

Case Study: Department Head Inappropriate Relationship

Description:	A 34-year-old squadron maintenance department head was given captain's mast following a four-month relationship with a 20-year-old Sailor. The officer, a Lieutenant Commander with 12 years of service, was found guilty of several infractions of the UCMJ and was subsequently fined and administratively discharged. The enlisted member with 2 years of service was also found guilty of violations of the UCMJ and was fined and reduced in rank.
Background:	An informal investigation was convened to explore the case and to determine what decisions, events and circumstances contributed to the behavioral failing. The investigation was initiated following the results of the UCMJ but completely separate from UCMJ.

Findings:

1. The relationship began while the squadron was on a weapons detachment away from home field. The department head served as the officer-in charge of the 6-plane detachment and the Sailor served as a plane captain in the maintenance department.
2. The officer was married and reported that there were no issues with his wife of 8 years. He reported that he loved her and respected her and said that he had "meant it" when he took the marriage oath. There are no children in the marriage.
3. The officer said that his relationship with his wife prior to the event was comfortable but that he did not have the same desire for her that he once had. He said these feelings had been growing over the last year.
4. The officer admitted to having sexual thoughts about the plane captain since she had arrived at the command six months prior. He admitted remarking about her figure to two other pilots and that they had agreed that it was impressive.
5. Investigators interviewed the two squadron pilots and they remembered the conversation about the Sailor's figure. They both believed that such conversation was off limits and agreed that such conversation showed a total lack of respect for the Sailor. They both

-
- said they did not say anything or do anything to “correct” the maintenance officer or attempt to stop the conversation. They both said they thought such things were his business.
6. The O-4 said that he did not have any plans to actually have sex with the Sailor as this was “against about every rule in the Navy.”
 7. However, when discussing the probable list of detachment participants with the Maintenance Master Chief he casually mentioned it would “probably be a good experience for her.”
 8. After landing his jet at the deployment field, the officer did get a rental car for personal use. This vehicle was in addition to the rental cars authorized for the detachment. This was the first time he had ever rented his own car on a detachment (his fourth). He said that he had done it for “flexibility.” Upon questioning, he admitted this was the first time his thoughts relative to the Sailor turned into an action (the rental) even though he did not see it as such at the time.
 9. The officer stated he was not outwardly planning to do anything with the Sailor.
 10. The first morning of the detachment the officer approached his jet and saw the Sailor was his plane captain. He asked her how the jet looked and she answered, “Just fine, Sir.” The officer said that he then blurted out, “Well, you look just fine, too, Airman.” He knew it was not appropriate but it just came out. He said the Sailor just grinned at him and said, “Thank you, sir.”
 11. The Sailor said that she was not “looking for a man” at that time in her life but just wanted to have fun. She thought the maintenance officer was handsome and his rank and position impressed her. She said she was surprised, but also pleased when he had remarked how she looked. She said she was not surprised that it happened since she received those kinds of compliments all the time but she was surprised that an officer would say it knowing that it was “a little personal for work.”
 12. The Sailor told her fellow plane captains about the incident.
 13. The next day the officer and the Sailor were again teamed on the same jet and exchanged conversation about what they had done the previous night. The Sailor told the officer that she had gone to a local club with some of the other Sailors and that it had been a good time. She asked the officer if he played pool and he said yes. He said that
-

she suggested he stop by the club and play a game sometime and he said that he would if he could.

14. The officer said that he took himself off the night schedule that night and drove his rental car to the club the Sailor had mentioned. He said that although he did not have a plan to do anything with her he did feel excited to be “a kid again.” He arrived at the club and soon was buying pitchers for the Sailors and having a good time. He was teamed with the Sailor and they had won every game they played and he had hugged her and kissed her on the cheek when they won. He said at the time it felt like just an extension of what guys would do but instead of shaking hands they hugged. He said he thought it was no big deal at the time. When the vans came to take the Sailors back to the base he drove back to the BOQ.
15. The detachment had a beer party the third night of the detachment and the officer admitted “eyeballing” the Sailor the entire evening. He also admitted that it pissed him off when some of the Chiefs showed too much attention to her.
16. The next night the officer once again joined the Sailors at the club and played until around ten. When the vans came, he suggested that he take the Sailor home instead so they could stop for coffee on the way back to the base. She agreed but instead of going for coffee, he suggested that they have a talk about how the detachment was going. They went to his car and began to make out in the dark parking lot. He admitted to kissing her and fondling her breasts. He admitted that he knew it was wrong and that at the instant of the first kiss he had crossed the “career danger line.” He said that he figured he would just kiss her a little and feel her breasts and that would be the end of it. Upon questioning, he said that he didn’t feel they were having actual sex at that point but he did agree that he was guilty of fraternization. He said that fraternization was a navy ethical problem, not a real problem as far as operations go.
17. The Sailor said that she was a little surprised that the officer would offer her a ride home but by then she was really starting to like him. He was very cool for an officer. She said that when he kissed her she knew they were breaking the rules but that since he was the maintenance officer it shouldn’t matter.
18. Nothing else happened until the last night of the detachment. The

