

Case Study #1

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Abstract

In this case study, tenured Sergeant Mark questions his captain about a new policy in an operational meeting. Mark directly opposes the policy while citing operational complications and potential litigation concerns. Others within the meeting are surprised by the manner in which Mark confronts the captain. Mark takes it upon himself to track the captain down and explain himself in which the captain reassures Mark everything is fine. Not long after, Mark is passed up for a promotional opportunity in which he felt he was more qualified than other recipients were. Further, another team absorbs Mark's specialty position, and he finds himself back on the road. His peers tell Mark he has a bullseye on his back and his emotions start to affect his work performance. Mark becomes bitter toward the captain and feels his career is on a dead-end road. Mark seeks advice from Chief Jones, (myself). Mark advises he has reached a crossroads in his career and contemplates on another profession. Using various concepts from Learning Area 1, the next steps are examined in the following case study analysis.

Case Analysis

My interest in the situation revolves around the possibility of losing a highly influential rising leader in my organization. Further, I am concerned my captain might be lacking in emotional intelligence and is allowing a potential misunderstanding to prevent the growth of a valued employee. According to Iannone and Iannone (2001), “The acceptance of communication depends a good deal upon the receiver’s needs, his experiences, and the environment under which the message was received. If the communication is a threat to his own goals, he may refuse to acknowledge it” (p. 205). I believe it is very likely Mark overestimated his relationship with the captain and felt his meaningful input might be helpful in avoiding potential issues with the policy. Further, I feel the captain might have taken the manner and atmosphere in which Mark chose to question him as a personal attack and a form of insubordination creating conflict. As supported by literature, “An unfortunate characteristic of many police departments is the view that conflict is destructive so that its positive aspects and potential benefits are overlooked and lost” (Swanson, Territo, & Taylor, 2005, p. 299). However unfortunate, it is possible the entire perception of the incident might be a complete misunderstanding. It is my job as Chief to keep an open mind to provide guidance to repair the relationship between these two valued employees.

Mark’s Emotional Intelligence Growth Plan

I think it is important to get to the core of “why” Mark had the initial reaction toward the policy and/or change in the first place. For example, Whisenand and Ferguson (2005) assert that “Many of us who cling to the status quo for safety are consciously or unconsciously blocking new insight.” (p. 77). As Chief, I would want to know Mark’s reasons for his pushback on the policy. Would the policy directly affect how he carries out his daily functions, does he struggle with change or does he truly have the department’s best interests in mind?

Next, I would discuss how a leader might properly address matters with upper management. Disagreeing with the Captain regarding his policy in a room full of subordinates is not the correct setting. Mark should be coached on the idea of supporting the Captain's policy in public and voice his concerns in private. This form of communication is less confrontational and allows for a back-and-forth dialog. The captain will be less apt to misinterpret Mark's intentions if communication is performed face to face and in an office setting.

Lastly, I would look for areas to provide Mark more responsibility within the organization to rekindle the fire he once had. I would stress Mark's importance to the organization's success and provide Mark resources such as training geared toward employee development. By allowing Mark to see the organizational leaders are invested in his success, Mark might reduce his work stress which is a major contributing factor to his drop in performance. We must find a way to motivate and reignite Mark's passion while creating a goal-oriented path toward success.

Captain's Emotional Intelligence Growth Plan

In my role as Chief, I will need to get the captain's true perspective of the initial incident. It is very possible the captain took the interaction personally and did not allow himself to view Mark's perspective. Abrashoff (2002) claims that "The people who do the nuts-and-bolts work on a ship constantly see things that the officers don't. It seems to me only prudent for the captain to work hard at seeing the ship through the crew's eyes" (p. 44). Did the captain listen to the concerns that Mark was trying to relay and try to understand the potential issues with the policy, or did he perceive the interaction as an attack on his intelligence and ability to lead.

Secondly, I would question how the captain intended to implement the change within the department. Did the captain identify change agents within the organization to promote buy-in or

was he intending to jam the policy down their throats without allowing an opportunity for policy discussion. Further, I would want to assess the leadership style in which the captain carries out his departmental tasks and possibly direct him toward a situational style of management.

Situational management not only requires the leader to know the difference between democratic, autocratic laissez-faire and transformational styles of leadership, the leader must also have the experience and understanding of the situation to utilize the correct style and find ways to motivate and inspire. Educational opportunities sought by the captain for path-goal relationships and a more effective leadership style might be a course of action to consider.

Lastly, I would stress the importance for the captain to reinvest himself personally with his subordinates. It is concerning to me that Mark has always been viewed as a rising leader in the department, yet the captain has not nurtured his growth nor recognized the reasons behind his decline in productivity attitude and potentially his physical health due to stress. It is ultimately the captain's responsibility to sit Mark down to address his current situation within the organization. Both parties need to put their personal feeling aside and have an honest conversation regarding Mark's current situation. This discussion should include short and long-term goal setting to enhance Mark's potential path to success. If I have done my job correctly, both Mark, the captain and organization will all benefit in the end.

References

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