

SCENARIOS FOR PRACTICING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE¹

The scenarios in this document are examples of things people said that violated the experienced justice of people because of their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or other group membership. The violations may or may not have been intentional. In fact, the degree to which they were intentional probably varied between scenarios. The scenarios provide readers with an opportunity to understand and apply principles of restorative justice.

The scenarios can be used in many settings. For example, a team of employees may discuss one scenario at the beginning of their weekly meeting to learn together how to build a more just workplace. A trainer may have students discuss the scenarios in a training session. An individual may use the scenarios to contemplate and practice in preparation for unjust comments that are likely to arise in an upcoming situation. Other uses are also possible and encouraged.

The scenarios were designed for use with technical note CPL-2023-123, “Restorative Justice.” Please read the technical note before reading these scenarios, and then discuss how the concepts in the technical note apply to each scenario. We recommend discussing the following questions for each scenario and doing so both from the perspective of the protagonist, and from the perspective of one of the third parties in the scenario.

- What is just and unjust about this scenario?
- What could you do to hold the person who said this accountable for what they said?
- What could you do to welcome and include the person who said this?
- What needs to be done to appropriately balance accountability and inclusion?

Scenario 1

You are a 43-year-old female, but people often say you look young. Your chief executive officer appointed you and a colleague of yours who occupies a similar position to represent your organization on a city-wide council on economic development for the city’s citizens and businesses. You and your colleague have worked in this organization and in this city for over a decade, and both of you were vocal and actively involved in the council’s first meeting. When the meeting ends, you are standing next to your colleague when another member of the council who is friends with your colleague walks up to your colleague and, while talking to her, brings up a topic that you raised, glances at you, and says to your colleague, “She hasn’t been around long enough to know how people make up narratives in this city.” This council is supposed to continue meeting bi-weekly for at least six more months.

¹ These scenarios were collected by Professor Cherie Dawson-Edwards. They are based on actual stories, but were adapted for brevity, clarity, and to preserve . Ryan Quinn and Ramie Martin-Galijatovic helped with compiling and editing. The stories are to be used as the basis for class discussion, and not to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of a particular situation. The goals of this document include becoming aware of issues, identifying the benefits and drawbacks of taking different approaches, assessing their impact on outcome(s), and learning ways of addressing situations you may encounter in the future.

Scenario 2

You are a Latinx man working as a vice president in a high-tech firm. You are attending a meeting with four other people. Two are directors, one who is also a Black man, and one who is a Latinx woman. The other is your white, female, administrative assistant. It is 11:00 a.m., and you have the room reserved until 11:30. Suddenly, a front-line supervisor walks in and asks, “When are you going to leave this room, I have it reserved for a meeting?” Surprised, you state that you have the room reserved. The supervisor talks over you, loudly, saying “I have this room reserved at 11:30 and I need time to set up!” Your administrative assistant says, “I reserved this room until 11:30.” The supervisor turns her head, sees your assistant, says, “Oh, sorry,” walks back out of the room, and waits in the hallway until you are done.

Scenario 3

You are a Black woman serving voluntarily on a non-profit organization’s board of directors. You are a Chief Diversity Officer in the organization where you are employed, and the chairperson of this board has publicly stated that the board hopes you will share your expertise as a diversity officer when participating in board decisions. You are reluctant to do this because diversity, equity, and inclusion work is exhausting, vulnerable work, and you need boundaries. Making yourself vulnerable and exhausted for volunteer work as well is daunting. Even so, you agreed to offer insight when it is relevant.

The board has a difficult strategic decision to make, so the chair asked people to brainstorm ideas. You are one of many people participating in this conversation, and the facilitator captures everyone’s ideas on a flipchart without comment. Your ideas have been among the more creative—even risky—ones. Then, after sharing one idea that included some diversity, equity, and inclusion content, a White woman suggests that she does not like the tone of your suggestion and asks whether your idea is even legal. The idea was not illegal, and no other idea shared so far has received any criticism. After she speaks there is an uncomfortable silence, and then the conversation moves on.

When the meeting is over, the woman approaches you and says she would like to work through the issue with you. She says nothing about how she questioned the tone and legality of your comment in a session in which everyone was told that brainstorming does not involve criticisms or wrong answers. She just tries to explain her point of view.

Scenario 4

In this scenario, you are the same person you were in scenario 3. It is months later, and the woman who criticized your tone and accused your idea of being illegal left the board for

personal reasons. There is no evidence that she left the board because of her interaction with you. However, ever since she left, an affluent White male on the board starts an argument with you at least once in every meeting, misconstruing something you say in the process. He was friends with the woman who left the board, and he tells another board member that he believes that you drove her off the board.

Eventually, the regular conflicts become enough of an issue that the other members of the board know that they must acknowledge them and do something about them. The board hires a diversity, equity, and inclusions mediator to help the two of you work through your differences. When the mediation begins, he says that he thinks the mediation is biased from the outset because you and the mediator both have expertise in diversity, equity, and inclusion mediation.

Scenario 5

You are a white male with a disability serving as a diversity representative on a search committee for an executive vice president. Currently, there is an Asian man serving as the interim executive vice president. As the search committee begins its first online meeting, a White woman asks why we do not just appoint the interim executive vice president to the position permanently. After all, he is doing a good job and he is a diverse candidate. You say that the committee cannot do this because there is a policy in place preventing appointments such as these without searches, and you point out which policy it is. The woman tells you that your answer is condescending. Instantly, you start getting direct text messages from others in the meeting saying, “Wow!” “Did she just say that?”