officer had found an email address for the Sailor and sent her a message asking for a cup of coffee. They met off base and he suggested they go to a hotel room. She agreed and he said that was the first instance of sex. When asked about the previous kissing and fondling, he said he did not consider that sex. He said that was just fooling around.

19. Upon returning to home base, the relationship heated up and they had sex every other day in an apartment that he was renting. The officer said that he enjoyed the sex with the Sailor but that was it. He figured to end it soon.

20. The Sailor said she liked being desired by the O-4. He made her feel pretty. She said it bothered her that she had to hide the relationship and she wondered how it would develop. She felt that he might leave his wife one day for her. She knew the situation but she still wanted to enjoy it openly. She eventually told her friends in the squadron about it, and her sister. She said he made her feel good. She also said she felt some guilt since the officer was married.

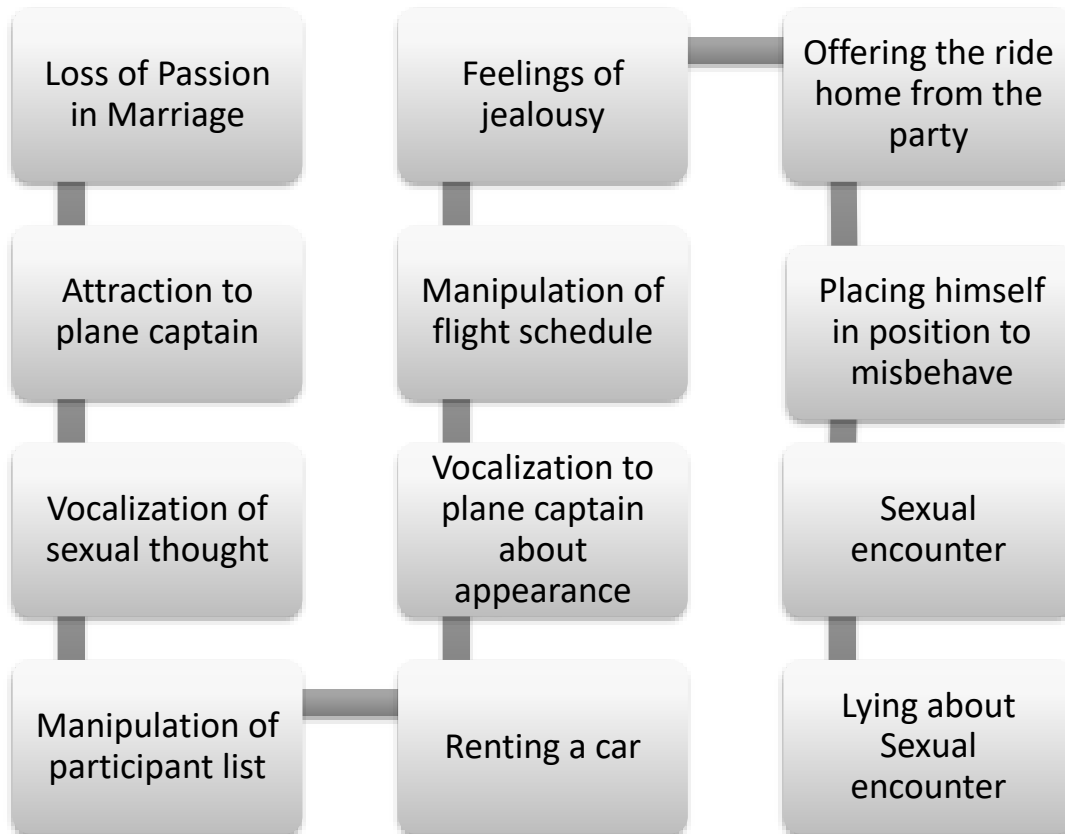
21. The relationship was discovered when the maintenance chief heard stories about the Sailor. He was also shown Facebook photos of the officer and the Sailor playing pool together and hugging, etc. He confronted her and she admitted to the affair. The maintenance chief then approached the executive officer and commanding officer. They called the maintenance officer in, who vehemently denied the affair.

