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TOM TOM ENGLISH



VOCABULARY

Reprimand =

A formal expression of
disapproval

Ridicule =

To subject someone to
contemptuous or
dismissive language or
behaviour

Testimony =

A formal written or
spoken statement,
especially in court;
evidence or proof of
something

x-figure salary =

Expression for giving a
rough indication of the
size of a salary. An 8-
figure salary is at least
10,000,000 yen

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. Why do you think the number of cases of power harassment is increasing?
2. Do you think Mr. Tanaka's behaviour was bad? Did he deserve to be fired? Why? Why not?
3. Do you think Mr. Tanaka's behaviour was appropriate in the past? Why? Why not?
4. Have you ever experienced, or seen, power harassment? What happened?
5. Do you believe Mr. Tanaka's explanation about the Shichimi incident? If so, was his behaviour appropriate? Why? If you think it was inappropriate, how do you think he should have handled that situation?
6. Based on the evidence in this article, do you think Mr. Tanaka will win his case? Why? Why not?

VOCABULARY

Let off steam =

To do some action to
release pressure or
stress

Railroad =

To rush, or coerce
someone into doing
something that they
don't want to do

Emulate =

To meet or surpass some
positive behaviour
through imitation

Draconian =

Excessively harsh or
severe (named after an
ancient Greek legislator
who made very strict
punishments for minor
offences)

Last year in Japan there were 66,000 reported cases of “Power harassment” - behavior by managers that can be considered abusive to their staff such as publicly **reprimanding** or even **ridiculing** them, or forcing them to do menial or humiliating chores outside of their job description. This is the case of one manager, as reported by Sankei Shimbun. The man, whom we’ll call Tanaka, was an executive for a major insurance company. In his mid-40s, he was promoted to regional manager - the youngest in the company’s history. Earning an **eight-figure salary** and in a great position, life was good. At least until he was called into the headquarters. Upon arriving, he was met by three “compliance officials”. They handed him a paper titled “Regarding Accusations of Power Harassment.” Up to then he didn’t know what was going on.

“Respond to the questions and then read out loud please,” the officials requested. Tanaka glanced down the list of dozens of complaints, none of which looked like anything he recalled doing. Underneath each “victim” **testimony** was a space for him to handwrite his response.

“**Reprimanding** subordinates in public without using a separate room”, read the first complaint. Tanaka jotted something down and then read it aloud: “I never **reprimand** my people, I only give them advice,” he recited.

There was a long list of comments that Tanaka was accused of saying to his staff such as “you should go back to elementary school,” and “die, I will kill you” He denied saying such things. The next accusation read: “Kicked a locker while shouting at an employee”. “I wasn’t shouting at anyone. I was was **reprimanded** by my bosses and I

was just **letting off some steam.**”, he responded. The list went on—“Called a subordinate with thinning hair ‘bald old man,’ told him to ‘get a rug,’ and left doodles he drew of a popular bald cartoon character on the man’s chair.” Tanaka angrily replied, “I’m balding too. We always joke like that - it’s a bonding thing”

Perhaps the climax of the list was: “Sprinkled shichimi and squirted mayonnaise on an employee’s head while drinking together, then began mocking him” Tanaka: “I did it to stop sexual harassment. The man was drunk and tried to touch his female colleague’s breasts. I put the stuff on his head to diffuse the situation.”

Tanaka submitted his responses to the three men. However, he was told “the victims’ **testimonies** prove this is power harassment.” Completely confused by the meeting, Tanaka returned home. Eight days later he received a phone call saying that “his presence in the office was determined to be disruptive to the work environment.” The next day he received notice of his termination. However, convinced that he was unfairly **railroaded** out of his job, he is currently suing his company, not for a lot of money, but simply to clear his name.

Experts say Tanaka’s case is not unusual. Most power harassers are unaware of what they are doing. Many are merely **emulating** their bosses, from a time when violent outbursts and **draconian** management were signs of passion and authority. Some may have risen through the ranks so quickly that they failed to see how their words and actions have a more menacing tone when coming from a superior. There are a lot of potential reasons, but perhaps preventative measures are more important than simply