

Dealing with the 'Grays' of HR

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Human resources is not a simple job to understand. You have to deal with a lot of people issues, specifically the matter of hiring and firing people. However, the more important aspect that you have to contend with is dealing with everyday problems where a person's employment isn't on the line. The decisions you make here can have significant implications throughout the company. On the one hand, you may risk going against company policy. On the other, you could foster an environment of resentment. Handling personnel issues on a non-employment basis requires entering "gray areas" that you have to navigate as carefully as possible, and possessing adeptness in this field is an import tool employers look for in HR staff.

Needing a hand

The kinds of situations where you have to enter the gray areas of business often revolve around seemingly minor and innocuous matters. The survey firm Nobscot Corporation provides an example in the form of a relatively new employee who is seeking a letter of reference to join the Board of Directors of his son's school. Even though his supervisor was OK with the idea, company policy dictates that the [reference letters can only confirm employment](#) and nothing more.

"Accepting a request may alter company policy, angering some management."

There's a lot of risk involved that slices both ways. The company typically has that policy in place because it may feel obligated to write letters of reference to every employee who walks into HR otherwise. It may set a precedent that alters company policy, which can anger executives who put the directive in place. More importantly, by handing over that letter, you risk damaging the company's reputation. The staffer may be a stellar worker here, but who's to say he won't be a terrible direct

However, if you were to flat-out reject the employee's request, it can have ramifications on the company culture. This person can very well feel slighted and start gossiping that the company doesn't care for its employees. It also has a deep impact on HR itself, for it both gives way to the stereotype that the department is little more than a bunch of disciplinarians that care more about enforcing the rules than the people who deal with them.or at this school of his?

Case by case

So how do you handle this situation? HR blog TLNT advises that you approach it individually and get comfortable with at least the idea of [being flexible on policy](#). This doesn't mean you should play fast with the rules all the time. Not every person's request will be legitimate and appropriate, and some will try to take advantage of you. They'll either abuse your charity or make you jump through some ugly loopholes.

But you should still bend with the wind rather than hold firm and risk breaking. Weigh your options, and consider the employee asking the question and the weight of his or her request. You don't always have to say "yes" to the request, but you should avoid going by default to saying "no."

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