

How I unfairly became a racist

I was the acting manager at this Lucky store in North Highlands, CA. It was a Sunday and I had just finished doing a cash deposit, left the managers office and went down to take a look at the front end and check out the condition of the store. I noticed that one of the cashiers (Jean) was gone from her register and so I asked another cashier where Jean was? She was on a 10-minute break and left the store to go over to Baskin Robbins to get an ice cream...on a 10-minute break.

It was standard procedure that before an employee took a break, they would let the person in charge know that they wanted to take a break and then the person in charge would know where that employee was and when to expect them back from their 10-minute break. In my past, I had always informed the person in charge to let them know I wanted to take a break and that was how taking a break was handled.

So I opened up Jean's register and took care of customers while waiting for Jean to return from her break. She finally came back from her break and she let me out so that she could continue on taking care of customers.

As this was happening I quietly told her that “it’s a common courtesy to let the person in charge know when you want to take a break.” just to let her know to let me know next time when she wanted to take a break. She responded “just shut up and get your fucking black ass out of my checkstand.” This is how rudely she responded back to me.

Being stunned by what she said to me I then quietly told her that I wanted her to clock out and go home. She ignored me. I told her again that I wanted her to go home. She ignored me again. I finally said “Jean, I want you to go home now.” She then stated that she wanted to talk to the manager, who was at home on his day off. I said she could. I went to the office, called Matt Vanairsdale (manager) and told him what was taking place here at the store. He said to give the phone to Jean, in which I did. He and Jean talked for a while and Matt told her to go home....and she finally clocked out and went home.

The next day, Matt contacted the District Manager, (Norm Millert), and explained to him the circumstances that required Jean to be sent home from work by me the previous day. The DM, after hearing the facts and being told that there’s a witness to what Jean had said to me while in the checkstand, he justly suspended Jean for three days.

Jean, being an African American, went to the union to try and recoup the pay for her three-day-suspension. The story she provided the union representatives was that I had used racial slurs with her and it became evident she was going to use the "race card" in an effort to get back her three days of lost pay. At no time when she was talking to the store manager on day I sent her home, did she indicate I had made racial slurs to her. Store Manager Matt (who had known me for many years) came to me and said "I have never known you to use those kinds of words." I told Matt "I have never used those kinds of words." Why would I use any racial slurs to her when she came back from her break. In truth she didn't like the idea that I or anybody else would question her about taking a break.

The courtesy clerk who witnessed this insubordination stated a number of times to the Store Manager Matt and District Manager Norm Millert that I did not make any racial slurs to her. There were other cashiers close to this situation and if I had made any racial slurs to Jean they surely would have heard it. **What nobody knew in the store** about me was that one of my most memorable experiences in my life centered around a dying black woman I came to know back in the 70s. There wasn't a racist bone in my body. Clearly this woman was bent in using the color of her skin to get back her lost pay....how dare that White guy do this to me...I'll show him!

So after Jean made these false racial claims against me with the union, the union set a date and time for her to be given an arbitration. I had never been to an arbitration before so I wasn't sure what to expect. On the day of the arbitration, at the union office, I met store officials along with my witness (Dirk).

The arbitration convened inside this room where union representative, store supervision, Lucky's Labor Manager, me, my witness and Jean sat. The arbitration opened up with Jean being given an opportunity to tell her side of the story. It was just amazing how brazenly dishonest Jean became to get her three days of lost pay back. She did her best to tell those who could hear her how she is a Christian, and she doesn't use the kind of words that got her suspended and then went into this episode of me being a racist.

After she finished, I then thought I would soon be given the opportunity to share the truth with a store employee witness there to support my side of the story. But that part of the arbitration didn't happen. A meeting took place outside of that room with the individuals who would decide this case. They came back to this room and this case was quickly adjudicated by claiming Jean would get back

her three days of lost pay. They tried to give this absurd reasoning for their decision and before I knew it this arbitration was concluded. I was never given an opportunity to share my side of the story of how rudely Jean treated me when she returned back from her break while adding a touch of a racist overtone in her remark to me.

My witness Dirk and I were just totally amazed by the outcome of this arbitration. We were both humiliated on how this case was handled and the fact that I was never given the opportunity to defend my side of the story of the incidence that got her rightfully suspended for three days.

She used the “race card,” and “Christianity” to get back her thee days of lost pay. I walked away from this union office feeling like a racist. I couldn’t imagine how a company I worked for could be any more disrespectful to me. But this was just one of many times that the company I worked for would be so disrespectful to me.