50 Case Studies for Management and Supervisory Training

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COMPLIMENTARY RESOURCES from HRD Press

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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First, I would like to extend my gratitude to Robert W. Carkhuff, publisher of HRD Press. Bob was visionary enough to see the potential for these cases, willing enough to risk trying out an untried author, and patient enough to give him some extra time to finish the project. I want to thank Bob for his help in making this volume possible.

Second, I am indebted to the numerous managers and supervisors who were willing to share their stories with me, to let me listen to the troubles, frustrations, and yes, the mistakes they inherited from their predecessors. In these moments, it was happily unclear who was the trainer and who was the student. Their experiences have given all of us an opportunity to learn, and on our behalf, I wish to thank them.
DISCLAIMER

Publisher and/or author make no warranties, express or implied, with respect to this book and neither assumes any responsibility for any legal complaint or action occasioned by any following of its guidelines. The user assumes all risk and liability whatsoever in connection with the use of or reliance upon the materials contained herein and there are no oral agreements or understandings or warranties collateral to or affecting the understanding implicit in the purchase of this book.

The practices of the user organization should be tailored to accommodate to the particular need. In case of any uncertainty with respect to any specific organization policy, competent legal counsel should be sought.

The individuals portrayed in this book are completely fictional. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.
Using the Cases in This Manual

The cases reported in this manual are, with few exceptions, based on true stories that I have gathered from a broad spectrum of supervisors and managers. While the essential features of each story have been retained, the names of the people and organizations have been changed to protect their identities, as well as to make the cases more flexible for training purposes.

I have used these cases successfully in various management and supervisory training programs over the years. From my experience, I have found that they produce recognition, discussion, and even debate. Invariably, they challenge trainees and encourage them to rethink and reexamine the fundamentals of being an effective leader. Together, as presented in this manual, they cover a full range of management and supervisory issues and concerns.

Although the cases are written primarily in the context of service industries, and a few cases set in manufacturing, they go straight to the heart of universal leadership challenges, and their application extends into virtually any organizational area. They include such issues as dealing with a difficult employee, improving performance, training and coaching, selecting the right person for the job, and managing fairly and effectively. These challenges are likely to confront any manager or supervisor in any kind of organization, and developing the ability to respond to them productively and to learn from them is what this manual is all about.

The Case Studies in This Manual

The Cases

Many of the cases are presented in one complete story; others are subdivided into sections that highlight major decision points in the development of the story. Either following each section or at the end of the case are suggested questions for discussion or assignment.

Case Discussion

Accompanying each case is the Case Discussion. This helpful guide contains a summary of the case along with answers to the suggested questions presented in the body of the case. The Case Discussion attachment is intended for use by the trainer or discussion facilitator.

Case Issues Index

The Case Issues Index lists the cases and the major management and supervisory issues addressed in each (see page xxi). Use the index to locate the issue you want to cover; then read the case summary in the Case Discussion to learn the specifics.
Using Case Studies in Training Programs

There are several ways by which you can profitably include case studies as part of your training programs. These options are reviewed below.

Preparing for the Training Program

Putting sufficient effort into the preclass preparation process can make the difference between a focused, effective training session and a fragmentary, inconsequential one. As a regular practice, I require managers and supervisors who will be participating in my training programs to submit a case report drawn from their personal experience as part of this preparation process. There are several reasons for doing so:

1. Case write-ups serve as a needs assessment, revealing the issues and concerns of the people who are coming into the program.
2. Case preparation begins the process of orienting the participants to the training.
3. For the cases selected, learning materials specific to the client organization and its unique management needs can be prepared and used in the training.

A Case Report Worksheet designed for the preclass case assignment is provided for your use at the conclusion of this introductory section (see page xiii). You can distribute this worksheet to participants some time before the scheduled start date. Participants return their completed forms to you. You look for cases that seem representative and important, then write a case based on that information for use in the training.

The Training Session

To use either the cases provided here or ones that you develop as part of the training, elect a case(s) that fits the topic under study.

In the training session, the participants are organized into leaderless groups and the cases are distributed. The groups are given anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes to read and discuss the case. When the participants are ready, debriefing is conducted, beginning with a prompt recitation of the story’s main facts. This review leads directly into the questions supplied at the end of the case.

