Case Study

Beth just got turned down by Carlos, one of her subordinates. She had asked Carlos to plan on working a couple of overtime hours this coming Tuesday and Wednesday evenings to complete special jobs that needed to be done before the Holidays. Beth's nose was a bit bent out of joint.

She wondered if Carlos did not yield to her because she was too kind when she asked. Or, because she was a woman. Or, because Carlos was envious that she got the managers position for which both had competed. Carlos was uncomfortable with the interaction, too.

If Carlos had no clue that Beth was upset, would this interaction cause a rift in their working relationship? Anytime there is an exchange and disharmony is felt within any one of the participants, it may result in a change in the working relationship. Next time Beth approaches Carlos she may change her approach. She may be more abrupt, leading Carlos to wonder if Beth got up on the wrong side of the bed. Carlos may then, in turn, react negatively to Beth, thus escalating the disharmony in their relationship. Individuals sometimes encounter stress and negative emotion out of an interaction—whether or not they ever confront each other about their feelings.

This communication between Carlos and Beth may have caused feelings of dislike, antagonism, alienation, and disregard.

Wherever choices exist there is potential for disagreement. Such differences, when handled properly, can result in richer, more effective, creative solutions and interaction. But alas, it is difficult to consistently turn differences into opportunities.

How could this exchange have been handled differently?