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## Experiences of Corporate Nepotism | Aparna Sharma | Senior HR Professional & Certified Corporate Director | Editor's Collection

### What is Nepotism?

Nepotism is the practice of favoritism toward friends or family members.

In the workplace, nepotism damages employee morale. It can create rifts and breed resentment, penalize hard-working team members, and unfairly advantage the undeserving and unqualified.



### So, Nepotism is illegal, right?

Sadly, no. There's nothing that legally prohibits nepotism.

However, in some of the upper echelons of public work, family members cannot be hired for certain positions.

In the private sector, there's no legal recourse for nepotistic practices unless it crosses into discriminatory practices.

## **Examples of Nepotism in the Workplace**

### **The Nephew Intern**

You come into work one day to find a young man still in his salad days—perhaps a college freshman or even a recent high school graduate. You're told to find him some work to do, 20 hours of it every week, he'll be here for the summer, and oh, by the way, it's the CEO's nephew, or cousin, or surprise younger brother, or the son of a board member. What are his skills? Nothing yet, he's a C student at best who doesn't participate in class, but he's on the CEO track for sure. We just know it.

### **The Teacher's Pet**

There's a company brown-noser, always hanging around the boss's office, doing personal favors, offering little gifts, getting the best assignments, or taking credit for other people's work. They've found a way to sucker onto the head honchos and claw their way to the top—despite never really contributing anything at all.

### **Cronyism**

One morning you're introduced to the new Chief Synergy Officer. He's an old friend of the boss and just left a senior role at another company under not-so-favorable terms (you have to turn off Google safe-search to even find the news coverage). The boss offers him a senior role for which he's not at all qualified. Now he's sitting pretty in a corner office in a newly created role which no one ever heard about.

### **Back-scratching**



You manage a client account and are regularly told to give them preferential treatment, maybe even fudge numbers occasionally. On a call one day, you find out the woman who leads this company is your CEO's girlfriend. Busted. At least now you can politely ask about their recent trip to Aspen on your next weekly reporting call.

There are so many real life examples that I know of either first hand or through friends...

Here are a few –

1. My friend, a writer for a leading newspaper, described a typical workplace scenario involving nepotism at a newspaper for which she used to work. A young, inexperienced colleague was hired in her department, and she actually spent several months helping him adjust to his role at the paper. Soon after, the individual was promoted to become her boss. Only then did she discover that he was actually an editor's nephew. Given the nephew's effortless and unwarranted promotion, she ended up leaving the paper.

2. Another friend, was hired in a back office of an MNC bank in a support role. She was extremely competent, set up a team in both locations she was responsible for. In the past, it was hard for them to hire talent for this team as well as retain them. Her stakeholders in both locations were extremely happy with the support & interactions. This did not go down well with her bosses who had failed to do so for several years in the past. They ganged up against her, used every possible opportunity to put her down, started harassing her for every little thing whether it was part of her function or not, This harassment & sidelining went on for over a year. When she finally escalated & spoke to the overall in-charge, she was told that "she was barking up the wrong tree". All of them were hand in glove, since her smooth & successful handling of both locations reflected

badly on them among their peers & subordinates. She was finally pushed against the wall & finally had to leave. They even threatened to spoil her references if she did not resign voluntarily.

3. Another instance is of a close professional confidante, who was harassed by a few powerful senior members of the Country Management Team including the CEO who were with the company for a very long time. My friend was much younger, came from a different industry & did not bow down to any unreasonable push backs or insults that she was subjected to. She did her job with utmost integrity, commitment & was authentic in all interactions. This group of people left no stone unturned to malign her, trying to prove she was incompetent & ensured that she got little or no support from her team who were close to this group. While she gave it a tough fight, however after a few year fell prey to extreme groupism, high handedness of these senior powerful executives.

### **Final word- When they go low, you go high**

Watching nepotism play out is completely frustrating, so remember that you're only in charge of yourself and the way you react. For example, gossiping or bad-mouthing the offender is not going to improve the situation, it's going to single you out in a bad way.

Just remember to go high when they go low.



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