Case discussions are important features of the training and serve two functions very well: First, they promote participant involvement, encouraging participants to talk and interact with one another; second, they offer marvelous opportunities for participants to apply and extend what they have learned to specific problems. The productivity of these case discussions can be increased by reviewing the steps in the Case Discussion (see the following chapter on Analyzing a Case) or by providing each participant with a Case Analysis Worksheet (see page xvii). These worksheets help participants evaluate the cases and apply their problem-solving skills to each group consensus on case solutions.
Cases and Role Playing

In many of the cases, a meeting between the manager/supervisor and the employee(s) is needed. Several different kinds of goals are possible for such a meeting: to communicate decisions, to listen for information, to negotiate a solution, to chastise, or to recognize good work. In this context, these cases present natural gateways for role-playing practice exercises.

To use these exercises as role-playing lead-in, the trainer assigns to participants the various roles of supervisor, employee, or anyone else integral to the case. Then the participants are given the task of conducting the meeting already discussed by the group. The case establishes the situation, but how the role players, especially those in supervisory roles, deal with the situation is up to them.

The participant who plays the role of the supervisor usually has the most control over how the situation develops—and the most decisions to make. For example, if the scenario is a disciplinary meeting, what should the supervisor say? And how should he or she act? While there might be common-sense rules about proper action, the use of more specific behavioral guidelines is often desirable.

There are numerous sources of behavioral guidelines that are appropriate for use in case scenario role plays. Some behavior-modeling training programs provide a list of steps a manager should take in any given situation; thus a set of behavior principles for coaching can be applied in these situations. Guidelines may also be drawn from the general literature. The behaviors associated with assertive communication, for example, are rather widely known and can be used as the basis for training and role-playing activities. Finally, keep in mind that the organization that employs the participants may itself be an invaluable source of guidance. The organization’s policies and procedures in disciplinary matters, for instance, may clearly indicate what a supervisor should do and say, therefore providing the role player with an established model of conduct for dealing with disciplinary problems.

The cases, which create the context for action, and the role-playing exercises, which bring participants into the sphere of action, help participants further develop their problem-solving and decision-making skills. Using these cases in conjunction with role-playing exercises and the appropriate guidelines can thus result in a highly effective training method.

Questions and Answers About the Cases

How were these cases developed?

These cases, collected over the past 10 years, are based on the experiences of managers and supervisors in a variety of professions. The occupational settings represented here include financial, health-care, educational, governmental, retail, and manufacturing settings.
Each case tells the story of a particularly compelling or challenging management and supervisory situation. Representing the “critical incidents” in the lives of managers and supervisors, these stories have been generated by the kind of circumstances that, whether simply unusual or quite extraordinary, can have profound effects on individuals and organizations. They are also circumstances for which clear-cut rules and routine procedures do not always apply.

Because the cases were developed according to the accounts of these real-life circumstances, as in life, there often is neither one absolutely correct answer nor single correct course of action to follow that will neatly solve the problems they pose. Such realistic difficulties only increase the power of these cases as learning tools. When a case situation can support several different possible responses, it promotes discussion and stimulates competing opinions and alternative points of view. Case discussions, in turn, promote the evaluations of options and help build judgment in considering how to handle difficult leadership situations.

**A Note on Leadership Orientation**

Several of these cases were developed for use with training in situation leadership methods. *Situational leadership* is an approach to directing employees in which the type of appropriate leadership style depends in large part on the maturity level of the employees. For instance, according to this method, a highly competent employee should not be managed in the same way that an untrained, poorly motivated new employee is managed: a supervisor or manager should use a more individualized style of leadership.

The classic statement of this approach is given by Paul Hershey and Kenneth Blanchard in *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*.

**Where did the answers to the case studies come from?**

The answers provided in the supplementary Case Discussion sections are based on my experience in managing employees, in training managers and supervisors, and in administering human resource management systems. Others may see the cases in different ways and recommend courses of action that vary from those that I have recommended. Case discussion will often yield a wealth of opinions that, through case analysis, can be developed into several options for resolving the case; then the “best” alternative from among those options can be chosen (see page xv, Analyzing a Case: A General Strategy). Again, equally competent managers and supervisors may arrive at different—yet equally plausible—solutions.

**Can the cases be adapted to my organization?**

If necessary, you can adapt and customize these cases by changing the identity of the firm and/or industry while retaining the essential features of the story. For example, with very little effort, you can shift the setting of a case from health care to finance by just changing
names and some slight details of the case. “Data processing” in a hospital could be translated into “information systems” in a bank, for instance, in order to fine-tune the case to your specific situation.

