10lb bags and began to fill small glass containers with the candies. It was then that I began to receive comments from others in the office building, even from those whom I had never met, who did not work in my department or even within the same company. The candies sat out on my desk until my boss could find enough boxes to pack them into and send out to our properties. More than once, I was clapped on the back while sitting at my computer.

Wow, would you look at all these M&M's! The stranger would say to me. *Would you mind if I took a handful?*

I would stare back politely and give my best, apologetic smile: *I'm sorry, I'd respond, but they're actually very expensive and we don't even have enough to fill up all of our jars!*

The humor would immediately disappear from the man's face. He would explain that I wouldn't miss just a few little M&M's, that the COO of the company *surely* would not mind if his buddy Tom took a few. I would firmly hold to what I had said and pray that my boss would see my discomfort from her office just 15 feet away and come to my rescue. She never did.

After this happened an uncomfortable amount of times, I came into work one morning to find M&M's spilled all over my desk. The 10lb bag was open and 2 jars were missing lids; someone had come into my space to steal a little snack after I had left my post. I cleaned up the mess and went on with my day as usual.

The next day, I found the same scene. And the next day, and the next day. For four days in a row, I cleaned broken shards of candy coated chocolates from my desk, picked them out of the carpet to save the cleaning crew the gruff at the end of the day, and sat diligently at my desk waiting for anyone in my department to return from their conference to finally give me some boxes.

It was on the fifth day of cleaning M&M's off the floor that I nearly broke down in tears. I was interrupted from my cleaning process by Mr. Butler, the man across the hallway. He greeted me as he sometimes does, but this time stopped to chat.

"I see someone keeps getting into your M&M's!" he said. I responded that yes, unfortunately, someone had been stealing my very expensive candies for days now. He sighed and shook his head, a slight smile creeping onto his lips. "Well," he began, "that does sound tricky. I will admit, though, Claire, that I stole one of your jars last night."

My eyes darted to the rack of jars to my left. Indeed, one was missing.

"Jim so-and-so had his hands in there after you left yesterday, and I figured that no one would want a jar with Jim so-and-so's germs all over it!"

I stood dumbstruck for a moment, unable to fully process what he had just said. I had been telling myself for days that these were just M&M's, small little candies that held no real significance in my life, that I didn't care for the company I worked for or that they spent their money on dumb marketing techniques. But I was livid.

"Mr. Butler," I began, "I think I need that jar back from you!" I smiled that smile that reflected that I was a 21-year-old marketing intern and that he was 40-something-year-old business man. He had entered my space without asking, crossed my 10x7 foot cubicle, moved my chair out of the way, and taken something off my desk that did not belong to him. He told me that he would return the jar after he finished eating all of the M&M's, and walked away from my no longer smiling face.

I turned back to my computer and took a deep breath, noticing my clenched fist resting on the table. "But Claire," I heard him call from inside his corner office, "you could always come visit me in my office if you want the jar back sooner!"

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