

# CASE 35

## A Leadership Challenge

### Background Information

Mary Herzen could not have been happier when she was hired to supervise the Patient Services Department at Northside Hospital. At age 45, Mary had been in various patient and bookkeeping capacities for more than 15 years, and she enjoyed both the work and supervising others. This new opportunity came at a perfect time: Just three months earlier, she had lost her job as part of a general reorganization at Central Hospital.

As Patient Services supervisor, Mary oversaw a department made up of a senior services representative and two service reps. It had taken five months to fill the position. The delay was caused in part by the internal job-posting process of notifying and interviewing internal applicants before advertising outside the organization.

Two Northside employees had applied. Both worked in the Patient Services Department. Juanita Ramirez, 32, had been with Northside for 10 years. She was the senior services rep, with over eight years experience in this department. Sue Williamson, at 26, had less time with Northside and, therefore, less experience in the function. Although both were interviewed for the supervisory position, neither were seen as strong enough candidates for promotion.

When Mary arrived for work on the first day, she met her boss, Chris Sapiro, after completing the new employee paperwork in Personnel. Chris was the one who had interviewed Mary and decided to hire her.

After going over some general guidelines and providing further details about the department and its personnel, Chris mentioned to Mary that two of her employees had applied for her job.

Chris continued: "I just mention that because there could be a possible problem with Juanita. I don't know, she might be resentful. Handle it the way you see best."

Chris then took her to the Patient Services Department, where he introduced her to the other employees and showed her the office. Mary began to settle in.

Later that afternoon, Mary set up individual meetings with each of the employees. She wanted to get to know them personally, learn what their job duties were and how they did their jobs. All the meetings went smoothly except the one with Juanita.

Mary could tell from the start that there would be difficulties. Juanita came in reluctantly, sat down, and did not look at Mary. Her crossed arms and unyielding stare at the ceiling conveyed the message: "Don't mess with me."

Mary was barely able to get complete sentences from Juanita in response to her questions.

Mary tried to press Juanita on what her job duties and responsibilities were. After a few vague replies and more questions, Juanita said: "Look, I've told you what I do. It's your job to tell me what to do. I don't know beyond that."

This kind of exchange went on a little longer, until Mary finally said: "Juanita, if this is as well as we are going to communicate, we're going to have some real problems."

That seemed to catch Juanita's attention.

"Don't try to frighten me," Juanita replied tensely. Juanita was clearly chewing over something in her mind.

Mary paused, unsure of what to say next.

"The only reason you got this job is because you're Anglo," Juanita finally said. "I should have had that job. This hospital is afraid to promote a Chicano into management."

Juanita halted for a moment, her bottom lip starting to quiver. She began crying.

"I've been discriminated against. . . . You're the boss. You're the one who's supposed to know it all. I'm not going to answer any more of your dumb questions. You tell me what I'm supposed to do."

### **CASE QUESTIONS**

1. Should Chris have informed Mary about the internal applicants before offering Mary the job?
2. Was meeting with each employee as part of Mary's orientation a good idea?
3. Evaluate the agenda Mary used. How could it be improved?
4. How should Mary respond to the issues Juanita is raising?
5. What are some general issues new managers and supervisors may face when assuming responsibility for a new job?