

CONFLICT WITHIN A POWER DIFFERENTIAL: A CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

Created by Leah Cooper, Ashley Hanson, and Pogi Sumangil for [PAHRTS](#)

The clock on her car reads 9:02 am as she circles the block one more time looking for street parking.

“Damn snow emergency!” she says out-loud to herself. Cars are piled nearly on top of each other and Kara adds her 1995 Toyota to the mix, bumping its bumpers between two other cars until she stops the engine. She sits there for a moment, dreading walking into the theater, knowing that her being a few minutes late will warrant some kind of comment from John. She sighs and makes her way into the theater offices.

“Hey Michele,” Kara says to her part-time box office / office managing / bookkeeping / (*what was her job title exactly?*) only other co-worker who is busy typing away at her computer already. Michele is twice Kara’s age, but they have a good working relationship.

“Good morning Kara,” she replies without turning her head. Kara understands... it’s a busy Monday morning - the show opens this weekend.

“Another weekend of partying, huh Kara? Putting on your sexy little black dress and driving the boys crazy. It must be great to be so young and carefree,” John said with a sly grin, “I remember back when I didn’t have any responsibilities but to myself - the good old days!”

“John,” Kara sighed, “I don’t drink, remember?” She doesn’t even address his second comment. John doesn’t know that Kara is in a long-term relationship with her girlfriend, Lisa - she decided her first month of working at THIS Theater Company that it would be better to keep her business and personal life separate.

“Sure you don’t,” John replied, “everyone your age drinks... Now, be a good girl and grab me a coffee, will you?”

As soon as John’s back was turned, Kara rolls her eyes and makes her way into the small kitchen to wash out the pot of coffee. On her way past Michele’s desk, Michele turns to her and gives her a “*that’s just John being John*” kind of look. As she starts the coffee pot, she thinks to herself, “*now, this is a task that was not in my job description.*”

She remembers how excited she was to find the posting of full-time Administrative Assistant for THIS Theater Company. The one she has been going to since she was young, the one that she kept returning to throughout college, the one whose work she has always admired. For the three years since she graduated, every part-time job, every internship, every steppingstone, she put into place to work towards getting a job at THIS Theater Company. She remembers watching John’s curtain speeches and wishing that she could meet him and convince him of why she should work for THIS Theater Company. Eight months ago, when she got the phone call that she got the job, it was one of the happiest days of her life!

She pours the brown water into a stained mug and makes her way back to John’s office. She sets down the coffee and starts to walk back to her desk.

“Oh, Kara,” John stops her in her tracks, “The draft promo blurb you sent me last week was no good. I need a rewrite, ASAP.”

“Oh, well I asked for comments by Friday - I think it already went to the graphic designer, but I’ll see what I can do - What would you like me to change?”

John let out a big, vocal sigh. “Nevermind,” he growled, “I’ll do it. You know what they say, you want something done right...” He turns back to his computer.

Kara starts to leave then turns back towards John...

Kara’s choices:

Confront John directly ([p2](#))

Go to Michele for advice ([p3](#))

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P2.

Confront John directly:

“John,” Kara announced, “It’s really difficult for me to know exactly what you want if you don’t take the time to talk me through it.”

John spins around in his chair. “Kara, I’m too busy to talk you through every little thing,” he replied, “it was really challenging to raise enough money for support staff. You need to take more initiative - what good is it if I need to rework everything you do.” As he turns back around in his chair, she hears him say “I guess they just don’t make ‘em like they used to.”

Kara’s blood starts to boil. Every part of her wants to yell “I QUIT!” and slam the door and leave THIS Theater Company forever. But, then she thinks about the show opening this weekend, how proud she is of the work that has gone into it, how happy the audience will be, how grateful she is to have a full time job (with some minor benefits) at THIS Theater Company, and bites her tongue. “*This is hopeless!*” she thinks, and she turns to leave John’s office.

