

**SEXUAL HARASSEMENT AT CITY HALL
A PERSONAL STATEMENT FROM CEVERO GONZALEZ**

When I agreed to work for Sam in July of 2008, as his Executive Assistant, he was still a City Commissioner but expected to win election to Mayor of the City of Portland. Truth be told, I initially turned down the job because I was worried the position might consume too much of my time and energy. However, when Sam later personally called and asked me to reconsider my decision, showering me with kind words and praise and offering promises of advancement, I agreed to join his team.

The job started simply enough.

My first assignment was to prepare a travel itinerary and briefing book for an upcoming trade mission. While working to complete the task, Sam called me into his office to ask for a favor; he wanted me to prepare a secret profile to be added to his briefing book that included locations of gay clubs, bathhouses and gay bars that he could visit while traveling abroad.

I thought the request was odd but I prepared the secret profile as directed and included a red unmarked folder in the back of Sam's briefing book prior to his departure. I actually didn't give anymore thought to the "favor" until a few days later, when I picked Sam up from the airport.

One of my duties included transporting Sam to and from the airport for work-related travel. In preparation for this task, I was given instructions regarding what I should say and do upon his arrival. For example, I was only allowed to welcome Sam back to Portland with a quick greeting. Then, I was to ask if he wanted to stop for a beverage or a bite to eat. With those pleasantries out of the way I was instructed to remain silent until spoken to in order to allow Sam time to re-acclimate after his long flight. Additionally, the temperature in my vehicle always had to be in the low-60's, the radio had to be off, and I wasn't allowed to remind Sam to put on his seatbelt.

When I arrived at the airport, Sam loaded his luggage into my vehicle and then entered on the passenger side. As instructed, I offered a quick hello but otherwise remained quiet until spoken to. Sam began our drive to his home by making a few calls on his cell phone then, after hanging up, he started asking me a series of strange questions.

His first inquiry? "When was the last time you got laid?"

When I demurred, he persisted: "Come on. What type of guys do you like? Do you like 'em cut or uncut?" Asking me the last question while looking directly at my crotch. I tried changing the subject to work-related topics but Sam would have none of it. "Tell me. Are you a top or a bottom?" Embarrassed by his questioning, and a bit taken aback, I responded as generally as possible; fearful of making him angry but also unwilling to divulge personal information about my private life to my boss.

His response to my nondescript disclosures? "Don't be so uptight!" Saying this last sentence as he lightly grabbed at his crotch.

Following his impromptu interrogation, Sam then proceeded to share two things: (1) how helpful the secret profile I provided had been, with a request that I include such profiles in all future travel itineraries, and (2) details of his sexual exploits that he alleged resulted from the secret information.

When I returned to the office later the same day I informed my immediate supervisor, Tom Miller, then-Chief of Staff, of the encounter with Sam. Unfortunately, instead of offering to address my unease or in some way intervene on my behalf, I was told the behavior I was reporting was just part of Sam's quirky personality. "That's just the way he is," Tom offered. When I insisted and explained I was not comfortable with Sam's innuendos, gestures, and improper conversations, I was then told these behaviors were simply something I had to tolerate or, if I preferred, I could find another place to work.

I rationalized my decision to stay by noting some obvious facts: I wasn't a kid anymore. I was a man in his mid-forties with health issues, helping to support an ailing parent, while also working to rebuild his life. The last thing I needed was to find myself unemployed and possibly blacklisted by the incoming Mayor of Portland.

The Problems Continued

Things were never normal while working for Sam. In fact, everyday brought its own set of unexpected crises as staff worked to balance a very unpredictable boss. That being said, the unpredictability didn't stop once the office closed for business.

There were, for example, several late-night occasions when I was called upon to retrieve Sam from a bar, club or venue because he was unable to drive himself home or unwilling to leave the premises. Since this behavior had by now become routine, I developed a standard protocol to help address and resolve the situation, including utilizing the following steps:

- Review the next day's calendar on the off-chance I would need to make a last minute adjustment or cancellation.
- Determine Sam's physical state. Sam often believed he could drive himself home regardless of how many alcoholic beverages he'd consumed. This was always discouraged so every attempt was made to take or hide the keys to the city-issued vehicle.
- Identify any patrons in the establishment that Sam may have spoken with during the evening in order to determine if any commitments or promises had been made, either personal or professional, including determining whether Sam owed any patrons money for unpaid food or beverages.
- Settle the tab. Sam would often forget his wallet when out-and-about, so it was my job to pay the tab and seek reimbursement at a later date.
- Negotiate a departure time with Sam to allow him the opportunity to wrap-up his conversations. For example, as a high-profile elected official there were often individuals and groups of people who introduced themselves to Sam in hopes of sharing an opinion or arranging an additional meeting to discuss a policy issue or neighborhood concern.
- Discourage Sam from inviting others to join us on our ride to his residence.

