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2024 Minerva Case Study Competition

Triple C Store

This case study and the company are fictitious. It focuses on managing health and safety in small businesses including workplace violence. This scenario was written for use by Minerva Canada, in partnership with the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada (CIAC), Service Hospitality and the Conference Board of Canada as part of the 2024-25 Minerva Canada Case Study Competition. Thanks go out to Jan Chappel, Dr. Deborah McPhee, and Stephanie Shaw for their contributions.

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Background

Employers are responsible for the health and safety of their workers. This duty includes hazards that are specifically regulated and extends to those that may not be directly addressed in legislation. Employers must demonstrate that they have taken all of the appropriate steps required to identify and control hazards that may cause harm. This requirement may take the form of written health and safety policies, practices, and procedures. These policies, practices, and procedures help demonstrate and document that the employer identified hazards, and made the necessary changes to correct them. Employers must also provide workers with information and training necessary to enable them to work safely.

Introduction

Bonnie Tanner is an 18-year-old high school student living in Regina, Saskatchewan who has been working for 2 years at the Triple C - Certainly Convenient Corner store located near her home. She was hired by a friend of her parents at a neighbourhood barbeque. Michael Sampson was new to Regina at the time. He had come there a few years before to marry a woman he met through an on-line dating site.

Michael had owned an import business when he lived in Winnipeg. When he relocated on the outskirts of Regina, he sold that business and was excited to start a new project. One day, he and his wife were driving back from visiting friends at their farm. He saw a building on a corner of two highways outside Regina was for sale. He wondered if it would be a good location for a gas station and convenience store. One of the things he missed from the city was being able to easily pick up items from a store nearby.

After doing a lot of research about the viability of a small business in a remote location, he purchased the property. Michael contracted the work of installing the gas pumps, and renovating the building. He thought that it was a better customer experience if the cash desk was not the first thing people saw when they entered the building. At his preference, he asked the architect designer to place the desk at the back of the store. He also knew from his import business how important it was for the suppliers to advertise their products. He placed as many posters and stickers from the suppliers in the front windows as possible.

Scenario

The convenience store was popular and had steady sales during the day and into the evening. They often had trouble closing by 8 pm because people were rushing to the store to buy last minute items. Michael decided that since business was good, he could afford to pay the salaries of his staff for more hours to offer longer business hours. As such, the store is now open from 6 am to 12 am

As the business grew, Michael also wanted to expand their services to include hot snacks and beverages. Michael was also not able to be at the store for all of the opening hours, so he hired a manager. Dara Nguyen had experience managing a restaurant, making her experience with both hot food and customers ideal for this new role.

Bonnie and other workers (mostly students) liked that Michael and Dara were both friendly and easy to talk to. The staff received training on how to use the cash register at the beginning of their employment. However, it was a lonely job as the staff shifts rarely overlapped each other. The management felt that

while business was steady, one staff person could keep up with number of customers they had at one time, and counted on the kindness of the local population to wait if the store was busy. There was a log book that the staff was to use to leave notes to Michael, Dara, or other staff.

Bonnie would spend any downtime restocking the shelves, and cleaning the counter and floors with the same household cleaners they sold in the store. When she was finished, management didn't mind if she did any reading she had for her homework. When she had to work the late shift, she would sometimes bring her guitar and practice her chords. At high school, she had chosen a music elective, and was loving learning how to play an instrument.

At school, Bonnie also liked math and business. As she learned more in school, she became concerned about certain aspects of her job. Her mom worked at a local restaurant and had mentioned that she recently had training in violence prevention and what to do in an emergency. They talked about what training Bonnie had taken at work. Other than running the till, troubleshooting the gas pumps, and how to check photo identification when a person purchased cigarettes, Bonnie's safety training was minimal. She asked Michael and Dara about any policies or procedures the store may have to keep the workers safe.

Michael and Dara replied that they were located outside Regina in a small town "in the middle of nowhere". Bonnie was not to worry because the laws were written by "city folk" and things like violence didn't happen where they were located. In terms of cash, Michael picked it up every 4th day. In terms of working safely with cleaning products, they only use and sell household cleaners. Workers did not require training about the cleaning products to use for any products spilled or when cleaning the store, other than to use their common sense. Michael showed Bonnie the log book where there were only a few health and safety concerns noted. He looked at it when he came to pick up the cash and there were few comments written by employees. Dara mentioned that when she ran a restaurant in the city, she didn't think that having procedures on violence prevention were required by occupational health and safety laws.

Bonnie asked other staff if they had health or safety concerns when working alone late at night or early morning, or when cleaning. Some said that they did, but had received the same response from Michael and Dara. Some co-workers had written their concerns in the log book in the past but rarely did now unless a customer was injured while in the store or parking lot. Other than a few things, such as providing gloves to clean the bathroom and changing lightbulbs that had burnt out, minimal changes had occurred.

The Event

Bonnie was working alone in the evening and it was near midnight. She was looking forward to closing the store. It had been a long, busy day. There were issues with the debit and credit card reader, so there was a lot of cash in the drawer. They did not have a safe as most of the sales normally would have been electronically processed. She was concerned about having so much cash in the till but Dara said it would be okay until Michael picked up in the morning. Dara left the store at 7 pm.

After Dara left, Bonnie had issues with three customers when they were not able to make their purchases by credit card. They yelled at her, called her names, and threatened to harm her if she didn't

take their credit card. She tried asking them to leave, but they would not until another customer arrived and asked what was going on.

At 11:45 pm, Bonnie was mopping the floor behind the cashier counter at the back of the store. She could not see the three customers in the parking lot through all of the stickers and posters on the windows, and was not aware of their presence until they ran through the front door quickly. They had returned and were demanding all of the cash from the register.

Bonnie hesitated when they shouted their demands. She did not know what to do. Her hesitation angered the customers further, and before she knew it, one of the customers held out a gun. She looked around, but there was no way to hide or exit the area. The hostile customers were standing between her and the front door. She saw the side door to her right, but it was blocked with a stand of potato chips.

Next thing Bonnie knew, she was waking up in a hospital.

The customer had shot Bonnie in the spine, stolen the cash, filled their truck with gas, and left the store wide open. Bonnie was discovered by a passing motorist at 2 am who was familiar with the convenience store and knew that it should not be open at that time. The motorist called for police and ambulance.

While the motorist saved her life, Bonnie had no feeling in her legs and was unable to move them. The doctors were concerned about the location of the bullet. It had lodged in her spine, and it was too risky to surgically remove it. Four months after the incident, Bonnie had to accept that she would not be able to walk again.

Case Study Questions

As the investigator of this incident, prepare a report describing what measures should have been taken to keep the workers of this business safe. Describe the hazards that are present in this scenario, and how to address them. Include in your submission:

- The legislation that may apply.
- Whether the size of the business has an impact on their duty to comply with legislation.
- A list and discussion of all hazards associated with the operation of this convenience store.
- The responsibilities the store owner, manager and workers had in addressing these specific hazards.
- Other responsibilities the owner has at this workplace in terms of managing occupational health and safety hazard.
- What can medium to large size companies learn from this case study in effectively managing safety within their organization?