

Harassment and Discrimination Report

INCIDENT

She reported her boss had sexually harassed her – then she was fired

It started the day Wanda met her new boss.

After a successful interview, the man who would be overseeing her fundraising work walked her out down some stairs. As they made small talk, Wanda, felt his hands press on her shoulders and squeeze them.

The way he touched her was odd, Wanda thought when she got home. But she was thrilled by the prospect of her new job, something that made it easier to dismiss the encounter.

A few days into her new role, it became clear this was part of a pattern of inappropriate behavior.

Things escalated after Wanda caught her boss staring at her breasts repeatedly.

“He looked at my breasts, looked down at his genital area, looked back (at me), opened his palms and looked back down,” Wanda recalled.

“I’m in a state of shock that any man would do that and just keep going and pretend that nothing happened.”

Wanda says she confronted her boss about some of his behavior, but he denied it and told her he didn’t know what she was talking about.

As someone who comes from an abusive background, Wanda says her experience was even more traumatizing – especially the gaslighting.

Wanda decided to report the harassment to her employer in the spring of 2018, three years after it began. She says it took time to start the reporting process because her boss wielded a lot of power and was well-liked.

Wanda detailed the harassment to the department at her workplace that handled such cases and they conducted an internal investigation.

“For me to go up against a powerful person among the powerful circle by any measure ... was tough,” she says.

“(I felt) no one would believe me and everyone would blame me.”

After five months, the department determined her boss’s behavior did not violate the workplace’s harassment code.

Further, the investigator said there was a lack of reliable evidence to support that the alleged conduct was sexual in nature.

Shortly after the department closed the investigation, Wanda went on sick leave. Less than two weeks later, she was terminated.

“I was devastated. I was emotionally crushed,” she says.

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