CASE 8

The Tardy Drama Queen

By Karen McMillen Dielmann

Eastside General (Eastside) is part of the Sun Valley Healthcare System. Eastside is one of Sun Valley's smaller, community-based hospitals located in a rural area of the Midwest. Sally Moreno, the Admissions Department supervisor, has worked for Eastside for 10 years, with her job as registrar in the small, but busy emergency department (ED). She appreciates the importance of her staff's roles in contributing to the financial health of the hospital. In addition, Sally's manager frequently reminds her that she needs to keep productivity high in the department in order to avoid layoffs in this poor economy. Sally feels a strong sense of responsibility to Eastside and the surrounding community. Eastside is the largest employer in the area and Sally grew up in this community. Many of her family members work for the hospital.

Since the Admissions Department is a 24/7 operation, all staff need to work together as a team to ensure that there is adequate coverage in all areas of the department. One Admissions Department staff member, Rosetta Samuels, transferred in 18 months ago from the Dietary Department where she had worked for

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2 years. About 9 months ago, Sally noticed that Rosetta began to have a tardiness problem. It was becoming worse, causing grumbling among her coworkers, who were tired of having to either stay late (from the night shift) to cover for her or having to deal with angry patients who are waiting to be admitted for services (from the day shift) when Rosetta was late for her 7 a.m. shift.

Rosetta breezes into work 15–30 minutes late several times per month, complaining loudly and dramatizing the situation that led to her being late. Some of the reasons for her tardiness have been:

- Losing track of time when tidying up her apartment before leaving for work
- Taking too much time to pack her lunch, get dressed, or take a shower in the morning; she just can't seem to get out of the door on time
- Running out of gas on the way to work or having car problems, such as the car not starting in the rain
- Having trouble deciding what to wear to work

Sally has been keeping daily documentation on the time Rosetta arrives for her shift as well as a list of complaints from her coworkers. Rosetta has been verbally counseled about the problem. Today, Sally was giving Rosetta a written warning and called her into the office:

Sally: Rosetta, you know that we have talked about you needing to be on time.

Rosetta: Yes, and I have really tried to be on time. I just can't help it sometimes. I get a late start in the mornings, or my kids won't get out of bed…You know that yesterday my youngest, Georgie, he's my biggest problem, well he wouldn't get out of bed. I kept pestering him, 'Georgie, I'm going to be late for work,' but he wouldn't listen. I don't know what to do about him anymore…

Sally: [interrupting] I know you have problems at home and you've told me about your issues causing you to be late, but, Rosetta, you must be here on time. It creates problems for the department and the other employees when you're late.

Rosetta: I know. I will try, I really will…Who has been complaining about me? I bet it's that old biddy, Jane. She never liked me…

Just last week she told the other ladies in the break room that I don't do my share of the work. I do work hard; I just have a little trouble getting to work on time. It's not my fault…I don't know why she dislikes me, I never did nothing to her….

Sally: [interrupting again] This isn't about Jane or anyone else; it's about you needing to be on time. I have to write you up and if you don't start showing up on time very day, you will get fired.

Rosetta: [crying out loudly] Please don't fire me! I need this job. My husband lost his job and I am the only one working. My kids need to eat. Please don't fire me. I promise to be on time.

Sally: I know Rosetta. Please try to be on time. I have to write you up; it is the company's policy and my manager will be asking to see this report. Please, Rosetta, be on time.

Rosetta: I will, Sally. I promise. Maybe I should transfer to another department where it's not so important that I be at work right at 7 a.m. everyday…

Sally: Rosetta, it is important to be on time in every job here at Eastside General.

Rosetta: Okay. I will try from now on.

Since that conversation two weeks ago, Rosetta had been on time…most days. She was a few minutes late here and there, but most of the time, she had arrived very close to the start of her shift…that is, until today.

Today, Rosetta was 20 minutes late, complaining in a loud voice when she arrived about the "traffic jam." Sally is dreading the thought of having to deal with her again about her tardiness.

Interestingly, yesterday Sally received a transfer form from the Human Resources Department regarding Rosetta's request to transfer to another job within the hospital. The form requires Sally, as Rosetta's direct supervisor, to complete information about her performance and attendance. Sally is torn about this; if she completes the form honestly, Rosetta will most likely not be considered for the transfer (Sally and the Admissions Department will be stuck with her). However, if Sally "overlooks" Rosetta's tardiness issues, she may get transferred to the other area—perhaps with a more amenable schedule? After all, Rosetta is a good employee when she's at work.