

Bill tells Louis that the firm has grown enough to need another outside salesperson. He's looking for a good person. Louis realizes that the job would be a good opportunity for him to expand his career, and he decides to apply. When Louis approaches Bill about the job, Bill seems quite surprised and says, "Well, let me think about it, Louis." A few days later, Bill says to Louis, "I think you're a better asset to the company in your present job. You don't quite fit the sales rep image, and we need your know-how and knowledge of the business and the customers to handle phone orders and shipping."

1. What surface problems do you notice?
2. What are the underlying root problems?
3. If you were Bill, what would you do?
4. If you were Louis, what would you do?

Case Study 15.4 Helen, Travel Agent

Helen has been working for World Points Travel Agency for about a year. World Points consists of a chain of 15 travel agencies with a total of about 100 employees. When Helen interviewed for the job, the office seemed perfectly suited to her style. People seemed to like their work and enjoy a little humor. Franko, the manager, was very flexible about allowing her to work only 25 hours a week and to schedule her hours around her daughter's needs. He hired her on the spot.

Helen was thrilled to get the job: all she wanted was to work part time so she could spend time with her three-year-old daughter Linda, whom she had just enrolled in a good nursery school. Helen figured that a nice part-time job at a travel agency would give her a chance to get out of the house and meet people and make enough money to pay Linda's school expenses.

Everyone was friendly from the beginning, and Helen was invited to join the employee's association, even though part-time workers were technically not eligible for membership. The employee's association didn't negotiate contracts or require dues, but did consult with management in making policies for the agency and the employees. Little did Helen know that the actions of the group would eventually lead to her downfall.

A few weeks ago, the group suggested to management that the company's image needed to be improved. As one of them said, "We sell so many European vacation plans, we need to present a chic, updated European image." Most of the improvements involved changing the names of vacation packages and the office decor. The trouble arose when the group decided to adopt appearance standards for employees; for example: "Employees who deal directly with the public must look attractive and professional and wear outfits that reflect current European high-fashion. Employees must keep their weight within the optimal weight range for their height and bone structure."

Helen is 5'6" tall and weighs about 200 pounds. Last week, two of the women from the employee association committee that drafted the image policy met with Helen. They asked her if she would agree to bring her weight down to 160 pounds within the next six months, saying "That seems reasonable, don't you think." Helen said, "No, I don't think it's reasonable. I gained this weight three years ago when I was pregnant and then nursing my daughter. I've tried to lose it, and it's just not that easy. I'd like to lose it on my own terms and in my own time frame. To make this kind of agreement just puts too much pressure on me."

Marge, the committee chair said, "It was the employee association's idea to do this, and you are a member of our group, so you shouldn't view this as something the company is forcing on you." Helen replied, "Do you think I don't look good enough to sell European vacation plans? Don't I have a right to look the way I want to look, so long as it isn't outrageous or harmful to business?"