

"With You We Got a Twofer"

Challenging the Affirmative Action Hire Stereotype



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KEY TERMS

- ◆ stereotypes
- ◆ patriarchy
- ◆ discrimination
- ◆ gendered roles in the workplace

Kendra smiled when she saw the header "Party Time!" on an email from her team leader, Joe. He was an enthusiastic leader of their sales team in the tech division, and she knew her sales had contributed to the celebratory environment. When she was hired by the general sales manager, Ted, just a few weeks ago, he acknowledged that she would help to diversify their group—she was one of only two women and the only African-American in the tech sales division of their company. However, he had also reinforced how excited he was to have someone with her strengths and expertise in the job.

So it had taken her by surprise when one day after lunch, the other female tech salesperson, Jana, asked, "Did you hear that Joe has been referring to you as a 'twofer?'"

"What the heck does that mean?" asked Kendra.

"Well, he said it was because Ted could count you in two categories of diversity—both female and African-American," said Jana. "You know, the other person they brought in to interview for your job in tech sales was one of Joe's old college buddies. I'm sure he was disappointed he didn't have another good ole boy working in this place. Me personally, I'm glad you're here. I can't believe it took five years for them to hire another woman."

Kendra had decided not to let Jana's comments about Joe bother her. Since Ted had seemed to try to assure her that she was hired for her qualifications, she

had chosen to just let her actions speak and demonstrate that she was actually more than qualified to do her job. So far, she had done quite well. She had contributed quite a bit to the team already, including making a significant contribution to the increased sales this month.

Coming back from her recollections to the email, she noticed Joe had addressed the email to all team members: "Good job this month, everyone. We exceeded our quota by 22 percent!!! Let's celebrate by having a little party in the conference room this Friday afternoon. Kendra, would you organize everything? You can use the corporate credit card to buy some snacks and whatever else you think we'll need. Let's party hearty, everybody!"

Kendra felt her heart racing. While she had significant sales this month, Joe had not recognized her efforts in the email. Of course, everyone had some sales in the past month as well, and she did not want to be perceived as glory-hungry, especially in the first month. But she wondered, "Was Joe threatened by my productivity this month? And why does he want me to arrange the party?" Kendra mused. "Did he assume I'm good at planning social events because I'm a woman, or more specifically, because I'm a black woman?" She did not think she had done anything to give him or anyone else the impression that she was good at planning social events. Or, was there another explanation? Is this part of where the "twofer" comment came from? Especially if he was upset that his buddy did not get hired and thought of her as an "Affirmative Action hire," he may still be resentful toward her.

Maybe Joe singled her out because she was the newest employee? She realized she could analyze the situation all she wanted, but that would not help her decide what to do. She considered talking with Jana about it to see if she had ever experienced anything like it, but hesitated. "I want to be a team player," she thought. "I don't want my coworkers to think I'm a complaining black person, or a sassy black woman—those are all stereotypes I want to avoid. At the same time, I don't want to set a precedent of being the team's party organizer." The party was coming up and she had to decide what to do.