

FINANCIAL ABUSE MARS US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

How about an inspector general's report that uses words like "widespread nepotism," "abuse of authority" and "improper hiring" to describe its findings about the operation of the US Department of Veterans Affairs?

Add to these, phrases such as "inappropriate relationship" by one of its bosses, and "acted as if she was given a blank check to write monetary awards" about another boss--does the overall picture become abundantly clear?

Yes, even though their department (Technology Office) was battered by large deficits, former assistant secretary Robert Howard and Jennifer S. Duncan, former executive assistant to Mr. Howard, were involved in awarding \$24 million in bonuses to thousands of employees in 2007 and 2008.

Howard, who left the department in January, was also accused by the inspector general of an inappropriate relationship with a subordinate, Katherine Martinez. Ms. Martinez is accused of helping a friend get a job, and maneuvering a transfer of her own job to Florida despite spending 60 percent of her working hours in Washington.

Ms. Duncan, according to the report, violated anti-nepotism rules by pushing for the hiring of relatives, approved federal money for covering graduate courses for relatives and friends and approved bonuses without the authority to do so. Between 2007 and 2008 she also snatched a \$60,000 bonus for herself.

Now the Department of Veterans Affairs says it will "aggressively pursue a thorough review...the department will take appropriate corrective actions against policy violators." Wanna bet?

Jules Rabin

YOU LIKE TOMATOES AND I LIKE TOMAHTOES

In 1937 Ira Gershwin wrote a wonderful song for the movie "Shall We Dance" called "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off." It starred Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The point of the song was to demonstrate that a couple can have differences of opinion, but in the final analysis they must compromise if they want to achieve their goal. Differences of opinion arise often in my practice. He says casual and she says formal. He says dark, bold colors and she says light and soft colors. He wants modern and she wants traditional. Are you getting the picture?

So a couple contacts me for a consultation, and what are the first words that I hear? "We want to fix up our home, but we keep putting it off. We can't seem to agree on anything." So let's address the "marriage" of divergent tastes.

The wall color of a room can be predominately light blue with the exception of one wall which will be painted brown. The bold color can be further tempered by the addition of ivory moldings and taupe fabrics. If you add espresso brown pillows to coordinate with the brown wall, you have a marriage between the bold and quiet colors, a compromise.

A formal black iron and crystal chandelier in the living room can be paired with a sleek, modern sofa and a wing chair covered with a modern printed fabric, marrying formal and traditional to modern. The choice of artwork in a room can often serve as an excellent way for a couple to compromise, while allowing for a true expression of each individual's taste. The artwork may even function as a tiebreaker.

In the kitchen, she may want formal traditional cabinetry and he may be willing to compromise if fabric window treatments, chair upholstery and plaid wallpaper are utilized to add a casual country feeling. A dining room can have both a modern and traditional look. If the walls are painted a metallic silver and cherry molding is added to complement a sleek wood rectangular table with black Chippendale chairs that have textured upholstery both tastes can be satisfied. Top it off with a glossy black framed mirror above a sleek cherry buffet. An area rug and two paintings can provide the color that make these compromises work.

The ideas that I have laid out above are only examples. To tailor a solution to the clients' needs, the couple has to do a little homework. They should look through magazines and select pictures of what appeals to each of them. The pictures should then be compared to their old furniture and taste, which more than likely, has evolved. Often, when clients have divergent tastes they just may not realize how to bring these tastes together. Through patience and vision a new and unique personal design style can be achieved.

Wendy Lepkoff