I do not recommend, though, using the name of your organization in the case. By using your firm’s name, you invite participants to make analogies and speculate on whom this case is really about, and it would not be unusual for rumors to start. Moreover, the important issues of the case can become secondary to these distractions.

For similar reasons, I also do not recommend using the names of public figures, whether real or fictional, for case characters. If a boss is named Rebecca Howe (from Cheers) or an employee Frank Burns (from M*A*S*H), participants will immediately apply the character traits of those fictional personalities to the individuals in the case which, again, distracts participants from a full consideration of the case issues.

If you find it necessary to alter a case in this manual, please add the following statement to the bottom of the first page on which the case appears:

This case is adapted from the (case name) case, found in 50 Case Studies for Management and Supervisory Training, by Alan Clardy, Ph.D., published by HRD Press, Inc., 1994, 2008. Adapted by permission.
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Case Report Worksheet

Please answer each of the items on the form below. Certain cases will be adapted for use in training. If your case is selected for use, you will be contacted for your permission to use it and, if permission is given, for more details. The case prepared for final use will be written so that all people involved, including yourself, will be anonymous.

Name: _______________________________ Work phone: ________________

Describe a challenging situation you have faced or are currently facing as a supervisor. There are several reasons why the situation may be challenging:

- It was unusual.
- Even though it was unusual, you were not sure what to do about it.
- The demands or conditions were complicated.

There could be other reasons. The situation could be a problem or an opportunity. It might involve an individual or a group you manage directly, or someone you do not manage at all. Use the reverse of this page or attach additional paper if you need more writing space.

1. Identify the people who were involved: use job titles (no names) and describe each person’s age, gender, years in current position, and/or any other relevant characteristics.

2. Describe the nature of the situation. What is going on? What is happening? What is the performance issue?

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Background Information

First State Financial Services was the third largest banking institution in the state. It maintained an extensive branch and ATM network to service its diverse retail customer base. Even with First State’s size, though, the business success of the bank was extremely dependent upon the trends in the local economy. Two years of recession meant two years of poor loans, and First State fell into deep trouble. To limit and reduce overhead expenses, there were some extensive layoffs. A new executive management expected rapid, better results with fewer resources. Everyone at First State feared being fired even though the bank was inching back to improved profitability. There was still the pressure to “perform—or else.”

Lucy Winters managed the six-person Spring Hill Branch for First State. Spring Hill, fully equipped with an ATM and a freshly redesigned lobby, stood in the parking lot of a new suburban mall. The mall, anchored by a store from the largest grocery chain in the area, included about 20 different small retail stores. In addition, a major hospital was located just down the street, and a large manufacturing plant (with about 3,000 employees) was situated in a convenient, nearby industrial park. Many of the branch’s customers worked at those locations.

Lucy was promoted to her current job about 18 months ago. She had been serving as an Assistant Manager at another branch in the region until that time. During the past year and a half, Lucy had learned her job as a manager well. She enjoyed her work and did an effective job.

“I used to enjoy it, in any case,” she thought to herself. She was sitting at her desk at 6:00 p.m., looking at the night closing in. “I just wish I could leave here once before 5:30. These layoffs really hurt, the pressure is too great, and no one really cares whether I’m here or not.” Lucy knew she was in a bad—no, depressed—mood.

The layoffs she was thinking about had taken place six months ago, but their full impact was only now being felt. Lucy’s Spring Hill Branch was a busy one; previously there were nine positions authorized for it. Now there were only six: two New Accounts positions (including Lucy’s) and four tellers. One teller could alternate between the teller line and back-office duties.

The problem was that there were too many customers. Lucy smiled at the contradiction: “Here the bank wants more customers, and we can’t service the ones we already have.” On almost any day at almost any time, there were three or four customers in line. It did not seem to matter that most of them simply wanted to cash a check or make a deposit: by the time they got to the teller, they were curt or rude, demanding, and sometimes hostile and aggressive.

Lucy clearly remembered an incident that had occurred just two days ago. A customer had been waiting for about 20 minutes to pay a utility bill. When he finally reached the window, he started berating the tellers for being so slow and condemning the bank for being so inept. By the time he finished, the teller was in tears.
Case 24 (continued)

Lucy remembered talking to her after he left. The teller said, “We work so hard and no one seems to appreciate what we do. I just can’t work like this.”

