

CASE 1

I Don't Want to Get Fired, But...

By Frankline Augustin and Louis Rubino

A small for-profit skilled nursing facility is located in a suburb of a major metropolitan area and is part of a local long-term care chain. The owner of the chain of facilities, Mr. Frank Dobbs, hired his long-time friend as the administrator approximately 2 years ago. It is obvious to the employees that the administrator, Mr. Bill Stevens, has a close personal relationship with the owner of the corporation. The nursing home has a good reputation, and its scores on various websites show historically being about on par with its local competitors. The nursing staff has generally been at the facility a long time and is considered stable in the current environment.

Olive Washington is a certified nurse assistant (CNA) who came on board approximately 6 months ago. She has been well received by the nurses and is happy to be working at the facility. Over the last couple of months, the administrator, Mr. Stevens, has decided to make executive rounds and as a result is becoming more known to the nursing staff. His remarks to the nurses as he makes his rounds seem inappropriate to Olive. She feels that the remarks are culturally

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insensitive, and some of the other nurses in her team have complained about his remarks to the director of nurses, Mrs. Alice Gonzalez. Olive has also heard from a new housekeeper she has befriended named Ramon Alvarez. He says that he, too, has been the recipient of inappropriate remarks by Mr. Stevens. Olive, having not been at the facility very long, did not want to complain and is waiting to see the outcome of the other nurses' discussions. None of the nurses are willing to approach the administrator themselves due to fear of losing their jobs. The director of nurses, Alice, listens to the various staff members' complaints regarding the comments made by Mr. Stevens during his rounds. Alice is somewhat hesitant to approach Mr. Stevens directly because he has a temper. She has seen him blow up over issues where he is criticized, and she is not sure if she wants to be subjected to his confrontational behavior. Alice is on good terms with the owner of the facility, Mr. Dobbs, and could go to him directly, but she is concerned that Mr. Stevens will be upset if she goes over his head. Alice considers taking a less interventional approach and attempts to coach Mr. Stevens on making more appropriate remarks to the staff when he makes rounds.

Alice is vacillating on which approach to take. While she agrees that the administrator's comments are unacceptable, she also does not want to ruin her chances of getting the raise that she's due for after her annual evaluation. Additionally, Mr. Stevens does have a history of letting people go when he is upset, and she is concerned about being able to find another job in the current environment. Yet Alice just heard through the grapevine that two new employees are also the targets of Mr. Stevens' inappropriate remarks.

PART ONE

FIRST SET OF CASE STUDY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the various choices Alice has at this point to address the concerns raised?
2. What are the ramifications if Alice decides not to act at this time?
3. If you were Alice, what would you do and why?

PART TWO

Choose one of the following three options for Alice's next step:

Option A: Alice talks to Mr. Stevens, the administrator, directly.

Option B: Alice talks to Mr. Dobbs, the owner.

Option C: Alice decides to talk to the new employees, Olive and Ramon.

After choosing your option, read only the corresponding option below and then answer the second set of questions that follows the dialogue.

The People

Administrator: Bill Stevens

Director of Nurses: Alice Gonzalez

Owner: Frank Dobbs

CNA: Olive Washington

Housekeeper: Ramon Alvarez

Option A: Alice talks to administrator (Mr. Stevens) directly

Alice: Bill, I need to talk to you in private.

Bill: What is it about?

Alice: I really like the way you are making executive rounds, but I want to talk to you about some of the comments that you make to my nurses as you're walking in their units.

Bill: Well, I'm always friendly with them. I think that's being a good administrator.

Alice: Friendly is good, but some of the remarks you say are not culturally sensitive.

Bill: You need to be more specific.

Alice: All right, let me tell you now since nobody is near us. One of my best CNAs, Olive, said that you told her that she has pretty dreadlocks but that you asked her "How do you keep your hair clean?"

Bill: I'm just concerned about infection control.

Alice: Olive took it as a racial attack. She's told me that she is very proud of her dreadlocks and how it represents her culture.

Bill: It was not meant to attack her background. I was just concerned about our patient safety.

Alice: Ramon also said to me that while he was mopping the floor, you walked by and said to him "Boy, you're doing a really good job. Did you learn how to mop like that at the car wash?"

Bill: I'm just being friendly. Do you want me to not acknowledge the staff at all when I'm making rounds?

Option B: Alice talks to the owner (Mr. Dobbs) directly

Alice: Mr. Dobbs, I'm sorry to bother you, but I have a big concern that I want to talk to you about.

Frank: Of course, Alice. You're such a loyal employee. How can I help you?

