

What are the odds that the same company would have two consecutive bookkeepers steal significant amounts of money from them?

by Dave FEATHERLY

Would the odds change if each woman had accused their bosses - the same men - of sexual harassment and one of the bosses of porn addiction which disrupted the workplace?

There are some who believe that if a person is charged with a crime, they must have committed it. More believe that if an accused pleads guilty or "no contest," then they must be guilty.

But is that necessarily always the case?

Let's assume you are a woman who has moved from Cheyenne to Denver for a better paying job and your former boss and his wife ask you to return to your old job, working for their company again. Let's further assume that you are making significantly more money in Denver. But the owner whose companies you had worked for before moving to Denver tells you that you'll have a credit card which you can use to pay for your gas and make personal purchases to make up the loss in pay you'll suffer by coming back to work for them.

The pay is adequate, even if not as much as in Denver. And as long as your travel expenses are covered also, you accept.

Then your boss and his wife offer you a house to rent, even it means removing one of their mother's from the house to accommodate you so you move back to Cheyenne. And you rent the place.

So you come back to work for this company and even consider that couple to be your friends. You and your boyfriend do much with these employers - including attending family functions with each other. They attend your wedding when you and your boyfriend get married. You attend their daughter's graduation.

So, the subject of this story moved back to Cheyenne but continued to be paid what was called "mileage" because it truly was a wage differential and even after she was back in town, the owners knowingly

continued to pay her the extra money.

After she quit the company in September of 2004, she was accused of embezzling as much as \$31,000 from the company. She denied those accusations. The alleged misconduct stemmed from a credit card she (and others) used to purchase things - office supplies, motel rooms, postage, etc. - for the business and herself.

One owner (the second owner really tried to stay out of the fray - refusing to provide additional statements to the DA to make the case against this woman) applied for an American Express card in November of 2000 and the bookkeeper was listed to be a recipient of a card, along with the owner and two other guys in the company. The woman completed the application in her hand and the owner signed it.

When he (and his wife who was not active in the business on a daily basis) later accused her of stealing from his business, the accusations included charges which were alleged to have been for products for personal use of the woman, adding up to \$1,900 in 2001 and \$1,725 in 2002. This owner claimed that the bookkeeper was not to have been issued an AmEx card and all purchases she made for herself were unauthorized. The other owner stated that during her first stint with the company (during 2001 and 2002), those American Express bills were paid by check and the bookkeeper was not on the signature card - meaning one of the men knowingly signed the checks later claimed to be billings for personal purchases.

During her second stint with the company, the AmEx bills were paid by electronic banking transfers and she was accused of unauthorized transfers of funds to pay the bills. The owner claimed, under oath, that he knew nothing about the transfers. He also alleged that she made unauthorized charges of nearly \$28,000 with nearly 600 transactions during the last year and eight months of her employment. This during a time when the company was struggling financially and he didn't look at bank statements, bills or know what was going on in his own business?

He said that the unauthorized charges with an AmEx card came to his attention in December when the bills weren't paid and he was contacted. He also said that he had destroyed his AmEx card and "thought" others had done the same. But the two other men on the card continued to use theirs for motel rooms, etc.

In spite of supposedly not knowing about the activity on the AmEx card until December, the September 2004 bank statement (after she was gone) shows a \$500 transfer of funds to pay on the account.

A further accusation was that the woman had changed the mailing address on the AmEx account to go to her personal post office box or personal e-mail account. Both American Express and the woman have sworn that is not true - that she never changed the mailing address on the account and her boss(es) continued to see the statements as they arrived.

Bank statements during the period of 2004 when the woman was employed were sent to the same address as they were later in 2004 after she had left.

Fourteen charges of larceny by bailee were filed against the woman, by then in Las Vegas. She was charged but then Jon Forwood dismissed those charges. Later, she was re-charged with the same number of felony counts but more vague. With each charging, she had to return from Vegas, be booked and jailed. She has denied stealing any money from her employer and countercharges that these accusations were made only after she had threatened to bring sexual harassment charges against the men.

On one business trip, described on the owner's police report but lacking one important but salacious detail, the bookkeeper and this owner's wife, who was not daily or actively involved with the business operation, flew to Calgary and joined him in Montana. He had invited the employee as a "mini-vacation" at his cost and promised he'd rent a room for her.

But, when she got there, there was no separate room. She was expected to sleep in the same room with him and his wife. Kind of creepy, huh?

The other owner would hunker down behind a computer monitor in an open office and view porn endlessly. When she complained, she was told it would be dealt with but it never went away.

One day, the first owner pinned her against a file cabinet in a sexually aggressive manner. She had considered him and his wife to be friends. That was the beginning of the end.

While this behavior was going on, she shared details with her mother and an aunt. She had a sister who was going to go to school in Las Vegas and her mother encouraged her to leave these surroundings and move to Las Vegas. She quit and went to Las Vegas, where she found a very good job.

Then she were contacted by Cheyenne police and questioned about stealing money from the business. They said the owner had accused her of having an American Express card issued to herself without his permission or knowledge (even though he signed the application in 2000) and using that card to make many purchases for herself for her personal use. She never denied using the credit card and explained the reason for making those personal purchases - as a pay differential. The owner said he could not find the records related to that credit card activity - as though she had taken or destroyed them - even though a subsequent bookkeeper said those records were in the office several months later. Why would a company choose to pay an employee in this manner instead of through traditional payroll? That will be explained in the next issue. And more.

Then, the next bookkeeper was accused of similar wrongdoing. There's a strange pattern of behavior here - but on whose part? The employer or employees?

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