Lucy started to hear a lot more complaints—from everybody, it seemed. Customers complained about poor service, the tellers were complaining about the pressure, and “downtown” was starting to complain about the large number of mistakes, errors, and shortages being made at the branch.

Tomorrow Lucy had to hold one of her monthly sales meetings with the staff. These meetings were required by “downtown.” Lucy dreaded them because they always seemed to drag on and on and nothing ever got accomplished. Lucy was supposed to talk about a product for 15 to 20 minutes or so, and she could envision everyone else sitting there, fidgeting in their seats or looking at the floor. There would be no questions, but there would be occasional complaints about how “we need more help” or “the customers are yelling at us.”

Lucy was not looking forward to tomorrow’s meeting and wondered if there were ways she could work on the real problems in the branch and produce real results from her meeting.

**CASE QUESTIONS**

1. Can Lucy use this meeting to help solve some of the problems at the branch?

2. What kinds of general strategies can Lucy pursue to help solve these problems?

3. Describe the process that Lucy can follow with her staff to address productivity and quality problems.
Case 24 (continued)

Case Discussion:
The Contradiction of Business

Summary
Lucy Winters managed a branch bank office. The office was located in a good location and had many customers. However, the bank itself had been under severe pressure to improve profits. As a result, the staff in Lucy’s office had been reduced by a third.

Now there seemed to be a constant backup of customers in the branch. Because of long waits, customers were often abusive to the tellers when they finally reached the window. The staff was feeling increasingly stressful, and the quality of work began falling off.

The contradiction of this business was that, as things stood now, Lucy had more customers than she was capable of handling.

Two days after a particularly disturbing incident, Lucy prepared to conduct a mandated “sales meeting” in the branch. These meetings seldom went well as far as Lucy was concerned. She wanted to find some way to deal with the real problems of the branch, and felt she had to come up with something before the meeting on the following day.

Answers to Case Questions

1. Can Lucy use this meeting to help solve some of the problems at the branch?

Absolutely. But it is very likely that it will take a series of meetings with the staff to dig a way out of these problems.

The basic problem is that the current configuration of staffing and customers is out of balance: the demand for services exceeds the staff’s ability to serve the customers. The key to improving the productivity of the branch is to reconfigure the service and customer mix.

2. What kinds of general strategies can Lucy pursue to help solve these problems?

Lucy has several options that she can pursue to help solve this problem.

First, she can request additional staff from her management. Along with asking for full-time workers, she could suggest a number of options such as part-time positions or sharing staff with another branch. She could even pursue the latter option on her own initiative with friendly peer branch managers.

Second, part of the productivity problem involves customers using tellers for transactions that could be completed through other more efficient channels. There are several ways that customers could be approached and encouraged to use more productive methods, such as direct deposit of payroll checks and use of automatic teller machines (ATMs) and online. Since her branch is near a number of employers, she could recommend a marketing strategy to contact these employers for the purpose of establishing direct payroll deposit. She could also work with Marketing to create in-branch promotional campaigns to increase ATM usage banking.

Third, she needs to work with her staff to find ways to improve service. This latter approach would involve the staff in looking for recurring problems and appropriate solutions to them.

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Case 24 (concluded)

3. Describe the process that Lucy can follow with her staff to address productivity and quality problems.

Basically, Lucy should launch a quality circle or productivity improvement initiative with her staff. There are several major steps involved in implementing such an initiative:

1. She needs to explain the program to her staff and indicate that this is one way they can try to improve their situation. She could indicate some of the things she is already trying (see answer to Question 2). She should indicate that this process will be an ongoing one.

2. She should obtain training for her and her staff in quality and productivity improvement techniques. She should also develop the practice of providing performance reports to the staff.

3. She should use regular meetings to identify problems and brainstorm solutions.

4. Part of her actions should be to improve the training of her staff. This can occur in two areas: dealing with difficult customers and technical areas of branch work. She would need to seek training support for these areas.
Case 25

Problems Behind the Counter

Background Information

Bob Cramer, 36 and recently divorced, manages the Oak Street Branch for the Second National Bank and Trust. The Oak Street Branch has six tellers and does an average amount of business. Bob has been with Second National since he graduated from college and joined the management training program there. Bob is well liked and generally enjoys his job, although now, at the height of summer, he is carrying out the difficult job of preparing a disciplinary warning for one of his staff members.

