



“that’s what she said”

a ford & harrison blog about the popular television series “the office”

Brawl in the Family

September 23, 2010 - by: [Chris Butler](#)

Litigation Value: Not much; yet.

Kicking off Season 7, tonight’s premiere teaches us a valuable lesson — the perils of nepotism in the workplace. Nepotism in its simplest form is “favoritism” toward relatives, without regard to merit. Michael Scott’s misguided decision to employ his jackwagon of a nephew, Luke, as an office assistant illustrated nearly all that’s wrong with workplace nepotism. Michael completely ignored Luke’s utter disregard of the most basic of his responsibilities — from botched Starbucks and ice cream runs to blatant insubordination to hoarding important FedEx packages in the trunk of his clapped-out Honda Civic — until it quickly caused a mutiny among the Scranton staff. Only when confronted en masse did Michael attempt to discipline Luke; **by spanking him!?!?**

While not necessarily illegal, among the prime complaints that companies practicing nepotism typically face is the obvious lack of fairness toward those who are not related to the decision maker. Perceived favoritism of a relative often creates dissatisfaction and reduced morale among workers. And, employees who are awarded and promoted solely because of their familial relationships are more likely to be under-qualified for the positions they are expected to fill, leading to an erosion of leadership skills and contributing to the demoralization of more deserving candidates. In sum, when

<http://blogs.hrhero.com/thatswhatsheaid/>

workplace nepotism is present, employees often show less enthusiasm, have a lesser incentive to diligently or proficiently perform their jobs, become embittered and less productive, decide to work elsewhere, or, most importantly, become so disgruntled that they end up filing a lawsuit under an alleged discrimination or hostile work environment theory.

As typically is the case, learning by Michael's failures to manage, Sabre would be well advised to institute a written anti-nepotism policy in its employee handbook. By way of example, many company employment policies prohibit the hiring of an employee's relatives altogether, whereas others merely prohibit the hiring of relatives where there is a direct or indirect reporting relationship between the two related individuals. With or without policies prohibiting nepotism, the danger of overt favoritism premised solely on the basis of family ties — much like Michael — eventually breeds resentment, misery, and discord.