



As shared by a Doeihu reader:

The following story happened to me many years ago, before I was introduced to Doeihu. It underscores how critical your emails are to prevent similar pitfalls. Thank you for all of the inspiration your emails provide.

At the time of this story, my direct manager was a non-Jewish man but the department I worked in consisted of mostly frum women. Most of my business dealings involved only my frum co-workers.

Many times over the years, my boss consulted with me on numerous projects. During these meetings, he often asked if the door could be closed, to which I consented, being that it was always unlocked and there was also a window.

One day, my manager called me to his office and offered to promote my position. After my initial surprise, an intense feeling of discomfort overtook me. Here I was - alone in a closed-door office with my boss, as he communicated his satisfaction with my work and offering me a promotion. I should have been excited with the news. But my neshama sensed that something was not right. I hastily responded that I would think it over and I dashed out of his office.

For days following the meeting, my mind spun with confusion, distress and worry. I could not even come up with the words to articulate what was bothering me. I davened, “Please Hashem, help me identify what You are trying to tell me and what direction You want me to take at this crossroad.” Was this an opportunity that I should not foolishly toss aside or was it a trap? I was in this job to enable my husband to remain in Kollel and all I wanted was to do Hashem’s will. I just didn’t know what it was. I davened and I knew Hashem would enlighten me.

With time, I realized that something about what was happening did not conform to the proper standards of tznius and kedusha. Besides the question of whether or not to accept the promotion, I realized that the meeting itself was also causing me intense discomfort.

I called our Rav to find out more about Hilchos Yichud in the workplace. I described our office setup, the tenure of my employment under my current manager, and some of the personal dynamics between the team members. His response left me dumbfounded, shocked and reeling in pain. “A manager with whom you’ve worked closely for a number of years

is considered Libo Gas Ba. Therefore, to rely on the heter of Pesach Pasuach, just as an unlocked office door, does not apply. Remaining secluded under such circumstances is a serious shaila of an issur d'Oraisa of yichud". The window was of no help since it was high up and passersby could not see the people inside the office.

Hashem Yerachem. I had been working this way for years. I always dressed b'tznius, tried to speak with refinement and act in the manner of a bas yisroel. And without even realizing it, I was violating serious issurim, possibly Isurei d'Oraisa.

I asked my Rav for detailed guidelines of exactly how far the door needs to be open, how the Halacha would differ if more than one woman was present, if additional men, Jewish or otherwise, were present, and if the meetings took place in a conference room rather than a private office. With incredible patience, the Rav went through each situation and handed me the exact guidelines that I needed to perform my job according to Halacha.

At the end of the conversation he mentioned to me that another important factor was always to be extremely careful with physical proximity, to ensure that a significant distance existed between myself and any other male co-worker. He personally had gotten involved in a tragic situation that resulted from a lack of caution in this area.

I hung up the phone with a mixture of pain, relief and exhilaration. Pain in the knowledge of what I had done over the past few years, relief in

having identified what was bothering me and what I needed to do about it and exhilaration in the intense gratitude that I felt toward Hakadosh Baruch Hu for giving me the intuition that something was wrong, the strength to take the step of calling my Rav despite my discomfort, and for making my Rav the Shaliach to deliver me from the terrible situation that I was in.

One mountain was behind me but another one was still to come. After having worked one way for so many years, I needed to talk to my boss and somehow communicate the new guidelines. I was also worried about the other frum women on the team and how they would take to my new guidelines. But after having experienced the siyata diShmaya on the first leg of my journey, I strengthened myself with tefillah and emuna, and I plunged ahead.

That night I sat down and wrote up an email for my co-workers. I explained the psak that I had received and that I was in no way imposing anything upon anyone else. The intention of the email was just to raise awareness regarding an issue that I was completely in the dark about and also to let them know that I would be talking to my boss about it. With trembling hands and a tefillah in my heart, I clicked the 'send' button late into the night.

The next day I worked from home. I was afraid of being caught in the nisayon before having had a chance to approach my boss. To my great relief, B'H the women responded to my email with appreciation and support. One after the next, they sent words of gratitude, thanking me for

bringing the issue to their awareness and for my willingness to take care of the communication with my boss.

I began the conversation with my boss telling him that my Rabbi had brought to my attention that after working with a particular manager for a significant number of years, the Jewish laws of seclusion become more stringent. I outlined for him exactly how far the door would need to be open in his office and the conference room, even if more women were present besides me. When I completed my explanation, my boss thanked me for giving him all the details and told me he would be happy to comply. I was thrilled.

Along with the halachic guidelines I received from my Rav, I added some of my own gedarim to help draw a clear line and ensure that proximity would not become an issue. I decided that if my boss wanted to go over a document on his computer screen, I would ask him to turn the screen around to face me or to hook it up to a projector in the conference room. No more screen sharing on one side of a desk. Whenever he, or any other male co-worker, needed to see something on my computer screen, I would move over so there would be a comfortable distance between us.

No more looking over the shoulder.

As I began to implement my new kabalos, the most remarkable transformation began to take place. An undeniable layer of respect began to develop. Not only did the discomfort of a few weeks ago fade away, but a beautiful, tangible reality of tznius began to overshadow every interaction. Each morning as I walked up the steps to my office, I asked

Hashem to protect me from any nisayon or michshal in tzinus and kedusha, and my heart filled with such gratitude for the new reality that I was privileged to be living.

Since the exchanges between my boss and me took so much courage and conviction, I shied away from any more pressure. I turned down the promotion and maintained my former position in the office.

Following that fateful conversation, my boss only asked once or twice if I could close the office door a bit more during a meeting. Each time I closed it in a way that I was still clearly visible in the doorway to every person passing by, and not once did my boss object. Every meeting had the conference room door a bit open, and if another team member closed it, my boss was the first to have it reopened. Hashem loves kedusha, and when we show Him that we really want to live our lives according to the holy laws of His precious Torah, He is there to help us each step of the way.

But my story does not end here. Not long after this occurred, my company closed our location and my team was converted to remote employment. Not only was the office-related nisayon resolved, but a while later, I was transferred to another department with an even better opportunity than the original promotion. It drove home a message of timeliness. I gave up a chance for promotion, but Hashem saved it for me and presented it again when the environment was appropriate.