Meeting with Brandon Rogers

Thursday, Feb. 16, 2023

Approximately 4:00 p.m.

I went to the county manager’s office this afternoon at his request. The purpose was to discuss the open job positions at the library. I had interviewed several applicants and recommended two people for employment. Although I have been short-staffed since January 10, I have not been allowed to hire for the open positions.

**NOTE:** This meeting was very stressful and confrontational. I am attempting to convey the gist of the conversation, although the exact order may be different. In attendance also was Brooke Gaddy, Human Resources.

Prior to this meeting I had requested that we hire [Redacted] (who has 7 years of library experience and was a delight to interview) and [Redacted] (who has not worked in the U.S. in the 20 years she has been here but has a Master’s degree and extensive experience; while she did not work for an employer in the U.S., she has by no means been idle).

Although I had, along with my assistant manager, reviewed all the applications and chosen the ones we thought worthy of an interview, Brandon sent me his own list of the applicants *he* thought I should interview. Every one of them had already been weeded out for various reasons. So he asked me why I had not interviewed them, and I showed him their applications with these explanations:

[Redacted]: She is a college student and unable to work our shifts.

[Redacted]:: She does not meet our minimum requirements. Her work experience is sporadic; she has had 3 jobs in 2 years, the longest being 9 months. I am not sure this would help with our turnover rate.

[Redacted]:: She is not available. She has a full time job.

[Redacted]: She lacks work experience. She has had only one job -- fast food, one year.

[Redacted]:: No work experience. She has worked 3 jobs, none more than a month.

[Note from the Editor: Pike County Times has redacted the names of these individuals because the relationship between Rogers and Bunn is the focus here.]

When I told him that I had talked to [Redacted]: and she has a full time job and cannot work our hours, he asked, “Are you lying to me?” I responded, “Excuse me?” He repeated himself. I said again, “Excuse me?” and he repeated again, “Are you lying to me?” I finally said, “Are you lying to me?” I told him that I wasn’t trying to be insubordinate or rude, and I asked him if he could see how that question sounded condescending.

He wanted to talk about [Redacted]: He wanted to know why she seemed more qualified than these other candidates who had little or no work experience. I tried to explain her qualifications, but he did not seem receptive and is unwilling to hire her based on my and Helen’s reviews. He also said that he was embarrassed at how poorly [Redacted] was treated by me at the interview and would not be surprised if she never wanted to come to the library again. I asked him to clarify what he meant by that. He said that after the interview I showed [Redacted] a cart full of books and said they were a mess and asked her to clean them up and put them in order. (This was the shelving test. I told [Redacted] they were all mixed up and needed to be put in order. Then I went and got Helen; the shelving test is Helen’s area, and she came in and explained the process to [Redacted].) I told Brandon I was not rude to [Redacted], and he was free to call and ask her about it if he liked. He said he didn’t have to ask anybody; he was there. Then he complained that several times he came into my office and asked about going back in to talk to her some more; I explained that she was working on the shelving test and would let us know when she was finished. During our discussion today he indicated that he didn’t think the shelving test was necessary and he seemed very put out that we hadn’t gone back into the room while he was here, when he kept asking me about it. I was very confused about his reasoning on this.

Brandon insisted that before we hire anyone, I needed to interview more people. I agreed to set up appointments with other applicants, beginning with the ones he had chosen. He warned me not to try to sabotage the interviews by deliberately choosing poor candidates just to make him look bad. The interviews are being set for Monday, including [Redacted].

Brandon insisted that he was just trying to understand why our department had more turnover than any other department in the county. I assured him that I was concerned about that, also. I told him that this job requires a LOT of work and we do not pay accordingly; people can go to a number of fast food establishments and get paid more for doing less work. He then asked me to compare this job to \_\_\_, but I did not know who that person was. He told me what county office she works in. I responded that I did not know what her work load was or what her daily responsibilities included and could not make a judgment on that. He then asked me to compare the library assistant position to someone in the tax office, and I responded in the same manner. He finally asked me to compare this position to another position that I thought comparable, and I said Teacher. He asked for another, and I said Media Specialist (school librarian). But they get paid a lot more.

At one point in our discussion, he mentioned that if we were not a PINES library, the only difference would be that people wouldn’t be able to check books out of other libraries, no big deal. He said that the county would still support the library, though.

He told me that I did not have to answer to the library board, to the region, or to GPLS. When I told him that, yes, I do answer to the board and the region and GPLS, his response was, “No, you don’t. Can *they* fire you?” Several times during our conversation he repeated, “Can *they* fire you?” and “You’re just not getting this through your head.”

I mentioned several times to Brandon that I had not eaten lunch (it was after 5 p.m.) and I really needed to get back to the library.

Brandon tried getting into a discussion about “bonding.” He was trying, he said, to form some kind of “bond” with me, but that I just didn’t seem open to it. He said he was trying to have an open and honest conversation with me. So finally I told him that honestly, we will never bond. He asked me why I would say that, and I said, “Because I know you.”

Brandon presented me with an official write up for insubordination. His claim is that because I set up the interviews and he could not make them all, I was insubordinate. I reminded him that I did not have his schedule but tried, to the best of my ability, not to schedule during times when I knew he was at commissioners or department head meetings.

Although I repeatedly asked him if I could return to work so that I could get something to eat and get started on some of these interview requests, he insisted that we continue talking about bonding and trust. He told me that, couldn’t I see, he was just trying to help me be a better manager. He told me that most of the time people don’t leave a job because of the job, but because of the people. He mentioned my former assistant manager, [Redacted], who left a couple of years ago. He seemed to believe that she was a college student with no more experience that the current applicants. I explained that, no, she already had a degree and some work experience behind her before she came to our library, that she completed her Master’s degree while working for us, and that she did not want to leave but we could not offer competitive wages or room for advancement in her career. He very pointedly implied that he believes our turnover is due to management, and he was just trying to help me learn how to be a better manager.

Brandon said he was just trying to have an open and honest discussion with me and he needed some honest feedback from me. I finally told him that I could not do that at this time. He asked why, and I pointed to the write up and said that when I try doing what he asked of me, *this* (write up) is the result. I told him it was insulting and that I could not comment right now because it would be setting myself up for another write up.

I asked Brandon if I could take his write-up with me so that I could read what he had to say, digest it, and respond. He said yes, but that he would like it back tomorrow (Friday). I told him that I would not be in the office tomorrow, that I had a medical appointment, and that I had worked all last week, Saturday and Sunday, and all this week, and I was taking tomorrow off. He asked me if Friday was my regular day off. I said no, and repeated what I had just told him. He asked what my regular schedule was. I told him generally Monday through Friday and then Saturdays and sometimes Sundays as necessary.

I finally asked, several times, could I please go back to work and get something to eat, and he reluctantly allowed me to leave. That was approximately 5:30.