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Case Study #4: An Office Romance Gone Wrong

I think that Elizabeth should not make any permanent decisions until she is less emotional about her situation at work, but I do think she should start considering other opportunities. She could wait until her stock options have vested, that way she has more time to see if she can psychologically move on from her office romance and fully focus on her work or if going to a new company for a fresh start is a better option for her. She is a successful, high-level employee who is also a strong performer and leader in her group, thus her career should not be hindered due to the repercussions of her relationship with Brad.

Overall, I do not think that Elizabeth's company handled this situation effectively. The majority of the blame seemed to be put on Elizabeth and it felt like the CEO and HR only cared about protecting Brad since he held a higher position in the company. Wendi S. Lazar of Outten & Golden employment law firm agrees that there is an unhealthy dynamic in the company. She describes the environment as one that, "people at or below her level are "managed," while C-suite executives are free to act as they please." For example, Wendi refers to the fact that Elizabeth is asked "to keep her relationship out of the office" or "to get over her personal situation" whereas there is no evidence to suggest that Brad has been asked to keep his relationship low-key or to not date fellow employees. Therefore, I think this makes it critical for Elizabeth to also consider the company's culture when making her decision. Unless the CEO and

HR are able to change the male-dominated culture that seems to have been created in Elizabeth's company, then she should leave and work for a company that fosters a healthier environment.

While I do not think employees of the same firm engaging in relationships is always a bad thing, I think it is something that should be done with caution and requires both individuals to have high levels of maturity. By that, I mean that the individuals involved need to be able to separate their personal relationship and professional relationship. In this particular case, it does not seem like Elizabeth could do that with Brad and I think that is why she is having such a hard time moving forward since the end of their relationship. Karen Firestone, CEO and chairman of Aureus Asset, feels that Elizabeth let herself become too invested in someone who was not really invested in her. She also believes that Elizabeth did not fully consider all the consequences of getting involved in an office romance and truly understands how it is different than a regular relationship. There are countless risks in any relationship that is pursued but those risks are exemplified when the relationship is with a co-worker. Therefore, while I do not think dating another employee is bad, it is something that must be really thought out and proceeded with caution and I do not think that Elizabeth did this when becoming involved with Brad.

Ultimately, Elizabeth should use this situation with Brad and her company as a learning experience. She should understand the risks associated with dating another employee and come to terms with the fact she might not have the emotional maturity of someone capable of dating a co-worker. Someone with her drive and success level must prioritize their work performance above all else, therefore she needs to be able to fully focus on that when in the office with the least amount of personal distractions. Additionally, Elizabeth should use this experience as an opportunity to understand the value behind the management of a company. Sometimes negative situations will happen in the office and it is important that your superiors will support you in any

of those challenges regardless of your rank. Elizabeth should understand that the values and ethics of not only the company, but the specific individuals holding these high-ranking positions will drastically affect the outcome of specific circumstances. As a woman, it is critical for her to evaluate how a male-dominated company will handle these situations because it could eventually affect things such as compensation, benefits, maternity leave, etc. Therefore, while Elizabeth should not run right away, I think that she should definitely seriously consider her other options and be prepared to potentially move to another company if she receives the right offer.