Eight months ago, in January, Bob hired a new teller by the name of Connie Tremont. Connie was 23 years old and a graduate of a local high school. Connie had experience working as a claims clerk with an insurance company prior to coming to Second National. Bob spent about 15 minutes interviewing her, and although he had a few reservations about her appearance and communication manner, he desperately needed someone who could start soon, and she was available immediately. Bob decided to take a chance.

She started in Second Bank’s three-week teller training school the next Monday and finished it successfully. On her first day at the Oak Street Branch, Bob gave her his standard five-minute welcome, then turned her over to the head teller. The head teller introduced her to the other tellers, helped her get set up, told her to ask if she had any questions, and then went back to her job. Connie began serving customers soon thereafter.

Like all new tellers, it took her a long time to get adjusted and settled in. During these break-in periods, Bob would wonder whether the teller training was really needed because it always seemed to him that the tellers forgot everything once they walked in the door. Nonetheless, he noticed that in spite of these difficulties, Connie picked up the essentials of her work and began performing at an acceptable level relatively quickly.

Unfortunately, Bob was also finding that the initial concerns he had about Connie during the interview process had been well founded. While she could complete the technical aspects of her work acceptably, she had a major problem with presenting herself to, and working favorably with, the bank’s customers. Bob wondered almost daily when she would recognize this problem and do something about it, but she seemed oblivious to the matter and simply would not change. After six months, Bob knew that if she did not come around quickly, he would have no other choice but to release her. Although he dreaded the thought of being short-staffed again, he thought to himself, “I’ve been short-staffed so many times before that I should be used to it.”

Connie’s major problem is really a result of several factors. One factor is her physical appearance: she is pretty and slightly overweight, but pleasingly so, but she is obviously inattentive to grooming and personal hygiene—and Bob does not have any sympathy for poor, sloppy grooming. After seeing repeated examples of
Case 25 (continued)

her neglect, Bob has been forced to conclude that she is simply a slob. Her long hair is frequently disheveled and uncombed; it often seems to be unwashed. Her style of dress is plainly inappropriate, too: she often wears clothes that are either too loose and low-cut, or too tight and revealing.

Over the past eight months, a number of incidents related to Connie’s poor grooming habits have occurred. Bob could easily recall an incident that happened three weeks ago on July 18 when the branch was filled with a lunch crowd. Bob, standing near the front of the teller counter with a customer, saw Connie bend over to get some supplies from under the counter. Her dress hiked up substantially, revealing her upper legs and underwear. He saw that many of the customers had noticed, too, and were looking away in embarrassment.

Bob knew that this kind of image was not acceptable for the kind of business establishment he was expected to run. He talked with her privately the next day and told her what had happened, why it was a problem, and that she must be careful. However, in the days and weeks that followed, he detected no changes in her grooming or hygiene.

Another reason for her customer contact problem is her poor manner of communicating with customers: she is often just plain rude. Bob has regularly heard her argue with customers in a loud and contentious voice, at times cutting them off rather abruptly. It is as if she has a chip on her shoulder and almost anything a customer might do will knock it off.

Bob has received frequent complaints from customers regarding her abrasive behavior. For example, last Monday, August 2, when a customer asked to borrow a pen, Bob overheard her tell him, “Well, I don’t like to give up my pen because whenever I do, customers always keep it. Be sure to give it back to me.” He called her to his office as soon as the customer left and admonished her about what she did and told her she had better improve her conduct.

Bob was reaching a point of decision. The last straw occurred yesterday, Thursday, August 5, over Bob’s “no barefooting it” rule. The background to the problem is this: many of the tellers take off their shoes, especially toward the end of the day, in order to be more comfortable. Usually this poses no problem. However, throughout the summer, Bob received a growing number of complaints from the tellers that Connie’s feet and shoes smelled terrible. Two days ago, on Wednesday afternoon, Bob personally verified the problem. Yesterday, before the bank opened, he told the tellers that they should keep their shoes on.

Not an hour later, Bob was amazed to find Connie barefoot. He told her to put her shoes on. Later in the afternoon, he again found her barefoot, but this time he decided to give her a written warning notice. In the bank’s disciplinary procedure, issuing such a warning is the last major step before termination. Unless there was clear and immediate improvement after Connie received the notice, Bob intended to fire her.

