**A Hasty Firing - An Angry Client**

Monica sat back on her sofa – bemused, frustrated and completely exhausted. In the midst of preparing for a grueling series of exams, she had had to answer an unending stream of phone calls from Ken, her manager at the client company. Ken had been calling almost every hour, trying his best to persuade Monica to continue working with him. Monica had been firm in her response – much as she wanted to work with his group, she just would not call her (ex) boss David: She had been insulted and humiliated far too much by David’s behavior. Monica still felt a stab of anger at the memory of being called into his office three days ago and abruptly being told to clear her desk and leave right away: she was being fired.

At that time, apart from feeling a natural sense of shocked disappointment, Monica had also been surprised at the timing. David was letting her go right at the start of the busy period. Despite experiencing tumultuous emotions, she had offered to stay on for a few days to ensure that work was completed. David had brusquely turned her down, saying contemptuously that she could easily be replaced. Now it seemed that David had badly misjudged the entire situation. In his haste to fire her he had created a messy situation for the client (Ken’s group). Ken was livid at being put in a tough spot and desperate to find a way out.

Monica wondered whether she should relent and give in to Ken’s pleas to help out. Should she overcome her aversion to David and request permission to work with Ken in the interest of, and maybe ethical obligation to, completing the work? Or should she stand firm?

**Working as a Software Consultant**

Monica had joined ExpSol as a software consultant after a decade of experience in the field. ExpSol was a small firm with the business model of employing consultants who were placed at client firms. For the last five years, Monica had been placed into Ken’s group.

Ken’s group was responsible for delivering certain key products for his own (that is, the client) firm; his group was powerful and brought in a lot of revenue. Monica had developed an excellent professional relationship with members of the group, particularly Ken. Her work was critical for the group. She was well-known and respected there for her professionalism, commitment and for being a true team player. Indeed, several employees from the client company had sent complimentary, even glowing, comments about her to ExpSol.

Beyond her skills and capabilities, Ken’s group appreciated her dedication to work. The group was under tremendous pressure to deliver work product by the end of the first week of every month. Monica understood the urgency the group faced with this regular due date. During that first week, more so than other times, she was unstinting in her support and readily responded to calls at all times of day and night.

Monica had been fairly happy as an ExpSol employee, appreciating certain aspects of being part of a small, client focused firm. For instance, although she was expected to put whatever hours were required by the client, ExpSol was fair in compensating her for time billed, including those spent on telephone support or doing research. For her part, Monica had always maintained scrupulous records and billed accurately for time spent on work.

The one thorn in Monica’s side had been her boss, David. He had started out as a programmer, but moved up to a managerial position. Monica had been reporting to him for the last three years. In many ways David was the stereotypical micromanager. Although Monica had proved herself to be highly competent and capable in her job, he insisted that she document and report back every action she took. This often frustrated Monica since she much preferred to deal with immediate and dynamical challenges, rather than what she felt was administrative drudgery. Having spent recent years on administrative work, David was not as up-to-date technically as Monica. He often seemed nervous and uncertain on technical issues and would ask Monica to describe work she had done in excruciating detail. At other times he questioned her judgment and insisted she reverse certain work-product related decisions she had made.

At first Monica had taken David’s nitpicky behavior in her stride. Indeed, they had started out as fairly cordial colleagues. However, as time passed David’s behavior became increasingly irritating to Monica. He also appeared to have no plans for her professional development and she felt stuck in a rut, doing the same kind of job for almost seven years. It appeared that David was content with Monica continuing indefinitely as his subordinate.

**An Irresistible Opportunity**

Over time Monica had become increasingly convinced that she needed to deepen her skills. An upcoming and promising area was that of “analytics”. A lot of work she already did would fall in that area. A formal program would provide expertise to improve her work quality and credentials that would open doors to new opportunities. Without explicit training, there was only her word that she had expertise and skills in the field. Soon others, with formal training and education, could and would replace her. Monica felt the urgency to move fast.

Three months ago a neighborhood university launched a new program in analytics. Admission into the program was highly competitive and limited to professionals in the field who were at or just below middle management level. These criteria fit Monica to a “t” - she was convinced that it was the most opportune time, and the right juncture in her career path, for her to do such a program. Monica put in all her effort into preparing her application materials for the program and was ecstatic when she was selected. Monica met other students at an orientation session – they were seemed more qualified and advanced in their careers than her. The program promised to be a very demanding one, yet one that presented both challenges and opportunities.

In the past David had always been non-committal when Monica discussed her professional growth. After she was admitted into the program, she requested a leave of absence or a part-time schedule. David rejected outright any changes in her schedule and made it clear that she would not be cut any slack. As far as he was concerned, she could pursue the program on her own time and dime. Monica was perplexed and angered by this. In her opinion, ExpSol would benefit from developing expertise in the area of analytics. She had broached the idea of ExpSol setting up a separate analytics unit with the CEO of the firm; this would help bring in additional revenue. That proposal had elicited a less than lukewarm response from both the CEO and David.

**Paying the Price for Work-Work Balance**

Monica’s view that analytics was the way to future opportunities was validated by articles and news items in numerous publications. She became even more determined to do the program. As expected, the program required Monica to put in her A-level effort. At the same time, she had to fulfill her professional obligation in supporting Ken’s team. The combined effort was exhausting. Finally, after persistent requests by Monica, ExpSol agreed to grant her a certain number of unpaid personal days for use towards work related to the analytics program. Monica hoarded these days carefully and took one only when there was a scheduled exam.

Ken’s company had contracted for two ExpSol employees to be placed in his group. When Monica started the program ExpSol assigned a third employee, Jeff, to fill in for her on days she took off. Monica had a good professional and personal relationship with Jeff and willingly guided him on the work. Jeff knew that she was always available on call in case he needed further help. One small wrinkle in the situation was that Jeff was a close relative of ExpSol’s CEO, although he never brought it up and indeed viewed himself as just another employee.

In the meantime, David seemed to increasingly resent her spending any time at all on the program even though the client work continued without interruption. He began harassing Monica on trivial matters such as getting permission to do some pieces of work for the client. As an added complication the third ExpSol employee at the client company suddenly quit so that it was just Monica, and Jeff when she was not there, working with Ken’s group. Things came to a boil when Monica took two consecutive days off (a Thursday and Friday) to prepare for and take exams. The following Monday, the first day of the month, David called Monica in to his office and unceremoniously fired her.

**A Client is Livid**

Monica’s firing came as a shock to Ken. His group was under pressure, as was usual during that first week of every month, to deliver the product. He had received no prior notice of her firing. He immediately called Monica who apprised him of the situation. Ken knew that it was almost impossible to deliver the product that month without her. He tried convincing her to initiate contact with David and to ask to be put back on the team until the work was done. Monica had refused that suggestion outright. But as Ken was getting more desperate, Monica wondered if she should step down from the high pedestal and make that call to David.