

CASE STUDY BY LARRY OLMSTEAD

Fuzzy Reception

Amanda, the operations manager at a social services non-profit, had growing concern about Bobbi, the organization's receptionist. Bobbi joined the agency five months earlier and had gotten off to a good start – she was personable, cheerful and seemingly efficient. But there had been a fall-off the past few weeks.

A few phone messages had been delivered late, including to Amanda. Then there was the time Bobbi told the Board Chair, Juliet Mello: "I'm going to place you on hold, Miss Meddle." Meddle was the water-cooler nickname given to the chair by some of the admin staff. Bobbi explained to Amanda that it was an inadvertent slip of the tongue.

A week ago, Amanda asked Bobbi to pull a file that Cassandra, the CEO, needed for an important presentation. Bobbi forgot, and so did Amanda – until the CEO came to the office an hour before the presentation looking for the information. Amanda was able to locate it herself, just in time, but felt the need to apologize profusely.

Now Amanda was looking at an email from Brian, one of the case workers. Brian was upset because a client had come the previous day for an appointment. Bobbi sent the client away, saying Brian was out sick. Actually, *Bryan*, another case worker, had taken a sick day. (The two were known around the office as the Brian Brothers, as they had adjoining cubicles and were good friends outside of work.)

"This was bad because I needed to see this client to sign her up for an important benefit and now we've missed the deadline," Brian stated in his email. "When I asked Bobbi about it, she said, 'Brian and Bryan, Cassandra and Amanda, how am I supposed to keep all these names straight?' Amanda – it's her *job* to keep it straight!"

And it's my job to deal with this, thought Amanda.

Fuzzy Reception: Discussion Questions

1. As Amanda moves to handle the situation, what is at stake? For her, for Bobbi, and for the agency, and any others?
2. What are Amanda's next steps? Assuming one of them is to communicate with Bobbi, how should she set that up?
3. Write the opening sentences of a performance conversation between Amanda and Bobbi.
4. What might be some possible reasons that explain Bobbi's performance issues?