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Apply Your Skills: Case for Critical Analysis

More Hassle from HR?

In their three years at Vreeland Pharmaceuticals, Vitorio Nuños and Gary Shaw had rarely crossed paths, and they had exchanged no more than a dozen sentences. But here they were, seatmates on a plane headed to company headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri. And suddenly, they had a lot to say to each other. “What I’d like to know is why we’re wasting a trip to Kansas City to hash out some new policies about leader competencies,” Vitorio said. “Because Connie Wyland is HR at Vreeland, and you and I both know that policies and models and all of that touchy-feely people stuff are the lifeblood of HR,” Gary replied. “I also think a lot of this is the result of panic on the heels of the scandals in sales last year.”“I don’t think there’s cause for panic. The company fired the guys, apologized, and then you just move on,” said Vitorio. Gary laughed sarcastically. “No, you fire them, you apologize, and then you analyze the whole thing ad nauseam, and then you hamstring your management team with endless rules and bureaucratic standards just to make sure it doesn’t happen again.” “So we all pay for their mistakes,” replied Vitorio. “We pay because HR feels guilty that those guys moved up so high in the system,” Gary replied. “So now Connie and her staff have devised the ultimate solution to the problem. I don’t know why we all have to go in to discuss it; she’s already decided what she’s going to do, and she’s positive this is the cure-all to prevent any further embarrassment to the company.” “Let’s look at the document,” Vitorio said. He reached under the seat, retrieved and unpacked his tablet, placed it on the tray table, and turned it on. “Too much glare,” Gary said, peeking over. Vitorio pulled down the window shade. “Is that better?” Gary nodded. The two men read through the document. “I resent the term ‘rogue leaders,’?” Gary remarked, pointing to the phrase. Vitorio shrugged. “It’s a rough draft. They’ll clean up the language … I think.” “It’s really just a rehash of the mission statement and all of the things we learned in training. This is stuff we all learned in business school. I feel like I’m being lectured.”

“Yeah.” Vitorio scrolled up and down the document. “Any business student could have written this.” “I hear the HR crew put in lots of overtime,” said Gary. Vitorio smirked. “For this? I’ll tell you … and this is just between you and me, but I really resent this, and we’re some of the newer members of management. I would love to hear what the older managers are saying.”

“I know Connie,” Gary said. “She and her staff are going to come in tomorrow all gung-ho on this.” He turned the tablet in order to see it easier. “We already know what’s expected of us.” He scrolled down, stopping at key phrases. “Look at this … ‘critical values’ … ‘core behaviors’ … ‘fostering conflict resolution’ … and here’s one—‘implementing employee involvement strategies.’ How does she think we got these jobs in the first place?” Gary paused. “What really makes me angry is that I heard Connie is going to start manager training sessions where she will teach us the behaviors associated with each value! Can you believe that? She will have us role-playing and stuff. I will fight this if it goes beyond general value statements that we can follow in our own way.” “I can’t wait to hear what Vreeland says,” Vitorio remarked. “Are you kidding? He’ll go along with it. He’ll spend 10 to 15 minutes telling us how great we all are and insinuating that we don’t really need this, and then he’ll back Connie all the way. Face it, this is the way it’s going to be, and he really doesn’t need our input or approval. It just looks good,” commented Gary. Vitorio turned off and closed the tablet. “I just feel that imposing something like this on management is a slap at every one of us. We know what’s expected. We don’t need training. We also know our people and we have to have some flexibility within a broad set of boundaries. This sort of thing just hamstrings us. Connie wants the Stepford Wives.”

“I just hope a couple of senior managers speak up at this meeting and voice some concerns. Maybe it will be toned down a little,” Gary said. “You and I are middle management and we haven’t been with the company long enough. All we can do at this meeting is sit and nod.”

Questions

Are Connie and her staff on the right track to avoid manager mishaps by defining a new set of leader rules and core values and imposing it by fiat, from the top down?

Do you think a more participative and open culture can be imposed on managers with value statements and training sessions? Why?

Why do you think Vitorio and Gary are on the defensive? Might the emphasis on core leadership behaviors be handled in a different way? What do you suggest?