Riverbend City: Workplace Relationships and Social Cognition

**Branching Interactive: Help Erica Create a Performance Improvement Plan**

Help Erica Create a Performance Improvement Plan

Erica Kelly is the food services supervisor at Riverbend Senior Services. Her department prepares the food that is delivered to Meals on Wheels clients. One of her newer cooks, Nadim Abdirashib, is not performing well. He prepares food much too slowly and his station is always a mess. Most seriously, he has been deviating from the recipes—recipes that have been carefully designed to meet the nutritional needs of seniors.

Erica wants to help Nadim meet the requirements of the job. How does her attitude affect the outcome?

**Branch A**

Erica meets with Nadim and explains that she has concerns about his work. A major problem is that he seems to have trouble following the recipes he is given. On numerous occasions, he has forgotten the ham in the country pasta salad. As Erica talks, Nadim's body language becomes closed–he crosses his arms over his chest and draws himself erect in his chair. He tells Erica he doesn't think the country pasta salad recipe is good and they should drop it from the menu altogether.

Erica thinks: This isn't going well at all. I'm trying to be professional, but he's outright refusing to do what I say. Is it because I'm a woman?

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•"I'm sorry you don't like country pasta salad. But when you forget the ham, our clients don't get as much protein as we want them to. You have to follow the recipes exactly. You understand that, right?" (Go to Branch E)

•"Nadim, you're being rude. It's not appropriate for you to refuse to follow the recipes. I'm willing to listen to your opinions, but only if you're willing to work with me here." (Go to Branch E)

•"I don't understand. Can you explain why you don't think the country pasta salad is a good recipe?" (Go to Branch B)

**Branch B**

Nadim explains that the problem with the pasta salad is that as a Muslim, he is prohibited from eating or even touching pork. "Pork is forbidden," Nadim tells Erica. "If it touches my body, I cannot pray. I have to clean." Erica tells Nadim that she did not know he felt that way and that other Muslim cooks have not objected to the recipes used. She offers to work with him to find an acceptable solution, such as having alternate recipes that he can substitute without prior approval.

Erica thinks: Now that we're past that, I can talk to Nadim about the other problems I have with his work. He is going to need to make some real changes!

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•Nadim, there are two other issues we need to work on – speed and work station cleanliness. I've mentioned these things to you before and I know you are trying. Why do you think you are stuggling with the time it takes you to prepare the meals? (Go to Branch C)

•Nadim, there are two other aspects of your work that need improvement. You need to be faster with the meal prep and you to keep your station cleaner while you work because of safety concerns. Do you have any questions? (Go to Branch G)

•Nadim, it's actually pretty simple, and I know you can do it! There are two things you need to improve. First, you need to prepare food faster. And second, you need to straighten up your work station while you cook. (Go to Branch H)

**Branch C**

Nadim explains that he understands what Erica wants, but he doesn't know what he should do differently in his day to day work. The harder he tries, the worse it seems to get. As they talk, Erica learns that Nadim never had the opportunity to observe an experienced cook. Erica suggests that he spend a week working with Miguel, a senior cook who is particularly good at keeping a neat workstation. Nadim responds enthusiastically.

Erica thinks: How should I structure this experience so that Nadim receives maximum benefit?

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•It is not uncommon for a new employee to work with – shadow – a more experienced person, but it works best when you have clear expectations. What would you like to get out of this shadowing experience, Nadim? (Go to Branch D)

•I want to make sure you get the most out of your time shadowing Miguel. I'm going to draw up a very clear set of goals and we'll go over those goals together. (Go to Branch I)

•Why don't we meet with Miguel? Then I'll write up a very clear set of goals for both of you. (Go to Branch I)

**Branch D**

Nadim reiterates that he wants to learn from Miguel. He mentions that he has wanted to get to know his coworkers better, but he has a hard time getting to know people who aren't from his community. He tells Erica that he is really looking forward to working with Miguel.

**Erica thinks**: I had no idea he felt that way. I'm glad I asked.

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•I this working with Miguel is going to be helpful not only with your job performance, but also in helping you break the ice with your coworkers. Let's set up a short meeting with Miguel so we can talk about what you two should focus on while you're working with him.

Outcome: GOOD. Nadim's shadow experience is a success. His performance improves quite a bit. He also makes some friends. This new sense of belonging helps motivate him to perform well.

•Let's set up a meeting with Miguel to talk about everyone's expectations for your shadow experience. I think I'd also like to assign you to more team projects. That might help you get to know more of your coworkers.

Outcome: GOOD. Nadim's shadow experience is a success. His performance improves quite a bit. Working on team projects helps Nadim overcome some of his shyness and he begins to make some friends. This new sense of belonging helps motivate him to perform well.

