# Harry Potter and the Human Resources Nightmare

Analyzing the plethora of instances that call for HR intervention throughout the wizarding world, today I'm putting a magnifying glass on one specific HR nightmare.

Published July 31, 2018

2018 marks the 20 th publication anniversary of Harry Potter for this side of the pond, and today is both Harry and JK Rowling's birthdays. To celebrate, I thought it'd be fun to combine JK and HP's wizarding world with our magical world of HR. When reading or watching the series, anyone with a mind inclined toward HR can certainly envision the behind-the-scenes HR discussions that *would* occur in the hypothetical HR departments of the Ministry of Magic or Hogwarts in response to the series' events. However, rather than analyze the plethora of instances that call for HR intervention throughout the wizarding world, today I'm putting a magnifying glass on one specific HR nightmare. Dolores Umbridge. One of the most cringe-worthy, wicked characters of any series, Umbridge is an employee of the Ministry of Magic who takes up the positions of Defense Against the Dark Arts and "High Inquisitor" at Hogwarts, eventually manipulating her way to briefly occupy the position of Headmistress. Umbridge is an authoritative figure who holds unfair biases, abuses her power, and constantly creates and strictly enforces preposterous decrees. And, ironically, for somebody who loves her own rules, she is quite fond of breaking the rules of others, whether it be Ministry laws or standard HR practices. Her flaws are right there in her name: *Dolores* comes from the Latin word for pain and *Umbridge* is a modified spelling of "umbrage," meaning "offense, annoyance, displeasure." An example of a true self-fulfilling *prophecy*. So, let's dive in and unveil the HR violations of Dolores Umbridge. But remember, in this blog we're merging two different worlds: our world governed by HR, and the wizarding world that seemingly lacks it. So, for example, while our civil rights laws may not technically encompass species such as Merpeople or Giants, and the Americans with Disabilities Act ( ADA) doesn't necessarily protect those with Werewolfry, in this merged world we'll assume they do.

## Discrimination

In our world of HR and the workplace, we abide by laws and regulations enforced by the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) against discrimination. According to the EEOC, it is illegal to discriminate in every aspect of employment, including age, national origin, race, religion, and more. We also as a society try to abide by an inherent moral code of right and wrong. Dolores Umbridge lacks this fundamental moral code, of course, and she blatantly violates various codes of the EEOC both during her time at Hogwarts and the Ministry. From instilling anti-werewolf legislation making almost impossible for people like Remus Lupin to get a job to campaigning that Merpeople be

rounded up and tagged, to her pursuit of firing Hagrid for being a half-giant, to calling centaurs "half-breeds," Umbridge makes discrimination part of her personal brand. Later in her career, Umbridge becomes head of the Muggle-Born Registration Commission, seeking to arrest witches and wizards with Muggle ancestors for *stealing* their magical abilities from "pure-blood" wizards. Just to be clear, this is as crazy and impossible as it sounds.

## Toxic Culture

If you need your office environment and company culture to be toxified, call Dolores Jane Umbridge. Talk about a toxic employee, or toxic boss, altering the environment they work in. Umbridge creates a culture of both fear and favoritism within Hogwarts, steepening the divide between the houses. We frown upon this in HR! Umbridge's blatant favoritism of the Slytherin house and dislike of the three other houses, especially Harry's house of Gryffindor, is prominent from the start. Take her stance on Quidditch, for example – after banning the sport at Hogwarts, she allows only the Slytherin team to resume practice until Professor McGonagall intervenes. In HR terms, this is parallel to interdepartmental bias and favoritism. Then, of course, there is her "Inquisitorial Squad," a select group of Slytherin students whom she empowers to take away points from other students' houses for supposed rule-breaking. In HR, while we obviously do not want a culture of rule-breaking, we do not encourage this "snitching" culture. Leaders need to empower their subordinates fairly, giving equal opportunity for all perks and rewards. Why Slytherin, you ask? Because this was Umbridge's house during her time at Hogwarts – which makes sense, considering the house began with Salazar Slytherin, the prejudiced and discriminatory Hogwarts co-founder known to be only concerned with educating "pure-bloods."

## Performance Management

As "High Inquisitor" of Hogwarts, Umbridge takes it upon herself to determine the value of the professors currently working at Hogwarts, regardless of their tenure or of Dumbledore's judgment. With the Ministry behind her, she evaluates the professors by sitting in on their classes and assessing their teaching abilities. Now, these sorts of performance reviews or check-ins on teachers are a very normal thing, and I am not saying the reviews themselves should be frowned upon. However, the problem lies in the way in which Umbridge conducts them – and in the fact that she really is not qualified to conduct them in the first place. Throughout the evaluations of professors such as Divination Professor Trelawney, she constantly interrupts the class to ask intrusive and manipulative questions. Her sole purpose here is to evoke responses from the professors that either incriminate them or question their expertise. She asks impossible tasks of them, like when she asks Trelawney to "predict something" right on the spot. Umbridge's idea of performance reviews is a confrontational attack on the employee, rather than a professional conversation involving constructive feedback. Her lack of professionalism culminates in the messy, dramatic scene she causes when she publicly fires Trelawney in front of the whole school.

## Abuse of Power and People

Let's start with the dementors that Umbridge sets on Harry to keep him from broadcasting Voldemort's return. Umbridge secretly sends these dementors to attack Harry while he is out in the Dursleys' Muggle town. Their sudden appearance forces Harry to use magic to save himself and his cousin Dudley, which is illegal on two counts: using magic while underaged, and using magic in front of a Muggle. Of course, these events result in a disciplinary Ministry hearing for Harry – which is Umbridge's goal. During this hearing, Umbridge accuses Harry not only of lying about Voldemort's return but also of lying about the presence of dementors. This is an abuse of power in multiple ways, as Umbridge leverages her position to both put Harry in danger and to create a scenario in which she can get him expelled. Umbridge later uses her position to *physically* abuse Harry. During his frequent detentions, she requires him to use a magic pen that carves the message "I must not tell lies" into his hand. Yes, it becomes a permanent scar. Call HR. Umbridge also attempts to get information out of Harry first through a truth potion, and then through the "Unforgivable" (read: illegal) Cruciatus curse, a spell that physically tortures its recipient. When challenged on its legality, Umbridge responds that what the Minister of Magic doesn't know "cannot hurt him." So, Umbridge is essentially willing to break the law knowing she has the power to get away with it. HR, are you there? Dolores Umbridge: the HP HR nightmare. She discriminates, she manipulates, she abuses power, she abuses people, and she negatively affects all environments she's in. Her character is the perfect example of what not to do and who not to be in any environment, but particularly in the place where we spend most of our time: the workplace. She is a reminder to show respect to your employees and co-workers, help perpetuate an environment of equal opportunity for growth, and to remember ethics when faced with any decision. Well, happy birthday Harry. One of the biggest headaches you come across in your journey has been put on HR trial and deemed an HR nightmare. Feel free to print this out and mail a copy to her in Azkaban for some light reading.

---

This information is for educational purposes only, and not to provide specific legal advice. This may not reflect the most recent developments in the law and may not be applicable to a particular situation or jurisdiction.