

## Case Story: Family Values

During his job interview, Johnnie asked his prospective boss to describe the company's values. He was delighted to hear Lakshmi declare right off, "Family. Nothing is more important than family." After adopting two sons, Johnnie and his wife had two more kids biologically. Between dance class and sports practice and after-school tutoring, not to mention the mentoring he did with other kids, Johnnie was always on the go. While he was also a hard worker, family was definitely Johnnie's top priority, and he was happy to hear that he'd found a company where he could have the flexibility to balance work and family. He'd read that women leaders were better at creating healthy work environments.

Two months into the job, Johnnie was preparing to leave at 4:00, as he did every Tuesday and Thursday so he could drive the carpool. Tuesdays and Thursdays were long days, as he arrived around 7:00 am and ate lunch at his desk to accommodate his "early" departure. At five minutes til 4:00, his boss Lakshmi stopped by his office. She wanted to discuss the notes for the next morning's meeting "one more time" to make sure they were on the same page. Johnnie snuck a peek at the clock on the wall as Lakshmi chatted away – 4:00, 4:05, 4:07...

As the minutes ticked by, Johnnie mentally berated himself for letting his boss make him late again. And he kicked himself for falling for her "family values" story. Almost from his first day at work, he realized that Lakshmi was a workaholic. With only one child and a full-time nanny, Lakshmi had the luxury to work as late as she wanted. And she expected everyone else to give as much to the job. She had recently questioned the commitment of another staff person, the only other man of color in the office, because he'd taken funeral leave three times in the past two months.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Does a conflict of values exist?
2. If so, how would you frame the values conflict?
3. How might the values conflict be negotiated?
4. With whom (Johnnie or Lakshmi) do you identify – why?

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Lakshmi was impressed with this candidate – not only did Johnnie have a solid résumé, but also a winning personality. She loved how he talked about his kids. Anybody who could manage four kids and still produce results at work was highly organized and efficient and a great multi-tasker, exactly the kind of employee she needed, especially after all the drama she'd gone through with Becky. Lakshmi had been so supportive of Becky during her divorce, and then how did Becky show her appreciation? By giving two weeks notice and saying she needed to find a job closer to her daughter's daycare.

As Johnnie talked about his kids' various talents and activities, Lakshmi recalled how she and her two sisters would stay up late for their father to come home from work so they could tell him about their latest success – getting the lead in the school play or winning the debate competition. They loved making him proud; he worked so hard and made so many sacrifices to give them a good life. Hearing Johnnie talk about his kids reminded Lakshmi of her immigrant father, and she was eager to give another man of color an opportunity. She felt certain that Johnnie would be a great fit here.

Two months later, Lakshmi was not so sure. It seemed that Johnnie was always coming in late or leaving early. And he just passed up that special project she'd offered him. Sure it meant an intense couple of months of work, but it came with a generous bonus as well. Not only did she think he'd be perfect for it, she was also trying to help him out. He was always talking about how difficult it was to raise four kids. Here was his chance to make some extra money, and he turned it down. Didn't he notice how hard she worked, without any complaint, in order to provide the best for her family? Maybe he wasn't such a good fit after all.

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