

## Maree's Story – A Neurotic APS Director on a Power Trip

It is with great hesitancy that I write about my painful experience in the APS because the humiliation and insecurity I was made to feel by my former APS director was, in my view, so outrageous that I have tried to forget about the 6 months that I worked under her. But there are some things that still stick out in my mind, which I will tell below.

When I first started working as a contractor for my APS director, I thought she was the bee's knees. She came across as so charming, kind and intelligent. She had just started a couple of weeks before me. Little did I know that this was just a mask she was wearing until she, herself, felt secure in her job.

Her mind games started off with minor things. She would stand at her door and shout out my name in an angry tone and beckon me to enter her office, as if I had done something, and then when I would arrive in her office she would either say something neutral or positive – I found this very confusing! Other times, when I would try to make some contributions during group brainstorming sessions, she would say 'and who cares about your opinion?' One time she said this in front of a consultant, to which the consultant replied with 'well I actually think she's made a good point' to which my director responded with 'oh, I was just joking... she's just so cute... I can't help but tease the little thing'. When I wouldn't contribute to the sessions, she would then accuse me of not showing initiative and not thinking.

My director's mind games and rudeness later grew more strange and frequent. She would publicly humiliate me for saying completely innocuous things, trying to claim that I was being rude. For example, one time she was doing a Google search on the consultant's background in front of me and a colleague (she was trying to dig up some dirt on him because she didn't particularly like him). I said to her 'you should click on the Australia category to narrow the search'. She snapped back at me saying that I was extremely rude. I was so baffled that I couldn't say anything. My colleague asked 'what did she say?' to which my director replied 'she should have said "have you considered that it might be a better option to try clicking on the Australia category?"' I said to her 'wouldn't that actually be patronising?' to which she replied 'no' and glared at me for several awkward seconds.

She would frequently remind me that I was a contractor and she was the only one that had the power to extend my contract. As a result of this, I would agree to do her personal favours outside of work hours out of fear that if I said no, then she would not extend my contract. One time I had no work to do and since my director had told me she was busy and was not to be disturbed, I decided to go to my director's supervisor to ask for work. My director's supervisor took me to my director's office and asked my director to provide me with some work. My director asked me to sit down in her office, as she closed the door, and scolded me, saying that going above her head was a serious form of misconduct and that if she didn't like me so much she would have sacked me on the spot. Because I was new to the APS, I believed her and never asked anyone for work again.

The height of her rudeness was when she eventually started burping in my face and then asked me 'did you like that?' This was one of the most humiliating experiences in my life.

Eventually, the time came for me to apply for a permanent position with my director. I remember being really proud of my job application. My director called me in for the interview, sounding all pleasant. Little did I know that she was setting me up for an ambush! Throughout the whole interview she accused me of lying in my job application, saying that I never did anything of the things I claimed. She said the fact that my job application was different to the first version she saw proves that I was lying and that I needed integrity training. I was shocked! There was not one thing that was a lie in my job application. I had numerous documents to support the work that I claimed to have accomplished and I found it absolutely absurd that my director was suggesting that by updating a job application (after months of doing extra work experience) that this was proof of fabrication.

After the interview, my director apparently rushed to her supervisor as soon as possible to 'report me'. Fortunately, my director's supervisor was a decent woman and gave me the opportunity to exercise procedural fairness. After hearing my side of the story and seeing all of the documentary evidence that I had supporting my claims in my job application, she sincerely thanked me, expressed belief in my side of the story and refused to allow me to be sent to integrity training.

I never ended up getting the permanent position in the end. My neurotic director made sure of that!