

Sometimes an apology is all it takes

Jack Burghardt, an administrative support assistant in the Denver Clerk and Recorder's Office, said he meant no offense when he asked two Hispanic co-workers how much it costs their "people to get across the border these days."

His boss, Clerk and Recorder Stephanie O'Malley, felt the comment had racial overtones and suspended Burghardt for four days.

City documents report that Burghardt, who is a Polish immigrant, "testified that he did not intend to be demeaning in asking the question, which came to his mind in thinking about the movie *Fast Food Nation*." Burghardt said he "now understands that a question such as the one asked can be offensive." A city hearing officer ruled that it wasn't clear that Burghardt meant the question to be derogatory, and overturned the suspension.

Note: An ethnic comment, if it is not racist on its face and is not said with racial animus, is not automatically harassment. In the case of a first-time comment of this nature, a documented conversation about ethnic sensitivity would probably suffice.