



Former iHeartMedia employee alleges mistreatment, but the company is silent

WMRA | By [Randi B. Hagi](#)

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Leon Bowen, Jr. with his son.

A former employee of iHeart Media in Harrisonburg alleges that his supervisor lied about his behavior and performance to management. WMRA's Randi B. Hagi reports.

iHeartMedia is a national company that operates six radio stations from its Harrisonburg location, including 93.7 NOW and KCY Country. Leon Bowen Jr. worked there from January 2021 to February of this year as an account executive, selling advertising to local businesses.

LEON BOWEN, JR. ID: When I got there, you know, I noticed, okay, the market is completely
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Bowen, who is Black, is originally from Queens, and has worked in various sectors of the music industry. I spoke with Bowen at his home in Verona, so you can occasionally hear his young son playing in the background.

BOWEN: One of my biggest issues initially was ... diversifying the pool of clients that we had – it was all white. And you're not going to tell me that in Harrisonburg you cannot find Black business owners and Spanish business owners.

He brought on Black-owned businesses as new advertising clients, and received a plaque from the company for his initiative. But there was tension between Bowen and his supervisor, Market President Bridgett Knupp, which Bowen said boiled over during an internal video conference on December 21st.

Knupp has not responded to multiple interview requests.

BOWEN: I was wearing a blue Nike hoodie ... initial words, she goes, "oh you look cozy." I go, "yeah, it's cold." "Well I hope you're not going to see clients like that." I said, "No ma'am, I'm not, and I don't think I ever gave you an inkling that I did."

Bowen said Knupp asked him to stay on the call after everyone else had logged off, and then she tried to scold him, saying –

BOWEN: "Am I sensing some attitude?" So I'm looking around like, who are you talking to? So we had a work dispute. I never cussed this woman. But I would say it was probably the most vindicating moment for me since I started ... I defended myself, minus cursing. ... I said you are a self-absorbed leader, and honestly, you know, I don't respect how you take this stance toward me and everyone else.

Bowen said he immediately reached out to the higher ups – the area and regional presidents – because he was angry at how he'd been spoken to, and he figured Knupp would be reporting the altercation as well. After he spoke with both supervisors in a joint call, Bowen said one of them called him back individually to inform him that Knupp claimed he called her a sexist epithet that also included the "f-word."

BOWEN: I said "no sir, I did not. I did not!" But I knew what it was. I said here we are, right? We're going to victimize to remove accountability ... to paint me as the big Black guy or the aggressor

He said the area president emailed him later, asking Bowen to work from home until after the holidays to let things blow over. Bowen consented, but he also contacted a corporate Employee Advisor, who said they would conduct an investigation.

On January 6th, he said the area president emailed him again, asking him to continue working from home.

BOWEN: So I go, "okay, on what grounds?" Mind you, I've never had a write-up. I've never had an infraction. I've never had a disciplinary action. I've never had a tardy. I've never had a poor client review. Nothing. Nothing!

Bowen said that after he pushed back, the area president allowed him to return to the office. But the work atmosphere became increasingly hostile, and nobody from the corporate offices ever followed up with him about his complaint – or Knupp's, for that matter.

BOWEN: There's no HR follow-up, there's no mediation follow-up, there's no solution-based – there's not even a write-up for me to dispute it!

WMRA contacted Area President Chuck Peterson from iHeart Media's Winchester office to ask him about this conflict, and what the company's policies are for responding to allegations of mistreatment. Peterson initially said he would find a representative to speak with WMRA, but did not respond to a follow-up call two weeks later.

Bowen claims that after the holidays, Knupp started micromanaging him in a way she did not do with other employees, and vetoed some of his sales. Then, in a meeting on January 31st, he said Knupp told him he'd been underperforming since October.

BOWEN: So I said to her, I said "wow, that's interesting, because I have nothing but praise from you October, November, partial of December."

A week later, Bowen said she told him four of his clients had complained about him.

BOWEN: I said, "okay, who are they?" "Well, I can't tell you out of fear of retaliation."

He questioned why those accounts wouldn't have been given to another employee. All Knupp would say, according to Bowen, was that one of the complaints came from

someone he DJ'd for. This was one of the last straws for him, and he left the company soon after – he told WMRA that resigning felt like the lesser of two evils.

Paul Somers, who owns The Golden Pony and is a friend of Bowen's, feels strongly that Knupp was insinuating that he had been one of the disgruntled clients, since Bowen DJ's at his venue.

PAUL SOMERS: You know, we had zero complaints and nothing but accolades for Lee.

Somers said that, after Bowen told him about the alleged complaints, Somers contacted iHeart multiple times to address the matter, and eventually got ahold of a regional supervisor who said that they hated to see Bowen go.

SOMERS: But it also doesn't seem like they're willing to ask just the two questions it would take to get to the bottom of this ... you know, all you have to do is reach out to those accounts and say, "did you make a complaint? We're trying to resolve an issue."

He added that he's waiting to see how they handle Bowen's claims to determine whether he wants to remain a customer. And Bowen says that, while iHeart has yet to resolve or openly investigate the conflict, he's keeping other options open.



Randi B. Hagi

Randi B. Hagi first joined the WMRA team in 2019 as a freelance reporter. Her writing and photography have been featured in The Harrisonburg Citizen, where she previously served as the assistant editor; as well as The Mennonite; Mennonite World Review; and Eastern Mennonite University's Crossroads magazine.

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