

Transcription - Case Study: Overuse of Relief Staff.mp3

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. As we record, this is our first recording for 2025, so our very best wishes to everyone listening for a happy, healthy and challenging, in lots of ways, new year. Today we're going to look at a case study. It's one that Fulyana has suggested, but I'll give you the background for it and then she can talk to it first off.

The case study revolves around someone who works in retail in a customer facing role. They love their job, but they feel that their needs are not being considered at all. In terms of background for the team, it's a great bunch of people, we all get along well, different age groups, different stages of life, some with babies, some with school kids, some looking after parents. For the person themselves, their family are all grown up and mostly live overseas. The issue now is that whenever a team member has to take unplanned time off of personal reasons, they get called upon to come in from time off, most of the time. Whilst okay with it, lately they feel they are the default person and expected to fill in. They believe it might be their fault for letting it go on for so long. Now they feel they must address this, any tips would be much appreciated. Let's hear what herself has in tips.

I think perhaps because it sounds like a good team and everybody gets on and a good environment, it doesn't seem to me like they tend to take advantage, just making assumptions. It seems to me more like it would sort of become a habit and a pattern. So you're okay for them to say you're the backup and you would have made yourself available very kindly. Therefore what has happened there is that then just became how it happens, right?

I think there's no need to blame yourself and say it's your fault or not your fault. I think you can't let it go on anymore because now you're feeling some feelings which aren't really fair and you want to address it and continue this harmony in the group. So communication is to just say it, just say look guys I've been doing this, I've been happily doing it. But you don't know this, but I actually many, many times I had to actually cancel my own arrangements to fit in because I didn't want to let you down. However, I can't keep doing that because then I'm not getting my time because of that. Why don't we look at the process where we can have a rotating roster perhaps, where we could say if the person doesn't come, the next person on call if you like, emergency call, whatever, it is X and if they're not available it goes to Y and so on. Have a chat, do it, just come in nicely because it is and come up with a solution and the solution is for all of you to do it.

One thing that strikes me might be your nature, is that you like to keep going in and helping and doing stuff. So when you open the discussion don't put your hand up straight away of that coming up with the process and documenting it. Make sure others get involved, so it's, you know, it's not your responsibility. It's the team's responsibility and I emphasize that simply because the givers nearly always will do that. And then they give give and then they realize oh my god, this is my suggestion and have the procedure so that everybody can follow them and not default to you or someone else.

Okay, first thing in the new year I am going to completely disagree with the process. (All right,

that's good.) I think you should lead with the process, with here is the solution and not make it personal to start with but make it about the issue.

Not coming in and talking about me, you know, I feel this and I'm feeling this and all of the "I" stuff. For me, if I was a manager here, the barriers would go up straight away. I'm just talking about how I would react if that process happened.

What I would much rather see, is someone come in and say I know that it's difficult to fill in the blanks when someone has to take leave unexpectedly. We all appreciate one another's work. The thing with the team is sit down and talk about how can we have a more equitable process, a process that doesn't rely on any one person filling the gap. That heavily relies on there being more than one person to fill in those gaps. That's probably what we don't know about this situation, is this the only person who can fill in? I do agree with you that I think it's become a habit.

And it just becomes a no brainer for the management team to say, so and so will slot in there and we know that they know the job and we know that they can pick up any of these roles and do all of that. Is it time to think a bit more broadly? Is it time to have a bit of a paradigm shift about how you feel those gaps?

Now, if you're in a customer facing role, we've all over the years been at places where they're obviously short staffed, and we, as customers, we put up with it, we understand, you know, well for the most part we understand. We know that there are some people who are just impatient about life generally. My approach, the approach that I would appreciate as a manager, is if someone came to me and said, I think that as a team we need to sit down and think about this issue because the habit that we're in, the pattern that we're in, is not sustainable. Because it's not sustainable. What happens when this person gets called in and they're not well enough to go in, they'll go in anyway because that's their focus, I've got to help out the team. I've got to do this, they're depending on me. And so that builds almost unconscious resentment that my needs are not being met and it builds this guilt as well that, I should have stood up. I should have said something, you know, and it's always easier to say things at the beginning of a process rather than when it's got out of hand. So my approach, my suggestion will be to look at talking to, communication obviously, but talking to your manager first of all about can we, as a team, sit down and work out this a simple process that covers everyone's needs in these situations.

Often I think what happens in these situations is that because they're of the moment and so someone rings, I can't come in today. I've got to do this or the kids are sick, whatever, then there's an immediate need to fix that problem and you fix the problem without process. It's not a sustainable way of managing that issue, which is always going to be an ongoing issue. It is an issue for every business that has a mix of people whether they're retail, whether they're customer facing or not.

Everyone's got a customer, as we've talked about before, process is what is going to be the long term solution, the sustainable solution for this issue. So I think that's the only way to do it, working with the team to do it rather than going in and pointing the finger inward at myself and saying I've got this problem and I need to do this, I need to do that. I think if you take the personal out of it, it makes it easier to find the solution.

I'm okay with it.

I think for that case study, let's say that we would like you to look at process. You've got a

couple of approaches there. Talk to your manager first of all about how you're feeling or talk to your manager about the process itself. But I think that we both agree that a process is what's going to be sustainable in that particular situation.

So if you've got a situation like that and you have found a solution in terms of approaching the issue, please let us know so that we can share that. But for now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.