

## Cause Conscious

**THE DIRTY SECRET** weighed on Douglas Marshall-Steele's mind. Some of his fellow nurses at the Seaford, Del., hospital where he worked had confided that a certain doctor had made repeated passes at them, whispering in their ears and making lewd remarks. Compelled to stand up for his co-workers, Marshall-Steele told a senior official. Later he complained to the same official that he felt certain supervisors were sweeping evidence under the rug.

Not long after, he claims, some managers suggested he find employment elsewhere, and in 1998 the hospital canned him. "I naively felt that the hospital would be as outraged by the physician's behavior as I was. When they fired me, I was stunned," says Marshall-Steele, 48. He was told he was let go because he hadn't filled out his round sheets properly, but he doesn't buy that. Through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, he sued the hospital, claiming his dismissal was an act of retaliation. The hospital, which denies that allegation, eventually settled the suit for \$50,000, but Marshall-Steele says the black mark on his personnel record kept him from finding another nursing job.

Standing up for your co-workers is an alluring notion, whether it's fighting for better working conditions or just a better company match for your 401(k) plan. You get praise from your peers and the pride that comes from knowing you can bend — or at least challenge — the rules. But it's all too easy to irk your boss and scare off future employers. "Do it right and you're a hero," says Lee Miller, a former senior vice president of human resources at TV Guide. "Do it wrong and you're annoying — or you'll get fired."

### Odd Jobs

#### Cuckoo's Nest

"Live-in **Personal Assistant** needed immediately for this Aging Hippie/ Beach Bum/Wise Sage....All my facilities are outside! Outdoor kitchen and pantry...even an outdoor living room....This position is perfect for a person wanting to really escape from some terrible position....Also, I make monthly Costco/Wal-Mart runs."

San Felipe, Baja, Mexico  
*Craigslist.org* <sup>1</sup>, June 17

#### Killer Body

**"Guy With Washboard Abs.** To shoot stabbing scene for amateur video now in postproduction. No lines (well, a grunt or two) but need to be able to portray serious pain believably, take 'knife' in gut, writhe and die. Need a young-looking guy, smooth (1-2 tattoos okay) with well-defined abs....There is some pay."

Rathole Films  
Los Angeles  
*TalentWire.net*, <sup>2</sup> June 10

It helps to know where you stand legally. If what you're trying to change is illegal — a pay scale discriminating against women, for example — your employer can't use that to fire you. But there are plenty of cases in which you aren't protected. Complain about your stingy health insurance and you're out of luck if you're cut loose. (The exception: If you're a nonmanager complaining with at least one other employee.) And your employer could respond with subtler backlash, in your performance reviews or paycheck. How then to effect change without killing your career? For starters, avoid a confrontational approach.

"It isn't about trying to prove that the company is wrong," says Debra Meyerson, a visiting professor at Stanford's business school and author of *Tempered Radicals: How People Use Difference to Inspire Change at Work*. Rather, explain how an issue not only affects employees, but has a harmful impact on the company. "Where I see people being more effective is when they're able to ask, 'What's the bigger issue at stake?'"

For Barbara Waugh, the answer to that question was the morale of valued employees. When Hewlett-Packard decided against adding domestic-partner benefits, HP's Gay and Lesbian Employee Network enlisted Waugh, a personnel manager at the time, to help lead a last-ditch effort to change its mind. Waugh, who is openly gay, suggested staging a "Readers' Theater" for the rest of the personnel staff — a reading of real-life stories about how homophobia, including the denial of insurance to partners of gay employees, had affected workers' lives.

She hoped it would inform rather than antagonize the top brass. Still, she feared repercussions: "I thought I would lose my job." But after the presentation, which included readings from such top staffers as a marketing manager and a general manager, who came out of the closet to join in, the attendees applauded. Eventually, the company reversed its decision.

### Perk of the Month

#### Monday Manicure

**Who gives it:** Brogan & Partners

**Who gets it:** All 40 employees

**How it works:** Each week at this Detroit marketing firm, staffers can de-stress by taking 20 minutes for an on-site filing, buffing and polishing. (Sorry, no pedicures.) Women aren't the only ones getting in on the action: "I got mine done a few times, and they looked great," says spokesman Gabe Cherry. "But I decided to forgo the polish."

— Anne Kadet

Not every cause calls for klieg lights. Ganging up on your employer by involving your colleagues can backfire. "You could be looked at as someone who is creating turmoil among your co-workers," says Miller, who co-authored *A Woman's Guide to Successful Negotiating* with his daughter Jessica. But there's a more cunning motive for keeping your mission mum. "Companies don't like to admit that something needs to be changed," says Miller. "If you do it quietly, they'll be able to make it seem as if it's just a good thing they've always been thinking about doing."

Ingratiate yourself with the person in charge by seeking their "expertise." If your concern is a limited 401(k), ask such pointed questions as "What don't we have that would broaden my portfolio?" to lead the person to your idea — and let them take credit for it.

It helps, too, if you anticipate obstacles, such as money. When Tammy Mayer, a senior promotions manager at pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca, decided to fight for paid leave for parents who adopt, she did research to allay financial concerns. "Less than one-half of 1% of any employee population will utilize adoption benefits during a year," she wrote in her proposal. "Therefore, it will cost Astra very little to enhance its image as family-friendly." She listed competitors, including Eli Lilly and Novartis, that were offering such leave.

Not long after Mayer and her husband picked up their adopted son in Guatemala, Astra started offering seven weeks of paid leave for adoptive mothers. "She did her homework," says Andrea Moselle, Astra's manager of work-life balance. "She didn't call up ranting and raving, like it was an entitlement. That's important, because a sense of entitlement could really turn a lot of people off."

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