

Rachel Bader Confidential Investigation Report

Introduction

On Monday, November 14, 2022, Tom Clarke, Deputy Executive Director emailed me Rachel Bader's, Director of Air Service Development, resignation. In Ms. Bader's resignation she alleges a "hostile work environment in her last paragraph. As Human Resources takes all such issues seriously, an investigation into her claims was performed.

Summary of Allegations by Ms. Bader

1. Ms. Bader alleges that neither [REDACTED] nor [REDACTED], ever cultivated a working relationship with her. She also felt "that some see her skillset as being less than" referring to not having her C.M. (certified member) or a bachelor's degree. Ms. Bader also alleges that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] discouraged her from fulfilling the community outreach part of her job description.
2. Ms. Bader alleges that during the October 25, 2022, Commission Meeting when one of the commissioners questioned her about her report, [REDACTED] spoke up and clarified what she meant and that [REDACTED] embarrassed her by doing this and felt she was being demeaned. Ms. Bader also alleges that right after, during the post commission meeting, [REDACTED] made the comment that some of the information on the commissioner's memo she provided in the meeting was confusing and that's why the commissioner questioned her. She felt [REDACTED] attitude and demeanor showed a lack of compassion or concern towards her.
3. Ms. Bader alleges that as they ([REDACTED] and herself) were preparing for the LGA inaugural flight, [REDACTED] requested some information from her to give to a reporter. Ms. Bader alleges that [REDACTED] spoke aggressively towards her when she would not provide the information right away and informed her that [REDACTED] was going to HR (Human Resources) with a complaint. Ms. Bader claims that Carlos De La Torre, Director of Operations, overheard their conversation as well as individuals from the finance department. She stated that [REDACTED] actions were uncalled for, unprofessional, demeaning, and hostile.
4. Ms. Bader also alleges she had "earlier actions this year by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]" which she addressed in a meeting with [REDACTED] but made no comments as to what was said in her resignation letter. Ms. Bader concludes that a hostile work environment was created by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

Summary of Relevant Witness Interviews

1. [REDACTED] stated that Ms. Bader communicated that she felt at a disadvantage because she did not have a bachelor's degree and did not have her CM designation. [REDACTED] advised Ms. Bader that [REDACTED] did not have an issue with her not having either of these. [REDACTED] also advised Ms. Bader that she was welcome to get her C.M and a bachelor's when she felt the time was right

and the airport would pay 100% for the C.M. and had a tuition reimbursement policy that would help pay for the bachelor's degree. [REDACTED] referred Ms. Bader to HR for more information on the tuition reimbursement policy. [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] all stated that they never discouraged Ms. Bader from fulfilling the community outreach part of her job description. [REDACTED] stated that [REDACTED] advised Ms. Bader that Little Rock's market was different than other air service markets in that Little Rock has 1) had very little population growth in the past 20 years – which results in less new market travel support & demand, 2) Little Rock is 65-70% leisure, and 3) if the businesses in Little Rock do not wish to share their travel plans and market needs with us, we cannot force them to do so. [REDACTED] stated that in March 2022 [REDACTED] asked him to be Rachel's mentor and that [REDACTED] extensively tried to help her in many ways including becoming comfortable in preparing and giving group presentations and answering follow-up questions. Due to Covid, [REDACTED] did not resume doing external presentations until the summer of 2022. In June, [REDACTED] was asked to speak to the Rotary Club of Stuttgart. [REDACTED] asked Rachel to attend with [REDACTED] and to present regarding air service development, which she did. Rachel's photo was taken while presenting and was published in the *Stuttgart Daily Leader* newspaper. To [REDACTED] knowledge, Rachel has not pursued any recent speaking engagements.

