

COLUMBIA MEDICAL CENTER AND THE COCAINE-ADDICTED PHARMACIST: UNJUST TERMINATION? (B)

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Case Objectives and Use

This case was based on actual organizational data from secondary sources; specifically a lawsuit in which the organization was involved. The objectives of Columbia Medical Center and the Cocaine-Addicted Pharmacist: Unjust Termination? (B) are as follows:

1. To elucidate the concept of the doctrine of employment at-will.
2. To explore the possible exceptions to the doctrine of employment at-will
3. To demonstrate that exceptions to the doctrine of employment at-will are subject to interpretation and will vary by state.
4. To explore the necessity of employee handbooks as a protective feature for organizations.
5. To encourage students to become knowledgeable about employee handbook components.

This case is designed for use in undergraduate level Human Resource Management classes.

Case Synopsis

Tom Zenor, a pharmacist for Columbia Medical Center, became addicted to cocaine. He checked himself into a rehabilitation center and, upon request, was placed on leave as allowed by the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Upon his return, the company decided to terminate his employment. Zenor was upset at the dismissal, which he saw as unjust. Columbia Medical Center, in an attempt to be proactive, sought to consider any legal recourse Zenor might attempt. Columbia's Human Resources manager, Carmen Estrada, attempted to construct evidence to defend the company against a potential unjust discharge case. The company operated in Texas, which was an "at-will" state. Nonetheless, Estrada had concerns which included whether Zenor could claim an exception to the Doctrine of Employment at-will, and if including a disclaimer in an employee handbook that employees are retained "at-will" provided adequate legal protection for the organization.

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