INEQUITABLE TREATMENT?

Mrs. Payne walked through the door at 8:27 a.m. (late, as usual). I was around the corner and out of sight when another worker asked Mrs. Payne a question. In a loud, angry voice, Mrs. Payne began to argue with the other worker, who responded, “What’s your problem?” and proceeded to tell her off.

Way to go, Mrs. Young, I thought. Give her a dose of her own medicine. Nearby, the boss was in her office, where she could easily hear the whole exchange.

A few minutes later I asked Mrs. Payne a question about a technical aspect of the online bibliographic information system. Before I could finish my question, she exploded. “It doesn’t matter,” she yelled. “Make a note of it. You’ll have to do your own changes from now on.”

“That’s your job, not mine,” I replied. All the while, the boss had been sitting in her office, an expression of amazement on her face. Though this was normal behavior for Mrs. Payne, she was usually careful not to show it when the boss was around. Mrs. Payne has never had any tact at all, and she loves controversy. She is aggressive and intimidating to the average person, including our boss.

The boss came out of her office and said to me, “Before long, you will be assigned the duties Mrs. Payne is currently doing.” My temper boiled higher and hotter. I clamped my lips together so as not to say anything I’d regret later, then turned and walked back to my desk.

“I’ve had it. This place is driving me nuts,” I grumbled. “How could the workday fall apart 27 minutes after it started?”

Actually, this whole mess began last year, when everyone in the department received job reclassifications. Mrs. Payne was made supervisor of the project to convert the card catalog to machine-readable form. She had to learn to edit records on a new system at another site before that system was installed in our library. In addition to cataloging duties, she was also expected to help the boss with card production; that would qualify her for the “Library Associate” job title. I took on the responsibilities of binding monographs, processing reserve materials, assisting with audiovisual materials, cataloging and

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inputting new material not yet on OCLC, and member cataloging (for items without subjects or classification numbers), in addition to copy cataloging. And now I was supposed to do this!

“Why should I have to take on duties assigned to someone else? Is it legal to dress up a job description so one person can get a promotion and then delegate her duties to another person without a raise?” I asked myself. Mrs. Payne has done card production only when the boss was on vacation and the part-time librarian was unavailable.

At 10:00 a.m. that morning the boss came to my desk and asked if I would take a break with her; she said she felt I wanted to talk. I said no, but that I would if she insisted. She said, “Please do” (probably to soothe my ruffled feathers). In the break room, she told me we would all have to do some editing after the new system was installed, and that she was sorry Mrs. Payne had told me the news in such a rough manner.

That didn’t make me feel better. “Are you being fair to me or to Mrs. Young?” I asked. “How can you justify Mrs. Payne’s title and higher salary when we will all be doing the same job? Her ‘supervisory’ duties on this project consist only of answering questions from the two part-timers—who end up coming to me when she is not around, which is quite often. Plus her supervisor role will be over in a year.”

“Also, I feel you reward her bad behavior by reacting the way you did this morning,” I said. “It seems that you’re a little intimidated by her.”

The boss could not explain how our jobs actually differed, but offered to rewrite my job description to include the new duties! What should I do?