

Submission 184

I was working in administration for a local real estate company.

There was no HR office. The head boss (the Principal), was responsible for real estate and not one to go to for HR matters. The Admin manager was a middle aged lady who worked in office administration and was responsible for HR documents but not processes. She also had a very 'buddy buddy' approach with all the male real estate agents, and seemed to perceive other women as competition and could be quite rude to them.

Due to the work environment, the nature of the HR processes and the seniority of the staff who were harassing me, I did not feel comfortable in raising any issue with the company.

There were two male staff members who constituted sexual harassment.

One was an older white male, in his late 60's. He was one of the head salespeople for real estate in that office. Whenever he would pass by in the office, he would find a way to be able to brush his hand against my lower back and hips as he passed. He did it in such a way that it could be couched in 'trying to move me so he could pass in a polite manner'. Where he placed his hands - the hips felt inappropriate, but mainly it was the subtle light brush in certain inappropriate areas which made me miserable but he did it in a way that I felt he could argue that the movement was 'inadvertent' - so I was unsure about calling him out. This happened on such a regular repeat basis that I would feel uncomfortable whenever he was near me. He did not perform the same move on any men, nor older female staff. Due to my position in the company, and the 'blokey' environment - I felt scared and unsupported should I speak out, and feared about losing my job or being bullied in the workplace.

This man then offered to place me under his wing as a trainee real estate agent. I politely asked if I could have one of the older female agents as a mentor instead. He was furious. He said the words 'well I don't want you now!' and proceeded over the ensuing weeks to hinder any possible progress of partnering with an agent, and created a cold and cruel environment in which to work until I was eventually able to find another job and leave.

The second man was in his early 20's and one of the 'star' real estate agents, bringing in high end properties. I didn't have any issue with him in the office environment. However during the office Christmas party there was an incident. I had been chatting with him just about work and life in general - just the usual conversation between colleagues. There was no flirting or sexual innuendo. I had drunk quite a bit of champagne and went to the women's toilets. As I was entering the cubicle, I looked over as he burst into the female toilets, barge into my cubicle and sexually assaulted me, telling me I was 'hot' as he groped me, tried to kiss me. He also barred me from leaving and shoved his hand down my pants. [REDACTED] I

managed to finally dodge under his arm and ran out of the female toilets. My partner had arrived to pick me up and I promptly left the venue. I didn't tell anyone, not even my partner as I felt such fear and shame and guilt. When I arrived at work the following Monday we both pretended like nothing happened and he had no consequences for his actions. I felt that I had no power in the workplace, nor even culturally due to the stigma of 'well she had been drinking'. I didn't ask some random colleague to burst into the private female toilets and assault me. However at the time of the incident I was very dependent on my wage, and of the power dynamic between high earning agents vs office staff. Also, watching how the office knew that the older manager was bullying me and trying to prevent me from becoming an agent, I in no way felt capable of making any complaint about the office party, and even felt I would be blamed.

I didn't have the financial means to quit, and it took me some time to get another job that covered my living expenses and enabled me to leave. However, I shouldn't be the one punished and have to leave my work based on the bad behaviour of others.