Alice: I have a concern about Mr. Stevens, and I'm hoping that you won't reveal to him that I was the one who told you this.

Frank: Well, I'll try. It depends on what you tell me.

Alice: Well, I'll tell you, but I'm concerned about retaliation because I want to keep my job.

Frank: Well, spit it out.

Alice: Mr. Stevens has been saying some inappropriate remarks to my minority staff, and they have been coming to me offended.

Frank: What did my old friend say?

Alice: Well, that's why I'm uncomfortable talking to you because I know he's your friend.

Frank: But this is business, and I want to protect my facility.

Alice: His remarks have referred to their cultural backgrounds in a disrespectful way, mentioning the hair of one of my workers and for another worker, he stereotyped him about prior work experience.

Frank: Oh, I know Bill. He didn't mean anything by that. He was probably just trying to be friendly.

Alice: Well he offended my workers, and it makes us vulnerable to potential discriminatory lawsuits.

Frank: Okay, okay, maybe I'll talk to him the next time we're playing golf.

*Option C: Alice decides to talk to the new employees
(Olive and Ramon) directly*

- Olive:** Ramon and I are offended by Mr. Stevens's remarks.
- Ramon:** Yeah, he assumed I was a car-washer prior to working here.
- Olive:** And he implied that my dreadlocks were dirty.
- Alice:** We do need to address this. You need to document your concerns and send them up to Human Resources so that we can find out later if these were isolated incidents or part of a trend.
- Olive:** But what if he says something to me again? Am I supposed to ignore it?
- Ramon:** Maybe next time he'll slip on my floor.
- Alice:** We have to handle this per procedure. Any complaints must be documented and sent to HR.
- Olive:** I bet if you talked to the others, they'll tell you the same thing.
- Ramon:** We came to you thinking that you could help us, not send us to another department. Why can't you take care of this? I'm not good at writing things down.
- Olive:** Yeah, my friend got fired because she complained that while she was at the med-cart, he rubbed up against her as he walked by. Next day she was gone!
- Alice:** Oh, that had nothing to do with your friend's departure. But that's a confidential matter.
- Olive:** Well, I know the truth.

**SECOND SET OF CASE STUDY
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Based on the conversation that occurred, are you glad you chose the option that you did? Do you wish you would have chosen one of the other two options instead? Why?
2. Assess how you think your meeting went. Do you think you could have improved the outcome of the meeting?
3. Based on the conversation you did have, if you were Alice, what would you do next and why?

PART THREE

Now, Alice goes to her computer to try to keep up with her emails. She reads the following three messages received this morning:

Email #1

To: All Employees
From: Mr. Bill Stevens, Administrator
Subject: Executive Rounds

I am pleased to announce that the executive rounds I started earlier this month are going well. I have already prevented certain family complaints escalating due to acting quickly on service recovery. I want to thank you for your cooperation as I make my daily rounds and your quick follow-through on any surfaced issues. This is important to resident and family satisfaction and also to improve our organizational culture. This is a good start, and I encourage all of you to be friendly to everyone you encounter as we work to further our goal of being the nursing home of first choice in our community.

Email #2

To: Alice Gonzalez, Director of Nurses
From: Mr. Bill Stevens, Administrator
Subject: Friendliness

During my recent rounds, I have seen many unhappy faces in the hallways. I would expect that of our patients but not of our employees! Things need to lighten up around here, and I expect you to carry that ball and model that behavior to the staff. We will talk about this during your performance review.

Email #3

To: Bill Stevens, Administrator
From: Frank Dobbs, President
Subject: Resident Satisfaction Scores
cc: Alice Gonzalez, Director of Nurses

I just saw the latest resident satisfaction scores on the Internet. I am very satisfied with the upward trend I see. Bill, I am pleased you began the executive rounding that was recommended in the latest issue of the long-term care industry journal. Keep up the good work and maybe it will be my treat for drinks on the 19th hole next week. Alice, I hope you are supporting Bill on his rounds and going with him as your time permits.

**THIRD SET OF CASE STUDY
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Does having this new information change the way you would act if you were Alice? What would you do now?
2. Read the two options you did not select. Assuming these conversations also occurred, does this alter your next action steps? What would you do based on all the conversations that took place?
3. What about the cultural issues raised by the comments made by Mr. Stevens? Do these get handled in a different way than if the remarks made were not culturally related? How best are they addressed?
4. If you were Alice, what do you predict will be the outcome based on your final interventions selected? Do you think the issues raised in the case occur in real life?