This last item was always difficult to navigate.

On this particular evening, although again not unlike others, Sam had met someone he wanted to invite home. Regrettably, the young man had no means of transportation so Sam recommended he ride as a passenger in my vehicle. I refused, which I would not have normally done. However, I was concerned about the optics of serving as chauffeur to an elected official and his new companion. Instead, I suggested Sam say goodnight to his acquaintance so we could go about our business and avoid any unnecessary complications.

Sam's reply? "Just because you're not getting laid doesn't mean I can't. You never let me have any fun!"

To which I could only reply: "It's not my job to let you have fun, especially if it means you miss or cancel an event tomorrow." Then silence. Thankfully, Sam's acquaintance took note of the tension, smiled and waved, and just walked away.

I looked at my phone. It was now 1:30 a.m. and both of us had a very long day ahead. I was grateful that things had calmed down, if just for the moment, until Sam got a second wind.

"Let's go to Silverado!" he demanded - a local gay strip club. "I'll buy you a drink and a private dance with a hot stripper. Maybe he can give you a bl*w job so you'll lighten up!" Had I just been harassed and demeaned because I was trying to protect Sam from unwanted scrutiny? Nonetheless, I respectfully declined the offer and again insisted that it was time to drive him home.

When we approached my vehicle I was surprised to see the acquaintance waiting nearby. Sam, ignoring our previous conversation, proceeded to once again invite the young man to ride with us to his home. In turn, I continued to refuse to make the accommodation. Sam then forced me to accept a compromise; the acquaintance would take a taxi and follow us home.

No End in Sight

The situations described above are merely two examples of the types of working conditions I was forced to endure while working for Sam. However, please be aware that there were always other tasks I was required to complete, either at the direction of Sam himself or by his then-Chief of Staff, which included but were not limited to the following:

- Cleaning the mayor's house while on city payroll.
- Paying Sam's personal obligations and waiting for him to reimburse me. This included paying his tab at bars, restaurants and coffee shops around the city while often apologizing on behalf of Sam for his forgetfulness. I was also required to reimburse staff for money they had directly loaned to Sam.
- Using my personal credit card to secure lodging for the mayor when he traveled out-of-office on city-related business, including purchasing food and alcohol.
- Laundering, pressing and mending the mayor's clothes, including instances when he would come into my office, take off his pants and ask that I make repairs to a seam or button while he waited, often "accidentally" exposing his genitals.
- Picking up prescriptions and dry cleaning while on city payroll.

- Assist in the destruction of compromising city records. During one of Sam's many trips abroad he met and spent the night with an individual who, the following day, contacted Sam via work email to thank him for a wonderful evening. The individual then implied he might disclose their encounter and encouraged Sam to contact him again to discuss the issue further. Concerned that this communication was a veiled threat, I contacted my then-supervisor, Jennifer Yocom, who was serving as Deputy Chief of Staff, and asked her how best to proceed. To my disbelief, Jennifer thought it best to simply delete the email. When I refused Jennifer asked me to turn away from the computer monitor and keyboard so she herself could complete the required task.
- Tracking the mayor's whereabouts. Sam would sometimes "go missing" after he completed his participation in a public event or political gathering. Given his hectic schedule, and his reputation for running late to meetings, I was asked to place a track on Sam's smartphone so I could better access his location. For example, when Sam was late or did not attend a pre-scheduled event or gathering, I was required to secure his location - using the Find My Phone app - then drive in my personal vehicle to said location and physically walk the perimeter until he or his official city vehicle could be located.

No Time for Apologies

On my final day working for Sam, I thought perhaps he would apologize for his inappropriate and harassing behavior. After all, I'd just devoted the last four years, five months and ten days of my life to his care and feeding; waking him up, getting him dressed, sobering him up, keeping his secrets, and even paying his bills.