Now, on Friday morning, Bob reads over the following rules for completing a written warning notice in the bank’s policy and procedures manual:
Case 25 (continued)

- The expected standards for performance must be stated.
- Specific examples (with dates, times, locations, examples) of the offending behavior must be identified.
- A deadline for improvement must be set.
- The employee should sign the form, or if he or she refuses, a note to that effect must be added. The employee may add remarks to the document. The employee keeps a copy, with the original sent to Personnel for filing in the employee’s folder. It is kept for two years and removed from the folder if there have been no other problems during that time.

He picks up his pen and gets to work, aware that he will be discussing the warning’s content with Connie later in the day after she receives it.

ASSIGNMENT

Given the information presented in this case and using the form provided, prepare a written warning notice. Use this form to conduct a role play with someone who plays “Connie.”

Note: Connie writes the following comment on the form when Bob gives it to her:

*My boss Bob Cramer is a real jerk. He picks on me and upsets me. I would do a much better job if I worked for a good boss. I want a transfer.*

Case Conclusion

After the discussion is completed, Connie signs the form and is handed a copy. As she starts to walk from Bob’s office, she tears it up into little pieces and throws it on his desk.

CASE QUESTION

What should Bob do now?
Second National Bank
Written Warning Notice

Employee name: __________________________ Date: ____________
Department/Branch: __________________________ Date: ____________

This warning is to notify you that you are not meeting minimal acceptable standards of performance for your job. Continued performance below standard may result in your termination. Immediate improvement is needed to avoid further disciplinary action.

Standard of performance: __________________________

Example(s) of inadequate performance: __________________________

Improvements needed: __________________________

Prior notice of problem to employee: ☐ Verbal ☐ Written

Date: ____________

Employee remarks:

__________________________

__________________________

__________________________

__________________________

Signatures:

__________________________  __________________________
Manager  Employee
Case 25 (continued)

Case Discussion:
Problems Behind the Counter

Summary
Bob Cramer managed a branch bank office and was experiencing problems with a staff member. Eight months ago, he filled an open teller’s position with Connie Tremont. Connie, 23, had been working as a claims clerk since graduating from a local high school. Bob spent fifteen minutes interviewing her for the job. Although he had some reservations about her, he needed the help. She began the bank’s training program the next week. Upon finishing the program, she returned to the branch. Bob welcomed her and then his head teller gave Connie a quick orientation and setup, after which time she began serving customers.

After a month or so, it became clear to Bob that his initial concerns about Connie were well grounded. Connie had pronounced problems with making a favorable impression on customers. There were several ways in which these problems manifested themselves—and are still manifesting themselves. One issue is poor personal hygiene and grooming. A second is the inappropriate style of clothing she wears to work. A third issue is her rudeness to customers. He has started receiving complaints from customers although he had informally counseled her about improving her performance in these matters several times before.

A “final straw” occurred yesterday. After receiving some complaints from the other tellers about Connie’s foot odor, Bob ordered the tellers to keep their shoes on. On two different occasions that day, Bob found her disobeying his directive. Now he is ready to issue her a written warning notice, the last step before termination in the bank’s disciplinary policy. He has a copy of the procedures.

Assignment

Given the information presented in this case and using the form provided, prepare a written warning notice. Use this form to conduct a role-play with someone who plays “Connie.”

Note: Connie writes the following comment on the form when Bob gives it to her: My boss Bob Cramer is a real jerk. He picks on me and upsets me. I would do a much better job if I worked for a good boss. I want a transfer.

Employees have the right to make whatever comments they please on the form. Even though this comment is inflammatory, Bob cannot have it removed. Bob could tell Connie, though, that she will need his recommendation for any transfer and that she needs to improve no matter what she thinks of him personally.
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**Case 25 (concluded)**

**Answer to Case Question**

**What should Bob do now?**

At the conclusion of the discussion, Connie signs the form but then shreds it and throws it on Bob’s desk before she leaves. If Connie did this act in full view of other employees, her behavior could be considered gross insubordination and could be grounds for immediate dismissal.

If it was done in private, Bob has two options:

1. He could just ignore it.
2. He could take further action

The first option, while no doubt difficult to do, might be indicated if she was particularly upset. However, he could instruct her to return and pick up the material for disposal in the wastepaper basket. In and of itself, the document was her copy to do with as she pleased, and there was nothing inherently wrong in tearing up the document. The offense would be in throwing it on his desk rather than in the garbage.

Given the symbolic nature of her action, though, a stronger response is needed. In this context, he could call her back into his office and issue yet another notice, this time for insubordination, including a clause about grounds for immediate termination for any future insubordinate acts of this kind.