

Lessons From Experience: One Really Bad Apple

Introduction

The story that you are about to read is from actual events that occurred in the field. Its purpose is to provide you with a real-world example from a seasoned professional in the business world.

One Really Bad Apple

I have been employed at Elite Global Engineering, Inc. (EGE) for over 25 years. During that time, I have worked in several different departments including engineering, research, and manufacturing. I have been an associate director in this organization for over eight years. One of the things that has always been important to me during my employment at EGE is the type of person to whom I report. This is important because I have had 18 different bosses in 25 years. Sometimes the transition to the new boss is difficult because there is change. Some changes have restructured the group that I am in, and some changes involved the new boss's expectations about his or her staff.

Occasionally, the most difficult thing to do was to develop a good, mutually-respectful working relationship with the new boss. I never had a problem with this prior to my last boss. I can still remember her first day. All of her direct reports were asked to meet with her in the conference room. Hazel, my new boss, sat at the head of the table looking down the entire time that her boss, the vice president of engineering, introduced her to us. She did not smile or make comments, and I knew we were in for trouble.

Hazel turned out to be an autocrat with no interpersonal skills. She believed that she had all of the answers and purposely embarrassed staff during meetings, which created a hostile working environment. In her first year, she did the following:

- Fired seven people in the department because she said they were not “engaged in their work”
- Took away responsibilities from staff without cause
- Was allowed to behave with disrespect toward others with no repercussions
- Became well-known across the organization as an “equal opportunity bully”
- Was the root cause of many good employees leaving the organization

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It is important to take away the following from this scenario:

- Human Capital Management must ensure the choice of “the right person for the right job.” Technical skills alone cannot make up for a total lack of interpersonal skills.
- Leaders create the environment of a department and the organization. The best leaders lead from a position of high character and respect for the most important asset in the organization—the employee.
- An organization can lose significant talent if the leaders are toxic to the health of the organizational culture.