

Case 37: Personnel Dilemma: Terminate or Retain

FACTS:

In this case, Dr. Jordan, head of the State Board of Education's staffing commission, determined the need for an additional secretary. After interviewing four eligible candidates, Edith Reichel was hired for the position. There were several complications involving poor performance and behavioral issues. The supervisors failure to initiate corrective and/or termination actions resulted in Reichel being retained as a permanent employee. Ultimately, Reichel was transferred to a lesser position in another division.

ISSUES:

The first issue to arise is that there was no clear identification of the job description. It was known at the time of Reichel's hiring that her "experience was not entirely what was wanted." Reichel was also hired on sympathy rather than experience. Rather than sending Reichel to the secretarial training early on, the other secretaries simply embraced the burden of Reichel's workload.

Reichel was described as restless, disruptive, and inattentive. Although the supervisors verbally addressed the issue, Reichel's behavior repeatedly slipped back into old patterns. She also repeatedly made multiple mistakes forcing the regular staff to routinely correct her work. This affected their own abilities to do their own jobs while also taking on the responsibilities that Reichel was incapable of completing. This created significant tension in the office, to the point where permanent and valued employees were threatening to transfer.

The management of the organization is improved through systematic adaptations to the needs of the organization's survival. This should force the supervisors to look at long term success rather than a stop and go approach associated with a goal to goal action plan. As Morgan referenced in the book, Images of Organization, "Survival is a process, goals are endpoints." In Reichel's case, the management failed to consider the long term impact of her performance and skills development and how that would affect the organization's success. In this case, there is error at all levels of supervision. This fell into a category of "too little, too late." Rather than addressing Reichel's issues immediately, the regular absorbed her workload. There was no indication of written performance reviews and the secretarial training course was provided as a last resort rather than a primary attempt at skills development. In Ackoff's Ted Talk, he stated that "an improvement to the program must be directed at what you want. Not what you don't want." Further, he went on to state that it "requires designing for what you want right

now." A clearly defined roll, a more proactive approach toward skills development, and immediate corrective action of troublesome behavior is necessary to promote functional unity. Ultimately, the supervisors lack of attention until the end resulted in the retention of a poorly performing employee, rather than counseling and ultimately firing her. The supervisors involved failed to do what was needed and failed to act in the best interest for the survival of the organization.

SOLUTION:

A clearly defined job description would likely have disqualified Reichel from the beginning. Since she was hired, immediate action should have been given to correct her known lack of skills.

Immediate corrective action could have derailed the progressive behavioral issues. Reichel should have received documented counseling regarding her disruptive behavior and excessive smoke breaks. Her uncorrected conduct likely led to her disregard when she failed to advise her supervisor that she would not be at work on a day that she was responsible for preparing an important meeting. Reichel was a "no-call/no-show" under non-emergency circumstances.

JUDGMENT:

A more proactive approach toward behavioral correction and professional development may have assisted Reichel in acquiring the necessary skills to have become an employee worth retaining. Both Reichel and the regular staff would have benefited if she had been sent to the weeklong secretarial course immediately upon hiring. If Reichel had continued to fail after having been trained and counseled, the supervisor would have been more than justified to terminate Reichel's employment prior to the end of the probationary period.

References:

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