

Week five assignment

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A few years ago this researcher worked as a legal assistant part-time at a small personal injury law firm. A successful personal injury litigator had recently started his own private practice just before this researcher was hired to assist in the office. The job responsibilities consisted of knowledge management such as client intake calls, gathering and evaluating client medical records, processing records, digital recordkeeping, and shipping documents and depositions along with other office duties. Despite low pay, it was an opportunity to get back into the workforce. In the interview, the lawyer indicated that he was a transactional leader. He was happy to teach this researcher to become a paralegal. Though he was intelligent and successful, he was also a “bulldog” by his own admission. Referring to his style in the courtroom which won him a majority of his cases, this style also spilled over to how he managed people. In fact, other lawyers were known to move out of the way when they saw him coming down the courthouse hallways.

This lawyer’s leadership style was autocratic and transactional. If his staff did exactly what he said, dealt with his mood swings, and kept up the pace of communicating correct knowledge and information to him, there was relative peace in the small office. But, there was always underlying tension. Staff were always moments away from experiencing his explosive, fist pounding anger. He used coercive power and was extremely demanding. If he won a case or one was settled out of court in his favor, staff received fist bumps and praise for being a “great team.” When even the smallest error in processing information was made, he would shout and tell us that we were all causing him to lose his excellent reputation and that we were putting his cases at risk. All of this was endured by this researcher for not much more than minimum wage. Everyone in the office from the junior lawyers to the law students and assistants came to work under duress, fearful of getting something wrong. A law firm is a knowledge business and everyone in the office is a knowledge worker. So, processing knowledge amongst the team is

critical. However, with his kind of demanding leadership style, fear of the boss' reactions prevented real thinking and knowledge transfer to be well handled. For instance, this researcher only worked half time, while the work of the firm continued for the other 20 plus hours of the work week. Nonetheless, when the next work day would roll around, this researcher was expected to know absolutely everything about every case and its progress, and expected to monitor emails seven days a week to help move the cases forward.

Hislop (2018) states that management must encourage knowledge transfer amongst workers. A leader must show either transformational leadership for the growth of others or even servant leadership to encourage the atmosphere of safety to learn, make mistakes, recover and try again. This is an atmosphere that must be perpetuated by the manager. This leader caused so much fear with his demanding leadership style that the staff had to wait for the lawyer to leave for a deposition or a law convention for them to communicate their knowledge in a safe environment. When the lawyer was gone for some time, there was an opportunity to help one another share knowledge and make progress.

Although this leader meant well and only wanted to be successful, he did not become what Collins (2011) called the "Level Five" leader. The Level Five leader shows a deep humility that allows people to grow, flourish and share necessary knowledge on their teams without putting too much emphasis on their own ego. This type of leader shows his or her own flaws and perpetuates an atmosphere of learning. Within a year after this researcher quit the job, this lawyer had to close his practice due to everyone leaving his firm. He joined a larger law firm. This start-up law firm could have been a healthy learning organization that could have better served its knowledge workers.

References

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Collins, J. (2001). Level 5 leadership: The triumph of humility and great resolve. *Harvard Business Review*.