GOODBYE TO HAPPY HOUR

Case History

The organization in the case is a fictional representation of a division within the provincial government (please note that all characters and events described throughout the case are also fictional). The Division of Environmental Assessments is thought to be a small division in comparison to many governmental units and has a total of fifteen staff including office administration staff. The division was initially formed in the 1970’s and has gone through several divisional reviews and name changes. The last divisional review was conducted in 2000 and resulted in the unit’s name being changed to Environmental Assessments. The mandate of the unit was also reviewed at that time and the decision was made to change the unit’s mandate from one of environmental impact in a variety of sectors to one where the focus is on assessing environmental plans of oil and gas developments. Given the boost that such developments provide for the province, and the strategic importance of such, the Division of Environmental Assessments has become a key player in the future of the province and has received a significant amount of media attention when new developments are proposed.

The Division of Environmental Assessments is known for its visible role in the media and within the division, staff often feel pressured to meet client demands and expectations. This pressure has increased as the province has put more emphasis on the importance of oil and gas developments. While turnover was historically not an issue within the division, there has been an increasing trend towards a higher turnover rate while filling positions has become increasingly difficult because of the province’s economic boom.
Character Backgrounds

Jane

Jane has always been a real go-getter. She excelled throughout her university career, representing her undergraduate class on the school’s council, and graduating at the top of her MBA class, receiving the prestigious gold medal award. Jane’s aggressive drive for success often resulted in friction with colleagues. Her take-charge attitude has often been mistaken for bossiness in the past. However, Jane had an excellent educational background and as a recent graduate, she was eager for new challenges. Jane felt that she had worked hard to earn her current position of management in the public sector and that she deserved respect in the workplace.

Ryan

Like Jane, Ryan has always had a bold and aggressive attitude. He is a senior engineer in his department and enjoyed the challenges of his work. He has always worked hard, improving his salary and status throughout his career. Now that he was considering retirement within the next five to ten years, Ryan felt he was ready for a management position. He was hurt and jaded that the highly coveted management position had been given to a recent graduate with little experience in the field. Ryan was sure he would have been better suited to the position with his years of experience and broad knowledge base. In any case, Ryan still very much enjoys his profession and is comfortable in his work environment, where he is able to use his skills with little to no supervision.

Bob

Bob is an easy-going and content man with a large circle of friends. He is popular inside and outside of the work environment, mainly because of his cooperative and pleasant nature. Bob also enjoys his work and feels he is compensated fairly and can provide a nice living for himself and his family. He loves spending his free time with his wife and kids, enjoying their favorite activities such as camping and traveling. Bob has never considered applying for a management position in his field, as he is comfortable with his current level of responsibility and would not want to risk his precious time off with his family by taking on the devotion necessary to be a manager.
Current Situation

Jane is beginning to wonder whether she made the right decision when she and her new husband, Jason, moved back to their home province six months ago. Jane’s new job as Manager of Environmental Assessments with the provincial government started off well enough. Jane had initially been pleasantly surprised to find that her team of ten engineers and technologists were bright, capable, and worked very well together to produce top quality results. They were very conscious of the high profile and tight deadlines associated with their unit’s work in assessing environmental plans for oil and gas developments. Jane had been worried about taking a management position in the public sector, since she had an image of professionals there being only those who couldn’t make the grade in the private sector. Four years ago, Jane had received the gold medal as the top graduate in her Masters of Engineering program and obtained one of the most sought after environmental engineering positions with an oil and gas firm. While she found her work really rewarding, she and Jason were thinking of starting a family and wanted their parents close by to share that experience.

A month after Jane started work with the provincial government; her top engineer accepted a position with another company. The next month, a junior engineer also left. While Jane advertised both positions immediately, neither has been filled yet due to the scarcity of engineers with this background who are willing to work at government salaries. Last week, an intermediate technologist left for maternity leave and Jane’s only applicants to replace her are recent graduates. In the interim, remaining staff have had to take on extra work, which has translated into staff working long hours week after week. Jane has overheard the staff complaining about their mounting workloads. They no longer pitch in to help each other when deadlines approach and when she seeks volunteers to take on new top priority projects, the constant refrain is, “I’m too busy, ask someone else!” Jane has become increasingly frustrated by this situation and recently wrote the following email to another manager in the department:

