

Exit interview

We value your feedback on your work with UNHCR. Your contribution is very important, as it enables us to improve our working environment and shape future practices. Your responses will be treated confidentially and will only be shared under conditions that ensure your safety.

Supervisor: The Harasser

Primary reason for resignation: (X) Work climate

Comments: Since starting my position in, my relationship with my manager... has been unpredictable and marked by various difficulties....the guidance I received from my manager was minimal, as he has made it clear that he is not technically prepared to provide direction for the functions under my responsibility. When consulted on how to improve these conditions, my manager repeatedly stated at different times that his responsibilities prevented him from supervising my work.

To these conditions... were added instances of harassment. These included: shoving, shouting, canceling meetings intended to review my tasks, ignoring leave requests, making negative and mocking comments about my coworkers....

While sitting at his desk, my manager snatched my phone out of my hands; as he read my messages, he shoved me. I left the situation feeling very disoriented and confided in the only other person in the office....

On a Thursday in late .., my colleague ... and I were half an hour late returning from a lunch break during which we both ran personal errands: my manager called my colleague, shouting at him over the phone. I saw my colleague trembling after he hung up.

When we arrived at the office, my manager was waiting outside and yelled at both of us, loudly summoning us to a meeting later that afternoon.

I immediately wrote to the peer advisor as I was very frightened by my manager's reaction. She recommended that I try asking my manager to lower his voice and to speak to us with respect.

When we entered my manager's office, I took a seat near my manager's desk, which triggered him to shout directly in my face and throw a folder containing World Refugee Day documents at me.

Among other things, he threatened disciplinary action on our personnel records and resorted to name-calling, labeling us 'lazy' and 'clowns,' stating that we didn't realize we worked for him. He expressed feeling 'disappointed' about our work performance; however, despite my asking him several times, he refused to specify which tasks we were failing to fulfill or what exactly was expected of us.

Due to the shouting and the humiliation, I left that meeting in tears; however, I had to continue working to complete our numerous tasks.

Days after this incident of harassment, my manager revoked the performance evaluation objectives for my position that he had previously approved.

Given the deterioration of the relationship with my manager and the worsening of these problems, I decided to end my relationship with UNHCR and explore other career opportunities.

I choose to share all of this information because I am aware that the 'poor atmosphere' of the office is frequently mentioned; however, it is often difficult to put into words the specific situations that cause it. Personally, I am describing how an unequal, inconsistent, and at times disrespectful relationship with a person of higher rank and power could ultimately affect my working conditions and the performance of my entire team.

It is difficult not to make personal comments on these topics, as I have already stated that the relationship with my supervisor deteriorated progressively, and various incidents of harassment occurred. For example, my manager would make negative comments regarding the capabilities and personality traits of my colleagues in....

On one occasion, he mocked the fact that I had photos of my partner and my cat visible on the back and the screen of my phone. He regularly made jokes about the vehicle my former colleague drove. He even told the intern, that my colleague was a 'carepicha' [a vulgar Costa Rican insult] for resigning from his job at UNHCR. This language was highly unexpected and shocking, as I had never heard such terms used between the two of them.

In short, I believe that my manager took liberties due to his position of power, and many of these liberties can be described as harassing behaviors that interfered with maintaining a healthy relationship with his subordinates.

I believe the majority of UNHCR staff are deeply committed to providing quality care to refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons. They are often individuals who work under adverse conditions yet still achieve excellent results and remain motivated to work as a team, even though it is well known that several of them also face harassment and mistreatment from their supervisors. While I also witnessed shouting and derogatory comments occurring in other units, I prefer to focus on describing my own personal case.

Overall Experience

Please rate your overall experience working at UNHCR: Very Dissatisfied () Dissatisfied (X)
Neutral () Satisfied () Very Satisfied ()

Would you recommend UNHCR as a good place to work? Yes () No (X)

What suggestions do you have for us?

We have been informed in many ways that UNHCR is a vertical organization with military origins. This differentiation between ranks, and between national and international staff, creates unnecessary tensions that unfortunately affect the working conditions of national staff and those of lower rank.

I believe that a primary step toward dismantling these unfair vertical structures, which also discourage reports from those affected by psychological, physical, and sexual violence should be the implementation of a performance evaluation system for supervisors.