2. [REDACTED] stated that during the October Commission meeting, Ms. Bader froze up when asked an air service question from Commissioner Hurst. [REDACTED] assisted Ms. Bader by clarifying the Commissioner's question and Ms. Bader was able to respond to the request. [REDACTED] stated that during the post Commission meeting, [REDACTED] reviewed the question and answer with staff and that [REDACTED] advised that they could tweak the Air Service Report to remove any confusion. [REDACTED] stated that at no time was [REDACTED] condescending to Ms. Bader or any staff member during the Commission meeting or post Commission meeting.
3. LGA inaugural flight issue. On November 3, [REDACTED] stated that he asked Rachel for public information – not confidential route information - in order to complete an interview with a reporter waiting at the airport. According to [REDACTED] Rachel would not provide [REDACTED] with the requested details or provide [REDACTED] with contact information to obtain the information from the air service development consultant. [REDACTED] stated that despite [REDACTED] numerous attempts to convince Rachel that the information is not proprietary and is routinely provided, she would not deviate from her position. According to [REDACTED], [REDACTED] told Rachel, at least, twice in person, and previously on the telephone within a 30-minute period that the reporter was waiting and working on a tight deadline. [REDACTED] said that not at any time did [REDACTED] raise [REDACTED] voice, demean her, or react in an aggressive way. [REDACTED] did say that [REDACTED] asked if [REDACTED] should attend the air service conferences to obtain information directly, since she was not sharing the information she had. At that point, [REDACTED] says Rachel had an outburst and stomped her feet and said that she knew how to do her job. Given she would not cooperate, [REDACTED] told Rachel that [REDACTED] would report this to HR. [REDACTED] had two meetings on November 3 with Tom and Bryan regarding the situation and was awaiting follow-up on [REDACTED] complaint. [REDACTED] stated that [REDACTED] no longer was comfortable working alone with Rachel. Tom told [REDACTED] that for future air service development needs that [REDACTED] could work directly with the air service development consultant. [REDACTED] believes Rachel's complaint against [REDACTED] to be retaliatory. Ms. Bader stated that Carlos De La Torre, Director, Operations, overheard their conversation as well as individuals from the finance department. Ms. Bader did not list who as far as the finance team overheard their conversation as requested.

I (HR) questioned Carlos and the whole finance team. They all stated that they did not hear any loud or hostile interactions between Ms. Bader and [REDACTED] that day or any other day.

4. [REDACTED], [REDACTED], stated that [REDACTED] and Rachel had a couple of issues that he stated were initiated by Ms. Bader. [REDACTED] stated that Ms. Bader would call or come by his office for discussions and eventually that would become uncomfortable for [REDACTED] so much that he went to Michael Smith, Manager, Human Resources, and Tom Clarke about officially filing something with HR about her. Instead, [REDACTED] decided to document everything and only interact with Rachel with a witness present. [REDACTED] stated Michael Smith agreed that was a good practice to begin. Rachel did tell me, Mark Williams, that [REDACTED] told her [REDACTED] would not meet with her unless there was a witness present. Rachel then told me she was "done with him" and "anything I need from his department I would get it from Tom Clarke."

Conclusion

Ms. Bader abruptly resigned on Monday, November 14, 2022, citing the October 25 Commission meeting and a November 3 interaction with an airport employee, which occurred 20 and 11 days earlier.

I reached out to Ms. Bader on November 22, 2022, and asked if I could call her and discuss her claims. Ms. Bader stated that she didn't feel a need to be interviewed since she provided her reasons in her resignation letter, but she would consider answering written questions. I subsequently sent her a list of questions which she did not answer.

The two employees Ms. Bader references in her complaint had each approached Human Resources following their interaction with Ms. Bader. Each of these employees feel that her naming them in her complaint is retaliation for their going to HR. During my tenure, no other employee has ever reported a hostile relationship with either [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Ms. Bader has had several confrontational interactions with different airport employees. Most resulted in the employees working out the issue, some involved discussions with her supervisor and the other employee, and some involved discussions with Human Resources. In her resignation letter Ms. Bader advises that [REDACTED]. It is evident that this likely occurred at the October 25 Commission meeting and follow-up discussions.

Ms. Bader's claim that the Executive staff did not support her development as Director of Air Service Development and restricted her community outreach efforts is not supported by the facts. Her position did experience unusual challenges due to the Covid pandemic, but that was beyond the airport's control. During that time both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] assigned other tasks to her that she performed well.

Based upon my review of Ms. Bader's claims, discussions with Ms. Bader, and interviews with the airport staff, I find no evidence of a hostile work environment.

Mark Williams
Director, Human Resources & Administration