Subject: I Just Need To Vent!!!!
From: Parsons, Jane
To: Hogan, Shelly

Hi Shelly,
I’m at my wits end! None of my staff are willing to take on new projects. Are your staff difficult like this???? You know how John, (the Director) is ---“Don’t turn down any projects!” There’s a lot riding on these contracts- don’t let us down!” It’s like pulling teeth to get staff to work on a new project. I would have thought they would be more enthusiastic. I mean, these projects are leading edge and all I get is grumblings about them. As a result, I’m forced to pick up the slack and spend my nights working out the project charters- as if I have nothing better to do! They say they are busy but I’m sure if they were more efficient they would easily have time to take on another project each. In fact, I’ve noticed that some of them come and go as they want. I’m putting a stop to that practice- from now on they are going to have to account for their time- I think it’s the only way for me to really know if what they are saying is true.
On Friday, Jane sent the following email to the staff in the unit:

Subject: Requests for Vacation Time  
From: Parsons, Jane  
To: ALL STAFF LIST

Hi all,

Please be advised that as of today, ALL staff are to get formal approval for ANY time off from me directly prior to taking the time. This applies to vacation, appointments and flex time. This is as a result of staff complaints regarding workload and will be effective until further notice.

Ryan is has worked with the environmental assessment unit for over 15 years and he upset when Jane was hired, since he felt she lacked the experience necessary for the position. He had applied for the job himself, but was turned down because he did not have a Masters degree. Ryan’s perception is that Jane’s superior manner and lack of trust in the staff’s abilities has destroyed morale and caused the resignation of two engineers. Ryan became furious over Jane’s latest e-mail and drafted the following e-mail to Bob, his closest colleague and Friday afternoon drinking buddy.

Subject: Re: Requests for Vacation Time  
From: Power, Ryan  
To: ALL STAFF LIST

Hey Bob, did you read Jane’s email? Who the hell does she think she is? She doesn’t have a clue and if she thinks I’m actually going to ask her approval to go to a doctor’s appointment or to leave half an hour early after working extra hours all week she’s crazy!! In fact, let’s still leave at 4 today instead of 5 just to make our point that we have every right to go to happy hour as usual, regardless of her #!*# e-mail!

In Ryan’s haste to send the email, he accidentally pressed the reply button instead of the forward button. Jane received the email and couldn’t believe what she was reading. Ryan has been very argumentative with her lately, but she had no idea that he was this defiant. However, she couldn’t afford to lose another engineer, so she decided to ask Bob for help.. Jane arrived at Bob’s office and found Ryan was already in there. As she started to leave, she couldn’t help but overhear the following conversation:

**Ryan:** Why didn’t you respond to my email? What do you think about leaving for happy hour at four today?

**Bob:** I didn’t get an email, are you sure you sent it to me? As for leaving early, I’m not sure. I can see you’re upset with Jane’s new rule, but she is the manager and I don’t want to make things worse.
Ryan: Yeah, she’s the manager all right but she just doesn’t get it. Here we are working through our nights and getting stressed out just because she can’t hire or keep the right people. She’s not experienced enough to know what to do. All she cares about is her reputation and looking good for the director. She says she wants us to participate in the new projects but even when we do she just gets us to do the grunt work and then she presents our ideas to the Director and she comes off looking like the one who did all the work. One of the other managers told me that in the senior management group meetings she doesn’t even mention our names or the work that we did. She takes all the credit. Well, you know what- I’m sick of it! I’ve worked too long to be told what to do by some young thing who doesn’t have a clue!

Bob: Hey, Ryan, don’t take it so personally. Things will improve soon I’m sure. We’ll get the positions filled, and new people mean new ideas. Anyway, if nothing else, we’ll be able to stop working so many hours and we can get more involved in the new projects that Jane is bringing in. I’m sure this new rule will blow over in no time.

Ryan: I shouldn’t have to wait it out Bob. I’ve been here for years and I’ve never been treated like this. I’ve had enough

After hearing this exchange, Jane wasn’t sure what to do, but she knew she had to act quickly before she had another resignation. What should Jane do?

Background reading

Kamali S, Khan B, Khan M, Khan AB. Motivation and its impact on job performance

Lyndsay Swinton  Workplace Conflict Management: Strategy for Successful Resolution

The Foundation Coalition: Understanding Conflict and Conflict Management
http://www.foundationcoalition.org/teams