Unfortunately, Sam said nothing to me on that final day. He offered no apology, no explanation or excuse for his behavior. Not surprisingly, I didn't even get a thank you for my years of service; although Sam did relay to me via a fellow employee that I was required to work until 5:00 p.m. - while he was out celebrating the completion of his mayoral tenure.

Trying to Avoid a Run-In

A few weeks after Sam left office I received a phone call and then several text messages from him asking to meet. I never returned his call or answered his texts. I just wanted to put the entire experience of working for him behind me. Several months followed and I still found myself actively trying to avoid social situations where I might possibly run into Sam. Then it happened; our paths crossed at a party of a mutual friend.

When I entered the home where the party was being held, I noticed Sam immediately. He was holding court with a small group of partygoers; young men and women who remained enamored of the mayor's policy initiatives and public facing selfless nature. It was odd and funny and a bit unsettling that even after leaving office his cult of personality still remained quite strong. I tried to walk past but Sam immediately noticed me and asked if we could speak. At that moment, in a room full of friends, I felt so helpless and alone. He was no longer my boss and should have held no sway but I still feared him.

He'd been drinking, which I remembered was never a good sign, so I asked him quickly but politely what he wanted to say.

"Why don't you want to be my friend?" He began. "Have I done something to offend you?"

I was stunned. It was as if all those years of abuse had never occurred; like he had never demanded to know the intimate details of my sex life and sexual history. It was as if he had never repeatedly touched or exposed himself - intentionally or otherwise.

I wanted desperately to tell him the truth, to tell him how he had shamed and demeaned me. I also wanted to tell him of the financial hardship he had caused; how I had sometimes paid my bills late or delayed my mother's stipend because I was expected to pay his travel-related expenses and his nights out with friends.

But even then, even with all I wanted to say, I was still afraid of hurting his feelings.

You see, I'd been programmed over the years to protect Sam's ego at any cost, including if it meant compromising my values in order to accommodate his need for superiority, acceptance or gratification. If I said what was truly on my heart I would betray that unspoken contract. So, I said the only thing I could that I hoped wouldn't upset him any further.

"Sam. I love you like a brother but you exhaust me. I just can't be your friend."

His response? "F*ck you! I was the f*cking Mayor of Portland! No one says 'no' to me!"

I wanted to cry right then and there because seeing him again, hearing him speak so horribly to me, reminded me of all the other times I had felt helpless to defend myself. But instead of crying, I simply turned and walked away. We've never spoken since.

The Pain and Memories Still Reverberate

Sam still texts, usually just a friendly birthday or holiday greeting. I don't know why; maybe he wants to be forgiven and the only way he knows how is if he can make me his friend. Perhaps he's upset that I'm one of a handful of former staff who don't idolize him or his legacy. Regardless, I still don't reply but when I see his number pop up on my phone my heart stops for a moment and my face turns red. Why am I still afraid of him?

For the past several years I've struggled to make peace with the sexual harassment and hostile work environment I endured. That has included asking myself what I could or should have done differently. After all, Sam and I are both gay men, roughly the same age and physical stature - although as my mother used to jokingly say, I could still have taken him in a fight. We've both had difficult upbringings and have both overcome incredible obstacles to achieve our goals. So, why did he believe it was okay to treat me so poorly? And why didn't I fight back?

The truth is: Sam and I were not peers or equals. We were never friends. Sam was a man who held and exerted power and influence as he saw fit and I simply worked to avoid his wrath. I accepted Sam's behavior and the rationales provided by my supervisors because when I complained I was told to be quiet. When I persisted I was told I could lose my job.

I will admit to taking the abuse but believe others have also experienced similar treatment.

What's Next

I would challenge the City of Portland to seek out other victims, internal or external to the City of Portland, who've been approached, accosted or harassed by former Mayor Sam Adams. Quite frankly, given that Sam began his tenure under DOJ investigation for a potential inappropriate sexual relationship, I've always wondered why the City of Portland wasn't more aggressive in ensuring appropriate sexual harassment training for elected officials and enhanced reporting opportunities for City Hall staff. A code of silence encouraging complicity should never be allowed to stand.

I am Hopeful

I owe a great deal of thanks to the courageous women, and the growing number of men, who have spoken out on the issue of sexual harassment and sexual assault. They've given voice to someone who until recently could only grumble about his experience.

I remain fearful of the consequences of speaking out but I am also hopeful that I can finally begin to heal from my years-long experience. This statement is the first step in that process.

Cevero Gonzalez