

Case 12: Religious Diversity

Gita is an accountant at Auto Motor Assembly, a car manufacturing company. She is part of a small team with three other accountants. They are a team of two men and two women.

It's Ramadan, and, as a Muslim, Gita is fasting as she does every year. One day, her manager, Chen, invites the whole team out for lunch. They had just finished a huge two-year project—there was reason to celebrate. Gita politely declines the invitation and continues her work. She knows from experience that the way her team celebrates is with food and drink. Given the time of year and her devotion to Islam, she figures it's better to just stay at the office. She doesn't want to make anything awkward with her team.

When the team returns from lunch, everyone is in a great mood. Chen comes over to Gita's desk and tells her about lunch and how she was missed. Gita smiles and responds, "I'm glad you had fun. Maybe next time..."

The following Friday, Gita's team decides to go for drinks after work. Gita is invited, but it's still Ramadan, so she's still fasting—not to mention she also never drinks alcohol as a devout Muslim. During Ramadan, she can't eat while the sun is up, and, once the sun does go down, she must pray before eating. While she's spent much of her life fasting during Ramadan, going out for dinner and drinks is always difficult. Because of this, Gita tells her team that she already has plans. She wishes everyone a great weekend and says that she'll see them on Monday.

On Monday morning, the whole team is late. Well, everyone except Gita. She arrives on time, but her colleagues don't start showing up until 11:00 a.m.—two hours after they're supposed to be there. When she asks them what happened, they apologize.

"Sorry, Gita," Chen starts, "When we were out for drinks on Friday, we made plans to go bowling on Sunday. Bowling ran kind of late, so I told everyone they could come in later today. I should've sent you an email to keep you in the loop."

While Gita doesn't mind coming in on time (she's been busy at work lately anyway), she's upset she wasn't invited to go bowling. Sure, she can't eat during Ramadan, but she can bowl. She tries not to think about it as she continues her work. At the end of the day, Chen stops by Gita's desk.

"Hi Gita," he says. "We're planning to go out for some food on Friday. I wanted to let you know before the others, so you don't make any other plans this time around. We all want you there." Gita smiles at Chen. She knows he's trying to be friendly, and probably feels badly for the miscommunication earlier. Gita asks if they can speak privately in his office.

Gita closes the door and tells Chen the real reason she hasn't participated in all the team's activities.

"I'm so sorry," Chen says. "I didn't realize." But he also admits that he's not quite sure what Ramadan is.

"It's a Muslim holiday," Gita explains. "We have to fast from sunrise to sunset. I'd really like to participate," she says, "but it's a bit awkward to go out for lunch when I'm fasting during Ramadan." Gita then proceeds to tell him that drinks are even more awkward because she doesn't drink

alcohol for religious reasons. “I would have loved to go bowling though,” she says. “I can bowl a pretty mean game! But those plans were made on Friday night when I wasn’t there.” Gita tells Chen that she knows her exclusion was unintentional, but she sometimes worries about what else she might be missing when she doesn’t attend social gatherings.

Chen feels terrible. He prides himself on his open-door policy and in knowing his team. They are an extremely hard-working and productive team that likes to have fun outside of work. They love the pub down the street from the office and always seem to end up there on Fridays after work. But now that he thinks about it, he realizes Gita has never chosen to join them. Chen always thought his team was inclusive and welcoming to everyone, but this makes him question his recent—and past—decisions.

Questions:

- (1) What negative repercussions did Gita face from not attending the various team activities? Did it affect more than just her personal feelings?
- (2) List the ways in which organizations can show their inclusivity to all religions. Was Chen being intentionally exclusive? What is the importance of cultural and religious awareness training?
- (3) Name other post-work teambuilding activities that could be considered exclusive. How might this reinforce the notion of “majority rules?” List other bonding activities the team could have done that would have also included Gita.
- (4) Name some learning opportunities (i.e., training sessions) that could be beneficial for the staff at Auto Motor Assembly. Who should champion these initiatives?

What is the difference between exclusion and discrimination? Is not telling Gita about the late start on Monday an exclusionary or a discriminatory act?

Additional Resources for Case 12:

- Creating Space for Religious Diversity at Work (article by Harvard Business Review), [here](#)
- The benefits of religious diversity in the workplace (blog post by Inclusive Employers), [here](#)
- 8 Ways to Promote Religious Diversity In The Workplace (blog post by Vantage Circle), [here](#)
- How to Manage Religious Diversity in the Workplace (article by Chron), [here](#)

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