

## Alice in CubicleLand FAQs

*What are we supposed to learn from this?*

The most immediate answer, especially if this exercise is performed in a fish bowl setting, is how easy writing what one wants to say can be as opposed to actually saying that message to another person.

The second most common discussion topic here becomes the difference in constructing the argument. One good preparation for this assignment, which allows for good debriefing discussion, is to teach the difference between *induction* and *deduction* in constructing persuasion.

A third common point for discussion is when to hold your cards and when to show them—in other words, you may have all the facts, but how much of them do you need?

A fourth common point for discussion is the structure of the sentences and the word choice that the students have used. Words have power.

*Why doesn't Alice go straight to HR?*

Protocol. Many students, especially younger ones, have never experienced the chain of command that exists in most organizations; their lives have shown them example after example of how someone “went to someone higher” when he didn’t get what he wanted. But while that behavior may work in resolving a dispute, it is professional suicide. HR will throw this right back at her in some form, especially since it does not appear that the manager is violating any policy (except a social media use policy, if one exists). This is a great place to discuss office politics, etiquette, behavior, and career management. Students usually ask if she can go to HR to ask for another position within the organization; again the discussion of how to handle this sensitive conversation is valuable.

*Why isn't she allowed to work from home? Another employee does.*

We don’t know the facts around why that other employee works from home. There may be an ADA issue at work. Or simply that other employee made working from home part of her employment agreement at time of hire. Again, this could be a great discussion to lead to why the time of hire is the best place to negotiate what you want; you will never have that much power again.

*Why do the others have so much time to troll the internet and access social media?*

Some students come quickly to the realization that if Alice, with all her limitations, is the most productive employee in the unit, what does this say about productivity in general? About the workload for the entire unit? If these employees are meeting production goals and still having time to surf the web, perhaps a larger and more detailed look at the staffing needs of the entire department needs to take place. If they aren’t meeting production goals, what sort of reinforcement of consequences is at work, if any?

What is also vitally important here, especially for younger students, is to discuss why every company has to have a social media and internet use policy—and have one that is enforced regularly. A good sideline

discussion is to talk about what social media policies look like; sending students out in search of these policies—usually the ones they have signed or that are in their employee handbooks but that they are unaware of—is an illuminating moment. (A good one to show is Merrill Lynch’s, which states clearly that all employees may have a LinkedIn account only, and the only information in that profile is the name of the company and the role of the employee in the company.) Another sideline discussion can be about the fact that social media is either personal or professional; by its very nature it can never be private, no matter how many privacy settings are put upon it. A professional social media presence is usually one that has to have every single post or tweet run through corporate communication and/or legal before posting; many students are unaware of this fact.

*Why isn’t the manager doping anything about the others?*

Great question, which leads to the discussion of what exactly a manager’s duties are. Bringing up the due diligence that one expects from a manager in managing people in contrast to what behavior can pass for “managing” in today’s workplace is also a teachable moment. A good discussion question to proceed with is “Why isn’t it? Is there some sort of hidden agenda at work here?”

*Why dos the manager have that definition of professionalism?*

The most common answer to this one that the students come up with immediately is that the manager is “old fashioned.” At this point, a good strategy is to rein them in, asking them a) what in this particular department could have prompted this statement, and b) what value does this statement bring to the department? (An interesting sideline at this point is to look at the ban on telecommuting that was implemented at Yahoo, why the telecommuting was banned, and the results.)

*Is Alice bringing on any of this on herself?*

Great question! Students tend to step so clearly in on Alice’s side that they don’t see how her using the conference room daily can come across as selfish and arrogant, even if the others don’t need that conference room at all. What message does her action send? Is she unwittingly making her own life worse?