•I'm so sorry you've been feeling isolated here. What can we do to help improve your experience?

Outcome: GOOD. Nadim says he wishes he could offer input on how the organization could better serve the Muslim community. Erica thinks that's a great idea and schedules a meeting with Nadim and some of the managers to talk about this. Nadim's job performance improves quite a bit. He makes friends and feels like a valued member of the organization.

**Branch E**

Nadim doesn't say anything and he stops making eye contact.

Erica thinks: I don't know what to do. I thought I was being reasonable, but now he's shut me out. Again, I wonder if it's because I'm a woman.

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•Nadim, I want to make sure you understand what I'm saying. It's very important that you don't change the recipes. Otherwise the old people who eat the food could get sick. Do you understand? (Go to Branch F)

•Nadim, I don't understand why you're reacting this way. Please explain. Why don't you like the country pasta salad? (Go to Branch B)

**Branch F**

Nadim assures Erica that he understands.

**Erica thinks:** Well, that's a relief. He seems to be calming down. Now we can get started with this PIP.

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•I'm glad you understand, Nadim. I really don't want you to lose your job over some silly country pasta salad!

Outcome: FAIL. The next day, Nadim quits. It is clear to him that Erica is insensitive to his Muslim religious beliefs, which prohibit him from handling pork.

•Nadim, this is Miguel. Miguel's making penne pasta with sausage and peppers — why don't you work together with him?

Outcome: FAIL. Nadim leaves the room in disgust. It is clear to him that Erica is insensitive to his Muslim religious beliefs, which prohibit him from handling pork. He refuses to cooperate in any way with the PIP and is fired.

•Nadim, let's lighten the mood. Why don't we cook something together while we discuss the PIP? I've got a great recipe for a three cheese and bacon quiche—it's totally decadent!

Outcome: FAIL. Nadim quits angrily. It is clear to him that Erica is insensitive to his Muslim religious beliefs, which prohibit him from handling pork. He contacts the ACLU and the Riverbend City Muslim Council and is planning to file a lawsuit.

**Branch G**

Nadim says he is he is confused.

Erica thinks: Why is he confused? I thought I was being straightforward.

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•Nadim, why are you confused? (Go to Branch C)

•Would you like me to explain my expectations to you in more detail? I really want to make sure you understand what I'm looking for. (Go to Branch H)

**Branch H**

Nadim nods his head, but doesn't say anything.

Erica thinks: I'm losing him. I don't know what to say next.

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•You aren't the first person to struggle with preparing meals as fast as we need. The previous supervisor actually made a chart that shows how long it should take to prepare each dish. I'll make a copy of it and post it on your station.

Outcome: POOR. Nadim is humiliated by having the chart posted at his work station. He continues to try, but without guidance, the goals feel unattainable. His work improves only slightly. It is likely that he will lose his job.

•I'll bet you didn't know that I started here as a cook. Let's go over to your work station and I'll show you how to make today's menu within the time guidelines.

Outcome: POOR. Embarrassed by having to be shown how to do his job, Nadim absorbs very little from Erica's demonstration. His performance continues to decline. It's likely that he'll lose his job.

•Since it's about time to start preparing today's menu, why don't I show you some techniques to keep your station neat while you're working.

Outcome: POOR. Erica shows Nadim some strategies, but is called away within a few minutes. Nadim isn't given guidance on how to cook faster, so his performance continues to decline. It's likely that he'll lose his job.

**Branch I**

Erica writes a very clear set of expectations for the shadow experience.

**Erica thinks:** What else can I do here to make sure Nadim is successful?

**Erica says to Nadim:**

•Nadim, let's go over these expectations together to make sure you understand. Please feel free to ask questions.

Outcome: OKAY. After the shadow experience, Nadim's performance improves. But he's still not as fast or as neat as he could be. Nadim feels shy and lonely at work—and this was not addressed during his PIP session with Erica. If he felt more valued, he would perform better.

•Nadim, why don't I check in with you and Miguel throughout the week? I want to help out in any way I can.

Outcome: OKAY. After the shadow experience, Nadim's performance improves. But he's still not as fast or as neat as he could be. Nadim feels shy and lonely at work—and this was not addressed during his PIP session with Erica. If he felt more valued, he would perform better.

•Nadim, I know it's hard to work quickly and neatly at the same time. Before your shadow experience begins, why don't I show you some tips on how to do this?

Outcome: OKAY. After the shadow experience, Nadim's performance improves. But he's still not as fast or as neat as he could be. Nadim feels shy and lonely at work—and this was not addressed during his PIP session with Erica. If he felt more valued, he would perform better.