



UPFRONT

When An Interview Goes Bad

Joline Gutierrez Krueger

Here's a job interview Sonia Trujillo would rather forget, and not because she didn't get the job. She walks into the offices of Alliance Drug Testing, a crumbling duplex with cracked windows and crinkled mini-blinds appropriately located off East Central, where people get their illicit kicks.

She will make a good personal assistant, she thinks, a job she says she found on one of those dot.com Web sites, a job in which she isn't quite sure what she will be personally assisting, but a job, and as a single mom she needs one.

The long-haired man who introduces himself as the owner (which, she learns later, he is not) takes her through a snaky passageway to an office in an adjacent three-story building. For 20 minutes, the questions are typical: What are your skills? Your last position? She asks about the dress code. Something with easy access, she hears him say. He didn't want to go through layers. "And I thought, what the heck did he just say?" she says. "I must have misunderstood." But what she says she hears next is so vulgar and so creepy that she knows this is not the kind of job she's after. "It just turned all sexual," she says. "I didn't know what to do. I froze. I didn't say anything. It was disgusting." Suffice it to say, she contends that this "boss" told her in explicit detail that her position at the company would be on her knees.

Trujillo remains in the office alone with him for 1½ hours, paralyzed and in fear that she will not be able to find her way out of the maze-like building, that if she moves or says anything, he will rape her.

"Finally, I got the nerve to tell him that my sister was outside, and I ran," she says.

She calls Albuquerque police, who she says told her that if he didn't touch her there's nothing they can or will do.

It's just a little thing.

"They just blew me off," she says.

But she persists, and, eventually, the man, Jayson Bice, is charged with petty misdemeanor assault for the Oct. 11, 2007, job interview.

Ten months and nine continuances later, they are scheduled for trial Wednesday before Metro Court Judge Cristina Jaramillo — that is, if defense attorney Christina Argyres doesn't have a conflicting case in a higher venue than Metro Court, the lowest in the judicial food chain.

Whenever it goes to trial, it will be a battle. "He said-she said" cases are hard to prove, and the most Bice, 39, will face if convicted is six months in jail.

Bice, meanwhile contends that Trujillo made up the whole thing. His boss, Brian Hughes, says he expects the evidence to show that there was no online want ad, that Trujillo — then five months away

from getting married — just showed up and began engaging in “a kind of flirty thing” with Bice and that she was in no hurry to leave.

Sure, what Bice is accused of saying might have been a bit vulgar, but, heck, that’s not criminal, Hughes says.

“I really can’t hold this against him, and he remains innocent until proven guilty,” Hughes said from his office in Plano, Texas. “I don’t see where she has a case against him.”

Hughes suggested that Bice, a trusted manager at the Albuquerque site for five years, is just aggressive, blunt, socially awkward, misunderstood.

Just in case, though, Bice has been put through sensitivity training and relieved of any power to hire employees.

Uh-huh.

It’s just a coincidence, then, that, in April 1998, Bice was accused of a similar incident, this one involving a 16-year-old “job applicant.”

According to court documents, Bice, then a 29-year-old manager at First Choice Community Health Care, placed a want ad for a personal assistant without the consent of his employers.

The girl claims the interview appeared to be going well. She thought she had the \$10-an-hour job sewn up.

But, then, she says, Bice told her she shouldn’t wear such a revealing shirt to a job interview and touched her breasts. She says he later told her she would have to “get down for the job” and stuck his pelvis 1½ feet from her face.

Bice was indicted on a charge of criminal sexual contact of a minor — a third-degree felony that could have netted him up to three years in prison.

Three months after the allegations surfaced, two more women told First Choice officials that Bice had made “inappropriate comments” during their job interviews.

Those allegations never resulted in criminal charges but did contribute to Bice’s termination from First Choice — a dismissal he sicced a lawyer on and had overturned. In the settlement, Bice was allowed to resign, have all notes on corrective actions expunged from his files and receive neutral references for future employers. He also received unemployment compensation and attorney fees.

The case involving the teenager went to trial in November 2000 — more than two years after the “job interview.”

The jury hung.

By then, too much time had passed for prosecutors to retry the case. Charges were dismissed.

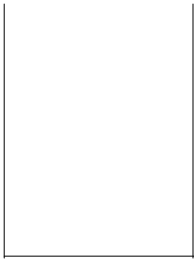
Trujillo hopes the same thing doesn’t happen in her case.

“The only reason I am doing this is I don’t want someone else going through this,” she says.

It’s a job she’s willing to do.

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BICE: Accusations aren't the first of their kind