Kara’s Choices:

Go to Michele for advice ([p3](#))

Write an email to the board about John’s behavior ([p4](#))

Grin and bear it ([p5](#))

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P3.

Go to Michele for advice:

Kara starts to open her mouth to say something to John, then thinks better of it. Why rile him up on what seems like a stressful morning. She walks to Michele' desk.

"Michele," she begins, "can I talk to you for a moment? You've worked here for a long time, how do you handle John's somewhat confusing and unrealistic... requests?"

Michele turns to her and says with a gentle smile, "You just can't take it personally," she explains in a motherly tone, "just let it roll off your back and do the best work you can."

"But, do you ever think that he is being unreasonable? Have you ever said anything to him or to the Board?" Kara replies.

"John does great work... artistically," Michele explains, "and he may not be the best at managing people, but he built THIS Theater Company from the ground up and there's a reason it is still around. You have to learn sooner or later - you can't teach an old dog, new tricks."

Michele turns back to her computer and starts typing again. Kara makes her way back to her desk...

Kara's Choices:

Write an email to the board about John's behavior ([p4](#))

Grin and bear it ([p5](#))

Resign from her position ([p6](#))

OR

Brainstorm other options for Kara ([p7](#))

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P4.

Write an email to the board about John's behavior

Kara sits heavily in her chair and decides she needs to do something about this. Talking to John directly seems like a dead-end, and Michele is too much a part of THIS Theater Company's culture to want it to change.

She opens up a new mail message and begins to type an email addressed to Bill, the Board President. She is nervous about doing this, since she has only met him a couple of times, and also knows that John and Bill are good friends, but she isn't sure where else to turn. She keeps it somewhat vague in writing and requests a meeting with Bill to talk about some concerns that she has about her working environment.

Just as she is about to hit send, John walks by her desk and says "Kara, I can't make it to today's production meeting for the next show, can you go instead and take notes for me?"

"Sure," Kara said, letting a little excitement into her voice - she loves production meetings! "I'd be happy to."

She turns back to her computer with her cursor hovering over the send button...

DISCUSS

- What do you think happens next?
- Will John's behavior change? Will Michele's? Will Kara's?
- What does this action mean for Kara's professional / personal wellbeing?
- What else comes up for you in this scenario?

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P5.

Grin and bear it

Kara sits heavily in her chair and starts working on a rewrite of her promo blurb. She will prove to John that she can get it right, with or without his help. She is partway through the new blurb when John walks by her desk and says “Kara, I can’t make it to today’s production meeting for the next show, can you go instead and take notes for me?”

“Sure,” Kara said, letting a little excitement into her voice - she loves production meetings! “I’d be happy to.”

DISCUSS

- What do you think happens next?
- Will John’s behavior change? Will Michele’s? Will Kara’s?
- What does this action mean for Kara’s professional / personal wellbeing?
- What else comes up for you in this scenario?

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P6.

Resign from her position

She has had enough! She turns around, walks right up to John and says “Do you know what, John? You are right, if you want something done, do it yourself. I QUIT!”

She grabs her bag on her way past her desk, with tears starting to well her eyes as she pushes the exit door open. She knows that she will never step foot in THIS Theater Company again.

As the door closes, John walks out and says to Michele “That’s too bad, I can’t make it to today’s production meeting for the next show, I was going to have Kara go for me... can you go instead and take notes for me?”

DISCUSS

- What do you think happens next?
- Will John’s behavior change? Will Michele’s? Will Kara’s?
- What does this action mean for Kara’s professional / personal wellbeing?
- What else comes up for you in this scenario?

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P7.

BRAINSTORM OTHER OPTIONS

None of the options presented work for you, please take the time to brainstorm other options for Kara in this situation.

Once you have brainstormed a few more options for Kara...

DISCUSS

- What do you think happens next?
- Will John's behavior change? Will Michele's? Will Kara's?
- What does this action mean for Kara's professional / personal wellbeing?
- What else comes up for you in this scenario?