

“You’re stepping on My Toes!” The Disillusionment in Employee Relations

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Before exiting a fraud training class that proved to be the linchpin in recognizing employee relations within the New York Passport Office, I was halted by an apology from the fraud training instructor, ***“sorry about that, I don’t want to step on anyone’s toes.”*** My immediate response was ***“this is your training how could you be stepping on anyone’s toes?”*** It followed that 10 minutes later my inbox was filled with the responses to the question I posed in our fraud training class, by my counterparts and supervisors.

In class, the fraud instructor opened up the floor to questions, however when I asked a specific question with regards to understanding a code that classified citizenship statuses of births abroad and by default, making the job of deciphering citizenship fraud much easier, I was told to relay such questions to my supervisor. As stated above the instructor did not want ***“to step on anyone’s toes.”*** Is this a faulty assumption? Given the political clout in the NY passport agency with regards to the strict ruling of following the chains of commands and the previous holders of adjudication authority who oversaw all supervisors, I am inclined to believe that the notion of “stepping on toes” may have been a historically ambiguous

practice that lead to a negative interpretation by those in authority.

Recent changes within the structure of our management team have brought about a general comrodary amongst employees. It is safe to say that the notion of “stepping on toes” has fled with those that were expelled from our department. For a new Passport Specialist it is practical to know the ins and outs of passport adjudication and it is not solely up to their supervisor to ensure this knowledge. One specific reason is that every season we change supervisors, therefore it is in the best interest of all Passport Specialists to get acquainted with those in authority; there is likelihood that we all will someday be teammates in all its capacities. For instance, the duty officer at the counter who may not be my supervisor assumes the position of team leader by sharing that fundamental knowledge of passport adjudication to all who are at the counter.

Knowledge is power. It is critical for Passport Specialist to be powerful key players in the role of adjudication. If ones supervisor is absent for the day and he/she do not know to handle a problematic situation that often arises at the agency due to emergency travels, should they maintain

staying crippled in their limited knowledge and issue a passport in error (identity theft, citizenship fraud, child abduction, improper derivatives etc.) when they are aware that someone else in authority is capable of relaying the answer to them? Creating such boundaries, whether perceived or a historical practice is diminishing the true potential of our agency to work as a team. New employees will work in fear of losing their jobs, as they do not have the knowledge of all supervisors to guide them successfully into this detail oriented and analytically investigative career. Old employees will maintain working in the four corners of a square where the only voice to hear is their own, this only dwarf’s our growth and stalemate’s the progress of efficient passport adjudication.

The time has come for all employees to recognize each other as their own limbs, an extension of themselves that provide key quality passport service for emergency travel, while tackling the problems of the underserving who serve as American imposters in a climate where terrorism poses a threat domestically. No longer should anyone in authority fear that by lending their knowledge and providing the tools to better equip the new generation of Passport Specialist, they are stomping their heels on the

toes of their counterparts.
Collectively it is our duty to
see to it that we are all
performing at our best. Not
only are we a representative
of each other, we are a
reflection of our united
government. It is our sworn
duty to keep terrorism at bay.
It is our sworn duty to protect
the American citizenry and
provide a United States
Passport to those who
deserve it.