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Rat or hero? How HR should view staff who blow the whistle

BY UYEN VU

YEARS LATER, whistle-blower and federal civil servant Joanna Gualtieri would still remember the immense comfort she found in the words of an employee assistance program co-ordinator.

At the time, Gualtieri was feeling like a pariah for having raised a ruckus within the Foreign Affairs department where she worked. Gualtieri was in charge of departmental properties abroad: embassies and diplomatic residences. When she discovered excessive spending — properties that sat empty because diplomatic staff preferred other accommodation — Gualtieri felt she was simply doing her job by calling to attention this misuse of funds.

Her superiors weren't receptive to her concerns. She said she was harassed, ridiculed, and felt her job was threatened.

That's why when she heard the words of support from the EAP staffer, she thought they were "just lovely." They were exactly what she wanted to hear.

"She said something like, 'I want to see you get strong again and go out in a bang, perhaps



BLOWING THE WHISTLE: Federal public sector employees demand more protection for workers who want to go public about wrongdoings like those committed by Privacy Commissioner George Radwanski.

with a lawsuit, rather than having them crush you."

But the support would later dissipate. A few years after this conversation, when Gualtieri tried to contact this EAP person

again while requesting an unpaid leave, "she had already become very distant, very cautious. She had understood not to support me in anyway."

Gualtieri, now on extended

leave, spent six years seeking, unsuccessfully, audiences all the way up, from the assistant deputy minister through to then-Foreign

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