

## **2023 Minerva – CIAC Case Study Competition**

### **Ruby’s Restaurants**

This case study and the company are fictitious. It focuses on psychological Health and Safety and its impact in the workplace. This scenario was written for use by Minerva Canada, in partnership with the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada (CIAC) and the Conference Board of Canada as part of the 2023 Minerva Canada- CIAC Case Study Competition. Thanks go out to Jan Chappel and Sean Tucker for their contributions with this case study.

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## Case Study

Ruby's is a small to medium size independently owned restaurant. It operates from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., serving breakfast, lunch, supper, and late-night meals. Ruby's is a popular restaurant in the local community, known for its quick service, good "everyday" food, and long opening hours. Ruby's hires approximately 25 people, most working part-time. About half of the staff are high school students in their first jobs. Ruby's owners take pride in helping young workers enter the workforce, assisting persons living with disabilities, as well as enabling older individuals who wish to remain working. Ruby's offers training to all employees on kitchen safety, food safety, robbery prevention, customer service, and other areas.

Ruby's often runs satisfaction surveys to track if they are meeting the needs of their customers. On average, 93% of the customers report being satisfied or very satisfied.

### Scenario

The owners of Ruby's, Roger and Fatima, have owned the restaurant for more than 37 years. They now consider themselves to be semi-retired, and leave the day-to-day management of the restaurant to the manager, Sydney. They are at the restaurant once a day but do not remain on-site all day. Last winter, Roger and Fatima decided to take an extended absence, and left the country for four months. They were available by phone and e-mail, and appointed Sydney to run all aspects of the restaurant.

When Roger and Fatima returned, they noticed that the staff members seemed quiet and reluctant to talk to both other staff and customers. It was taking longer for meals to be cooked and served. The most recent satisfaction survey only reported a 79% average of customers being satisfied or very satisfied.

They asked Sydney about the change. Sydney stated that nothing had changed during their absence. She stated that she had managed the way she always had. Sydney added that prices of food had increased and changes were required regarding serving portions, side dishes, and condiments. In terms of staff issues, a dress code was initiated. Several staff required disciplinary action due to their tendency to give food to the customers and not including the item on the bill.

Concerned, Roger and Fatima approached a long-time employee, Mary. Mary had known Roger and Fatima for 25 years and said that while she trusted them, she was reluctant to voice her concerns directly. She suggested instead that Roger and Fatima survey the staff and allow their comments to be anonymous.

Now more concerned, Roger and Fatima opted to hire an external consultant (you) to conduct interviews with current staff, as well as staff that had left the restaurant in the past 6 months. This route was taken due to the "family" atmosphere of the restaurant, and they wanted to make sure all staff felt safe to speak freely.

## The Results of the External Consultant

As the consultant, you interviewed all staff either in person or over the phone over a period of one week. Findings indicated that there was an issue with psychological health and safety, and that several themes were present. These issues were:

- changes in management style were described by staff as “random”, “not in the customer’s best interest”, and “not within the usual for Ruby’s.”
- interactions with the manager were described as “extreme yelling followed by being ignored” and “didn’t know what to expect next”?
- increase in incidents of aggression, harassment, and racial comments towards restaurant staff by some of the restaurant customers.
- changes were implemented without communication to all staff.
- shift scheduling, normally done 2 weeks in advance, was being completed 3 days before they were due to report to work.
- staff often worked extra hours to cover for fellow staff who were not able to make their shift due to last-minute scheduling.

Comments by staff included:

“Sydney changed everything on a whim, never had staff meetings to discuss these changes, so there were staff members who had no clue what was going on.”

“I didn’t want to say anything, but it felt like the responsibility was too much for Sydney to handle on her own. She seemed stressed all the time, and often yelled at the cooks and servers when we were in the back kitchen.”

“Sydney changed how the orders were placed. Only the server who was assigned to the table could enter it into the system. It might not seem like a big deal, but Caitlyn really struggled. We had to hide it from Sydney but Caitlyn asked for help. Caitlyn can remember everything said in a conversation, but she has trouble writing it down and reading the buttons on the computer. Her letters get mixed up. We used to be able to help her enter the order without being worried about what the manager would do.”

“Sydney would do nothing for me and many others when I mentioned the verbal abuse and racial slurs we have to take from some of our regular customers. She just told me to stay quiet and just do my job as they are paying customers who help feed my family.”

“I was told I was going to be fired about once a week. It didn’t matter what I did. Before we could bring the customers an extra bun or a small side of ketchup or mayonnaise for no charge - now my job is at risk if I do that. Customers then get angry with me when it appears on their bill. I was getting harassed by both management and customers.”

“She insulted me all the time and told me I was an embarrassment to look at. It was either my makeup, my earrings, or even my socks. Customers always make nice comments about my holiday-themed earrings and socks. I don’t get it.”

“I was told I could not wear my head scarf when serving customers, this was never an issue before.”

You, as the consultant, approached Sydney and asked her to share her information and respond to the findings. Initially, Sydney was belligerent and refused to comply. You encouraged Sydney to share her side of the events. Eventually, Sydney broke down and began to cry. She explained that her partner had been diagnosed with cancer just after Roger and Fatima left. She found that the stress of worrying about her partner had caused her to not be able to focus on the restaurant. She felt that she was always “running behind” and didn’t have time to call group meetings or communicate her decisions to all staff. She felt she just had to fix things and move on.

## Case Study Questions

As the consultant, prepare a report (maximum 5 pages) describing the impact of psychological health and safety and respecting equity, diversity, and inclusivity in the workplace. Describe the workplace hazards that are present in this scenario and how to address them. Include:

- The legislation that may apply
- The responsibilities the employers have in addressing these hazards
  - Describe elements of the policies and procedures that should be implemented to address harassment and bullying in the workplace
  - The reporting procedures that should be in place to report bullying and harassment
  - Steps the employer can take to help resolve or respond to the incidents
- Measures that can be taken to support the manager’s well-being
- Measures that can be taken to support the staff’s well-being
- Measures to increase awareness and acceptance of diversity in all forms, including addressing the racial comments from customers or third-party persons
- A roadmap on where Roger and Fatima need to prioritize their time over the next 3 months based on the above measures.