

CAUGHT IN THE ACT: VISITING ILLICIT WEB SITES WHILE ON THE JOB

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SYNOPSIS

A supervisor was asked to meet with the Human Resource Manager in his office. When she arrived, he informed her that IT had discovered that one of her employees had breached the information system's firewall and had been spending between one and two hours each day of work time over the past two weeks visiting pornographic web sites. When she heard this, she sighed and shook her head in disgust. "I can't believe this. I am so angry that Jeremy would do this. He is such a nice guy but he has been stealing time from us during a period when everyone has been working under a lot of pressure and feeling a lot of stress." After letting her blow off some steam, the HR manager stated that he knew that retention of employees in her department had been a challenge over the past couple of years, and that she had been working hard to upgrade the quality of her workers. He then very directly asked her "What do you want us to do?" Upon hearing this, the supervisor realized she had an important decision to make.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this case are:

1. To decide whether a disciplinary decision should be made by a worker's supervisor and to explain and justify why.
2. To identify factors in addition to a worker's past work performance and disciplinary history that can influence a supervisor's disciplinary decision and to explain how and why these influences can impact a disciplinary decision.
3. To evaluate the facts of a disciplinary situation and the information in a policies and procedures manual to decide what disciplinary action should be taken and to support that decision.
4. To evaluate whether a decision to discharge a worker could withstand legal scrutiny given the facts of the case and the information contained in the firm's policies and procedures manual.

APPLICATION

This case is a decision case and may be used in an upper-level Human Resources Management course. It should be used after coverage of employee due process and discipline, and employment-at-will.

KEY WORDS employee discipline and discharge, due process, employment-at-will, pornography, and personal use of the web while on the job.

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