

## But My Textbook Said This Would Work

*Topic:* Performance Appraisal

*Characters:* Alice, a new manager of Training and Development in a large bank  
Belinda, a teller-trainee who is black

Alice was hired last year as a first-line manager in the Training and Development department of the bank where she has worked part-time for several years while earning her bachelor's degree in business. Her main responsibility is to train bank tellers. The bank is very big on promotion from within, so most people start as tellers. The bank is also trying to hire (and eventually promote) more racial minorities, because there aren't a lot of minorities on the staff. In fact, the bank has been the target of several discrimination lawsuits the last few years and now wants to change its image of being a "racist" organization.

The bank's classroom facility has training work stations of tellers' equipment. When a trainee is hired, training takes an entire work week, and each trainee is either passed or failed at the end of the week. Each "class" of new trainees usually consists of about a dozen people.

Alice has been using written and audiovisual materials developed by the bank. Also, she took a class in Training while a student. Consequently, she knows that adults learn more effectively when they are given positive reinforcement (for doing something correctly) and constructive criticism (for making a mistake). So far, this has worked pretty well. Today, however, three days into a session, she has been hit with a potentially serious complaint.

Belinda is a black teller-trainee. She seems to have a very hard time learning some of the material, much more so than some of her counterparts. All of the other trainees happen to be white. Because much of the training involves objective quizzes and hands-on computer work, Alice knows that Belinda really did make a lot of mistakes. Alice had been careful to point out Belinda's many mistakes and explain how to correct them. Belinda, however, does not appreciate the constructive criticism. She insists that Alice is treating her differently because of her race and wants to file a formal complaint unless Alice lets up on her: "You're picking on me because I'm black. I don't see you picking on the white girls. I'd better pass this training, or your company is in trouble."

*Author:* Sue Margaret Norton, Assistant Professor of Business, University of Wisconsin-Parkside