Conquering Chaos: A Success Story to Encourage the Challenged Manager!

In May 2003, Marcia* assumed her new responsibilities as global Director of Quality Assurance and Regulatory Affairs for a medical chemical manufacturer, MCM*. Her excitement over her promotion was tempered by the state of affairs she inherited. "Two of my plants were out of control", she remembers. "It was chaotic."

When Marcia began working with PeopleFit in January, 2004, she had been spending 14 hours a day working on site, and more hours at home responding to several hundred emails each night. Despite her long hours, she was unable to concentrate on her bigger-picture responsibilities because she was bogged down in day-to-day lab operations. Relationships with other departments were strained, because her department was frequently a roadblock in the manufacturing process. Turnover was skyrocketing.

Organizational Design
To begin their work together, PeopleFit and MCM looked at organizational design, and it was found that Marcia had two levels of roles reporting to her, level 3 and 2. Not only was this diluting Marcia's effectiveness, but also it was denying her level 2 employees the opportunity to be managed by someone who could provide them the level of detail they needed to be successful. As a result of this analysis, Marcia, at level 4, reassigned her level 2 employees to report to the level 3 roles instead of her.

This reorganization freed Marcia to concentrate on five-year strategic planning and quality road mapping, two items that had been on her plate, but untouched, for nearly a year. In addition, with fewer employees reporting to her, she now had more time to coach employees and talk with them about career development.

Reflecting on the reorganization, Marcia says, "People work better when they are reporting to the right level. I couldn't meet their [level 2 employees] needs on a day-to-day basis. I couldn't give them the time and attention they needed."

Talent Evaluation
Next, PeopleFit helped Marcia explicitly define the problem solving capability necessary for each role under her command. Problem solving capability is a factor separate from experience or knowledge. It can be defined as the "mental bandwidth" one possesses to gather, organize, and extrapolate information to solve problems and make judgments.

From these discussions, Marcia could see that she had three employees who were in roles that were simply over their heads. They did not have the capability necessary to perform the work required of their roles, and, unfortunately, no amount of training, coaching, or personal effort could change that. This new insight into discreet levels of human capability led Marcia to reassign one employee and dismiss two others.

One year later, the reassigned employee is thriving in her new role, which is one level of complexity below her previous role. "In the past, I might have attributed her "transformation" to

her finally finding a job that she *liked*. Now, I can see how capability is the predominant factor in job success," explains Marcia. "Having people in the right roles makes everyone's life easier."

Armed with new information about matching problem solving capability to roles, Marcia began asking different questions during her interviews. She came across several candidates who, despite impressive resumes, did not have the problem solving capability she knew was necessary for them to be successful in the role. "The quality of my hiring decisions is better," notes Marcia. "I've hired four people in the last year, and they are all stellar performers."

Clarifying Cross-Functional Accountabilities

Customer complaint resolution was a hot potato that was burning six different departments. Without clear accountabilities established, each department blamed the others for the rampant confusion and buck-passing. PeopleFit was called in to facilitate an off-site meeting to address the fact that only 20% of customer complaints were being resolved within the mandated 30-day timeframe.

Department heads were led through an explicit accountability process-mapping exercise to establish accountabilities, authorities and escalation procedures. They left relieved that they no longer had to rely on manipulation, force of personality, or charisma to get their work done. Each person knew what they could and could not do, and they knew what to do when they encountered a problem.

Fast Forward Eighteen Months

Eighteen months after beginning her work with PeopleFit, Marcia is optimistic about her department's future. "We are working normal hours, and my emails are down from several hundred to 75 per day. My department is no longer a roadblock. We are resolving 90% of customer complaints within the 30-day goal, and we are delivering customer surveys in at matter of weeks when they used to take months. People are staying longer than two weeks," she laughs.

"PeopleFit introduced us to the concepts of Requisite Organization and helped us apply them to our chaotic situation. I've seen the difference that they make. These concepts inform all my processes now. When I make changes, when I create new roles, when I hire, these concepts are always on my mind."

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