School of Media Studies

THE NEW SCHOOL September, 2010

**ROMANCE IN THE OFFICE** \*

Good Or Bad For Business?

KPRR-TV is a very successful network affiliate in a top-fifteen market. It has consistently been number one in all time periods, including prime time, and dominant in the early and late news ratings. KPRR-TV is owned by the largest non-network group of television stations, and is considered to be one of the best-managed and most community involved stations in America. In fact, its previous general manager was so highly regarded that he was promoted to CEO of the parent company 18 months ago.

KPRR-TV's current general manager, Karen Frasier, has maintained the tradition of ratings dominance and community involvement, and Karen receives high marks for her management style from her associates at the station. She has also improved KPRR- TV's profit margins, news ratings, and morale during her year-and-a-half tenure. Conditions at the station were virtually ideal, except for two slight problems: A couple of well-known romances going on in the newsroom and sales department.

Karen Frasier had known about one of the romances for some time, but had ignored it until the day Helen Cohen came to her office to complain. Karen, as usual, had an open-door policy and was upbeat and positive when Helen paid her a visit. Karen and Helen exchanged greetings informally and joked about the cold weather, and then Helen told Karen the reason for her visit.

"I don't know if you're aware of it, Karen," Helen said in a low voice that reeked of confidentiality, "but Jim Jones is having an affair with Kathy Rossi, the reporter at Channel 6."

Karen was somewhat upset with Helen for assuming that she didn't know what was going on and for bringing up the subject. She didn't want to have to deal with it. "Yes, Helen, I know about it," said Karen.

 "Well, what are you going to do? I mean, I'm doing a big investigative series for the upcoming sweeps, and I'd die if Channel 6 got wind of it. They'd steal it. It's not right," Helen said.

"I'm not sure what you mean, Helen. What would you like me to do, fire Jim? He's one of the best reporters we have."

"He's not that good. Everyone knows he's a diversity hire. But it's not your fault; he was here when you became general manager," Helen said, fuming slightly, but covering her backside.

"I don't agree. He's a fine reporter. He won a local Emmy last year. Beside, you don't know he's telling Kathy about your series idea or about anything we're doing."

"Oh, come on. Of course he's telling her everything we do," Helen said, almost whining, as she got more frustrated with Karen's apparent lack of concern.

"I'm not so sure, but even if he is, there is nothing I can do. Legally I can't stop him from seeing her," Karen said.

"Then talk to him and tell him not to leak anything to Kathy," Helen was now whining.

Karen laughed, and said, "That's pretty funny, Helen. Your series, which is going to be terrific, by the way, is based on leaks from the police department. Since when are you so against leaks."

"Well, I'm pissed. If Channel 6 finds out, I'll know where it came from, and it will ruin my series, ruin it," Helen said as she stormed out of Karen's office.

Karen smiled and said to Helen as she went out the door, "I know how you feel, but don't worry, they won't find out."

The next night as Karen was watching Channel 6's early news on the bank of four monitors in her office, she was chagrined to see a promo for an upcoming news series that had an identical topic to Helen's.

The next morning, as Karen was contemplating what to do about Jim Jones, Kathy Rossi, and Helen Cohen, Janet Worsham, KPRR-TV's general sales manager, came into Karen's office.

"Hi, Janet, you look bouncy this morning, what's going on?", Karen said.

"Well, I guess I'm nervous. I've got something to tell you," Janet said.

"Shoot," Karen replied confidently. "

I've been seeing Mark, and now he wants to move in with me," Janet said, pursing her lips.

"Are you going to let him?", Karen asked.

"That's what I came to talk to you about," said Janet.

Karen let out a muffled, quick laugh and shook her head. "Just when everything was going so well," she said to herself, "at least the problems are about love, not war."

Mark was a salesperson who reported to the local sales manager, Tom Jordan, who, in turn, reported to Janet Worsham, KPRR-TV's general sales manager. Janet was an excellent sales manager; she had also been at the station for ten years and in the job for five years. Mark was the second highest-paid salesperson on the staff. He was very popular with all of the salespeople and support staff, and was an excellent overall performer.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

While the incidents in this case are not factual, they do represent a composite of actual situations at some companies. This case was prepared to use as a teaching tool.

ASSIGNMENT

1. If you were Karen Frasier, how would you handle Helen Cohen's complaint about Jim Jones's and Kathy Rossi's romance?
2. What are you going to ask Janet, and how are you going to respond to her?

\* This case was prepared by Charles Warner.