

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1008 Where Was IBM When Mama Was Giving Advice?

At some point in the lives of most people, they get the advice to be careful what they put in writing. I got that memo early in life from my mom. Words said to one person vanish into thin air, but writing it down and sending it to someone means that you lose control of the message. That can be disastrous. I'm Jerry Roberts, here to tell you that there are folks at IBM whose mamas obviously never told them. I've got proof, next, on The Extra Point.

You certainly can get in trouble for saying the wrong thing, a hurtful statement, an accusation, a threat, or even running afoul of America's employment laws. Making verbal statements can get us in trouble.

However, just like my mom told me way back when, putting the same information in writing and delivering it becomes hard evidence. It's no longer your word against theirs, it's your denial against clear proof that you said what you said.

I'm not suggesting you lie about something you say, either, even if there's nothing in writing. My mom also told me to think before I speak, to say what I mean, and mean what I say. I have to admit I haven't always followed that piece of advice.

I saw something yesterday worth talking about. In a legal battle that began in 2018, former employees of IBM are suing the company after it fired tens of thousands of workers over 40 years old. They claimed IBM launched a deliberate campaign of age discrimination, which the company strongly denied.

Mama said not to put stuff in writing, however internal emails show IBM executives calling older workers "dinobabies", then making plans to make them "an extinct species." This is the language that was added to the case last Friday.

The workers presented this evidence to the court, saying IBM was out to "oust older employees from its workforce," then replace them with millennial workers.

There's more. One high-ranking IBM executive stated that the company had a "dated maternal workforce." "This is what must change," the email went on. "They (the over-40 workers) really don't understand social or engagement. Not digital natives. A real threat for us."

The attorney for the workers, who has argued employment cases against Google, Amazon, and Uber, described the emails as highly incriminating, reflecting a definite age bias in IBM's top ranks.

A company spokesman claimed IBM is clean, and has never engaged in systemic age discrimination. He said IBM did, in fact, fire the over-40 workers because of changing business conditions — not because of their age.

Wait a second. Didn't the emails say the over-40s don't understand social media or how to engage in today's business environment, and that was a threat? Is that what he meant by "changing business conditions"?

Then IBM came out with a prepared statement. It read: "Some language in emails between former IBM executives that has been reported is not consistent with the respect IBM has for its employees."

Did you catch the key word in that statement? You get a gold star if you say it was "former," as in *former IBM executives*.

Now, IBM is saying that, "Yeah, we *had* people who acted in a discriminatory manner against these folks, but they're gone now — and we love everybody." (Con't.)

Look, none of this is exactly new news. There are a lot of Millennials who will celebrate when the last of the Baby Boomers, and even those in Generation X, have disappeared from the workplace.

This is how it goes. One generation comes into power, as Millennials are doing now, and they'd prefer not to have to deal with others who are vocal about how they did things, and the way things ought to be.

A big "however", however...there are three lessons to be learned here.

1. Discrimination is against the law, even if you're a member of Big Tech, and you figure you can do anything you please. IBM had better start looking for coins in the corporate sofas, because they could lose this case and end up being hammered with a massive judgment.

2. With the "Great Resignation" and millions of younger workers walking away from the corporate landscape, IBM and others may end up needing some of those over-40s to keep things going.

3. Listen to mama. Be careful what you put in writing.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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