



Deutsche Bank Accused of Retaliation After Firing VP Who Sued for Being 'Mommy-Tracked'

By LAUREN PEARLE
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Deutsche Bank today got slapped with a retaliation lawsuit after terminating a seasoned vice president who last [year sued the bank for gender discrimination](#), claiming she was "mommy-tracked" for taking maternity leave.

"I worked extremely hard and, as a working mom, I sacrificed so much. I just wanted to be treated equally and no different than my male colleagues," Kelley Voelker told ABC News.

Kelley Voelker, a former vice president at Deutsche Bank, said the company retaliated against her after she sued for being "mommy-tracked."

Voelker, now in her mid-40s, was a vice president with the bank's securities lending desk for 14 years. In a still pending lawsuit filed in September 2011, she claimed that despite consistently high performance reviews, Deutsche Bank denied her a promotion and eventually demoted her, one of its few female vice presidents, solely because of her gender and recent childbirth.

Voelker accused the bank of promoting equally-qualified male candidates while her workplace had a "hostile and degrading" atmosphere towards women. She claimed one of her managers frequently used vulgar sexual language and another took clients to strip clubs.

When Voelker was about to go on maternity leave in 2003 with her first child, she said one superior "expressed his doubts" she would return to the company. Her discrimination lawsuit claimed her supervisors, "never took her seriously because she was a woman starting a family, and this was seen as a huge negative within the company."

In late 2009, when she announced her need to go on maternity leave with her last child, the suit claimed "her exemplary performance was further ignored and her male colleagues ensured her alienation through their actions on and around the trading desk."

When Voelker questioned a decision made by one of her superiors in fall 2009, another executive said, "I'd watch your step - she's pregnant," the suit claims. In response, her supervisor replied, "No need to tell me. I've got one at home," referring to his pregnant wife.

Another male colleague asked her: "When is your husband gonna get it together so you can stay home with the kids?" Voelker told ABC News.

When she returned from her last maternity leave in May 2010 to a "chilling welcome," according to the suit, a superior in the company "immediately" tried to persuade her to take on a more "flexible" reduced role, a request echoed by "various members of Deutsche Bank management."

In the discrimination suit, she says she voiced "strong objections" to the idea and reiterated her desire for a long-awaited promotion.

Instead, Voelker was terminated a year after filing her 2011 discrimination suit. She was the only member of her 500-person group to be laid off as part a September 2012 "reduction in force," she said.

Today's lawsuit claims Deutsche Bank "has chosen to blatantly retaliate against Ms. Voelker [for filing the 2011 discrimination lawsuit] by firing her after a campaign of behavior by company management to sideline her and induce her resignation."

In a statement to ABC News, a Deutsche Bank spokesman said: "While we take all allegations of discrimination and retaliation very seriously, we will continue to vigorously defend ourselves against these allegations."

"Retaliation is often a much more serious, actionable and provable claim than the underlying discrimination claim," employment law expert Jack Tuckner, who is not involved in this case, told ABC News. And it's the retaliation case that can bring the hefty damage awards, because now she can sue for the compensation she would have received had she not been terminated for alleged discrimination, adds Tuckner.

"We believe that this is a systemic problem at Deutsche Bank based on other cases and discussions with other witnesses," Voelker's attorney Douglas Wigdor told ABC News. Specifically, today's retaliation suit mentions a 2006 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission decision to censure Deutsche Bank for "evidence" of gender discrimination and one NY court's observation in 2003 that "the incommensurate and exceedingly low number of females at senior management levels suggest a glass ceiling for women" at Deutsche Bank.

Voelker said her termination left her "shocked" but that she is "now more determined than ever to see that Deutsche Bank is held accountable for what they did to me and my family."

ABC News' Susanna Kim contributed to this report.