22. The officer then finally admitted to the affair and the case was awarded captain's mast.

Facilitation Questions:

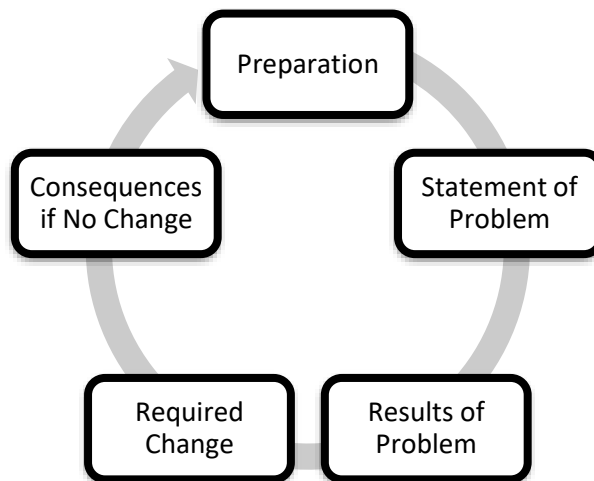
1. Diagram the thought-to-action chain for the O-4.
 - a. Loss of passion in marriage, loved his wife but loss of sexual desire, sexual attraction to plane captain, vocalization of sexual thought to other officers, manipulation of participant list, renting a car, vocalization to plane captain, manipulation of flight schedule, feelings of jealousy, suggesting she ride from party with him, placing himself in position to misbehave, engaging in sexual contact.
 - b. Note how long the chain went before he actually committed the misbehavior. What is the point of the critical incident?
2. Can you look at the length of the diagram and honestly say that all of these were coincidental? Or if the O-4 is truly being honest with himself from the start, the entire sequence was not an accident and should/could have been stopped immediately after link number two?
3. Do you think the O-4's home sex life contributes to the incident or is it just an excuse for misbehavior?
4. Why did the O-4 remark about the plane captain's figure to his fellow officers?
5. What might have been a good response by them?
6. Discuss the conversation between the O-4 and the maintenance chief when he suggested the detachment would be good for the plane captain.
7. Discuss the O-4's renting of a car. Does this represent a turning point?
8. Investigators did not put much into their report about the Sailor. What were here motives?
9. Discuss the O-4's behavior at the club. Was it wise to concentrate so much time on the Sailor? How did others perceive this?
10. Discuss the O-4's rationalization of his actions with the Sailor in the rental car.
11. Discuss the thinking of the O-4 and the Sailor as the affair progressed.

12. Discuss the seriousness of the O-4 terminating the affair?



Constructive Confrontation:

1. The first opportunity for constructive confrontation is internal. In this case, the O-4 would benefit from a constructive confrontation with himself. Why is he making the decisions he is making? What does he think they will achieve? What are the end results?
2. A next opportunity for confrontation might come from a friend or colleague. These “on-lookers” often know about or strongly suspect incidences of misbehavior in others. Have you ever been in such a situation? Approaching a friend or co-worker in such a situation would be very difficult and you would have to be sure that real, negative consequences were likely. Using the case study, your own observations, or a hypothetical example, how would you realistically handle such a confrontation? Look at the wheel below for a template.



Preparation:

1. In reference to the O4 what is the problem (or likely result) of the misbehavior? What problem is it for you? What problem is it for the unit, etc.?

Statement of Problem:

1. If you were a colleague or friend of the 04 and knew of the situation or previous situations how would you state the problem?
2. If you were a junior how would you handle this?
3. Listen

Results of Problem:

1. Using the example, what are the likely results or negative outcomes from the problem and how would you state that?
2. Listen.

Required Change:

1. What change in behavior do you want to see?
2. Listen.

Consequences of No Change:

1. Hopefully, by this point in the confrontation you are having a discussion and not a shouting match. The understanding of consequences would be something that both of you are agreeing on, vice you listing them.

Case Conclusions:

1. What main points did you take from this case study?
2. What are your concerns as a facilitator with this case study?