MANAGEMENT SCENARIO: WHAT AM I GOING TO DO WITH THIS GUY?

You just got a phone call from a Group Marketing Director at Frito-Lay that every Group Business Director dreads. And fortunately, it was not the “I’m putting the brand up for review” phone call. But it was a bad phone call. You took a lot of notes; drew a lot of boxes and arrows; written down words that your mother would never would have allowed you to say indoors or in her company; and the conversation ended with the GPD saying to you, “so to confirm, Scott Brown comes off Project Zeus *immediately* and we’ll meet on Friday afternoon at 2:30pm at the agency to review the new account team leadership structure. I’ll see you Thursday”. It’s Tuesday afternoon at 4:20pm when you hang up the phone.

**Some background …** Scott Brown is an Account Director in your group. He oversees the F-L potato chip portfolio as well as a high profile new product assignment. Scott is a brilliant man. Stalwart undergraduate degree. MBA from a “named” business school. Solid consumer brand experience at big-time New York and Chicago agencies. Stellar interview feedback. And two pretty solid annual performance reviews since he’s been at the agency. On paper, Scott Brown is an Account Management “poster boy”.

During last summer’s account management “resource planning” meeting, both the agency’s President and Director of Client Service agree with the Group Business Director on Procter & Gamble – who initially hired Scott to work on the P&G business - that “it’s time for Scott to move to another account, and that Frito-Lay would be a great *fit* with his skills and background”. And this actually works out great for you as you needed to rotate one of the Account Directors in your group to broaden her experience and manage her career path. And even though you had never really spent “quality” time with Scott, the endorsement from his current GBD as well as the agency’s senior management indicated this would be a “win-win” for all concerns. You agree to put the “ball in play” and move Scott into your group.

**How we got to now …**The first six months of Scott being on the Frito-Lay team were great. Solid thinking being put forward. The work was getting better. His “fit” with the team client and the agency team was terrific and all seemed to be on an upward trajectory. So, when you get the call from Frito-Lay regarding the agency putting together a “team” to work on *Project Zeus*, a new product innovation launch they have in their growth pipeline, you have no qualms in saying, “Scott’s most likely going to be the guy to lead this …let me run the internal trap lines and I’ll get back to you this afternoon”. You discuss internally, everyone agrees with your “Scott’s the guy” assertion and you confirm things with the client.

As *Zeus* is the strategy development stage, you collect your thoughts by taking a walk around the floor. Upon returning to your office, you call the Planning Director on Frito-Lay and ask if she can come on down for a quick update on *Zeus.* When the Planning Director knocks on your door it is as if she knows what you want totalk about, as she has that undeniable *we NEED to talk* look on her face. She comes in, closes the door, sits down and the very first words out of her mouth are, “Scott can’t lead” … his lack of leadership on *Zeus* is killing us. The client, I think, may even be questioning if we are the right agency for this project”. I spend the greater portion of the next hour with the Planning Director just listening.

The meeting with the Planning Director breaks, and I call HR and ask if I can come down to review Scott’s personnel file. Did I miss something when I reviewed his file last summer after the account management planning/resource meeting? Did I miss something when I met with him prior to his joining the Frito-Lay team? Did *we* miss something when we hired him? I spend the greater part of the next hour with the HR Director discussing Scott’s performance. But on paper, as well as in my personal recollection, Scott’s performance does not “tick & tie” with the Planning Director’s take on things. And the first six months of Scott’s run were great. What gives?

My next port-of-call is the Group Business Director on Procter & Gamble. And it takes me the better part of a day to get time with him due to our collective schedules. However, when we do get together, the first thing I get is, “yeah, I’ve heard about Scott … I was hoping that he’d take on much more of a *leadership* mantle after our discussion following his last review”. I was stunned. “Whoa, whoa, whoa …stop the clock. You knew? You knew there was a *leadership* issue with this guy … seriously?” In pressing the *leadership* issue a bit further, it turns out that Scott is very effective and consistent high performer in a *team* setting. A team setting is his true comfort zone. This is where he flourishes. “Scott’s a *great* Offensive Coordinator, my colleague states. “He’s fine being the second in command. And in his review, we did talk at great length about his needing to *step it up*. And I was hoping that a move into your group would be just what he needed. But now I’m thinking he’ll ever be in the running to be a Head Coach. I guess it’s just not in his DNA. But he’s a great account guy nonetheless.”

 With possibly the worst poker-face of all time, I respond, “OK, fine …but why didn’t you make any note of this rather significant issue in his performance review? And why didn’t you say anything to me, either as part of the RPA meeting, or at the very least in a sidebar conversation, regarding this ‘leadership’ *thing* with Scott? Do you realize what kind of hole you’re lack of transparency has put us in on Frito-Lay? …let alone the hole you’ve put Scott in?” “Come on, we’re going to talk to Howard (the agency’s CEO) about this.”

*You’ve got a little less than 36 hours to come up with both a suitable and sustainable “fix” for the account management leadership on Project Zeus. What are you thinking following both the phone call with the Group Marketing Director at Frito-Lay; your meeting with the Planning Director; your review of Scott’s file; and finally, the conversation you had with your colleague, the agency’s Group Business Director of P&G? How do you plan to address this issue from an immediate staffing standpoint? From an organizational standpoint what does the Scott Brown situation tell you about the current state of the agency’s performance management process?*