

Working like a slave for 20 years? You are fired!

[turboneers.com/3002157/working-like-a-slave-for-20-years-you-are-fired/](https://www.turboneers.com/3002157/working-like-a-slave-for-20-years-you-are-fired/)

by Juergen T Steinmetz

September 1, 2021



1. In a letter to Envoy Air management dated August 25, 2021, New York attorney Lee Seham takes Envoy Air, an affiliate with American Airlines, to task for terminating three employees for referring to themselves as “slaves” and quoting a line from the Jackie Chan movie *Rush Hour* as a means of explaining that the reference was not intended to offend others.
2. The three employees – Losaolima Fonokalafi, Faye Tuala, and Asefash Asfaha – each have over twenty (20) years of seniority. They are, respectively, immigrants from Tonga, Samoa, and Eritrea (Africa), and were employed by Envoy as Inventory Control Specialists.
3. Envoy found cause to terminate Ms. Fonokalafi because, in response to a comment by an aircraft mechanic that she was working too hard, she agreed that she and her co-worker’s worked like “slaves.”

The following week, a white co-worker confronted Ms. Fonokalafi about her comment and asserted that “Black lives matter.” Ms. Asfaha – an African-American born in Eritrea – came to her colleague’s defense by explaining that Ms. Fonokalafi was from Tonga and had a different life experience from her White accuser.

Ms. Asfaha compared the colleague to the innocent Chinese police detective in a hit movie who inadvertently made an offensive remark in a bar patronized exclusively by African-Americans, and appealed to Ms. Tuala for help in recalling the movie and the scene. Ms. Tuala supplied the movie name and relevant quote to assist Ms. Asfaha in explaining Ms. Fonokalafi's innocence.

Envoy terminated Ms. Fonokalafi and Ms. Tuala for allegedly making an improper "slave" reference and because they "quoted movie lines" that were offensive. Envoy terminated Ms. Asfaha for allegedly quoting the same movie lines.

Mr. Seham's August 25 letter, provided Envoy with precedent from the National Labor Relations Board, held that an employee has a right under federal labor law to articulate complaints concerning her working conditions using such language. He also argued:

Every race has been enslaved and has enslaved others. Our republic's first international conflict was in response to African pirates who had enslaved over a million European and White American sailors. In the English language, the term "working like a slave" or "wage slave" is a common idiomatic expression meaning nothing more than the individual is working hard for paltry compensation.

Seham further argued that terminating life-long employees for a reference to a popular movie that grossed over \$245 million worldwide could not be justified, particularly when the purpose of the reference was not to offend but to promote understanding. Moreover, the only African-American present at the time was Ms. Asfaha, whom Envoy terminated.

On August 30, Envoy responded to Mr. Seham that it was "working on collecting data for this case."

Termination letter:



June 22, 2021

Faye Tuala
Employee # 572941
Specialist, Inventory Control - DFW

Re: Termination Letter

Faye Tuala,

On Tuesday, May 4, 2021, it was reported to Envoy Management that you allegedly used inappropriate and hate-related language in the workplace. As a result, an investigation was conducted by your Management Team.

During the course of the investigation, it was discovered that you commented that your Crew Chief was working your team like slaves. During the same conversation, you also quoted movie lines that used the n-word. This assertion was supported by multiple witnesses who confirmed hearing you make these statements.

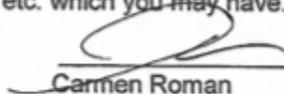
Your behavior is in direct violation of Envoy's Culture of Respect:

"Hate-related behavior includes speech, texting or other behaviors which create an abusive, intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment by suggesting hatred for or hostility toward a person or group because of their race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, or other protected characteristic. This includes, but is in no way limited to epithets, bigoted slurs, threats, stereotyping, drawings and symbols such as a hangman's noose, a swastika, or graffiti.

Such behavior will result in immediate termination of employment, regardless of length of service and prior employment record."

Due to the serious nature of the violation stated about, your employment with Envoy is hereby terminated effective **June 22, 2021**.

All Airport and Company property including, but not limited to Envoy identification cards/badges, manuals, equipment and keys of any kind assigned to you are to be returned to me and are not to be used for any purpose after the date of this letter. Please contact me about any questions or other matters regarding benefits, Credit Union, etc. which you may have.

 41763 6-22-21

Carmen Roman
Manager, Envoy Stores – DFW

Letter Handed to Employee

Letter Mailed to Employee at Address provided

cc: Personnel File
People Services