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Carrie Pan (C)

Kathryn Tang wrote this case under the supervision of Darren Meister and Don Uffen solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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improvement efforts

During Pan’s time in the U.K. office, she kept her schedule intentionally light and focused primarily on developing relationships with employees in the United Kingdom. She demonstrated her Octave script, which received strong praise and support from Kilfoyle. Pan was ecstatic to hear that Kilfoyle would soon return to Canada to lead the structural team overall as well as its Canadian team. This would effectively demote Burgundy from his leadership role.

Pan saw the potential for her work environment to improve, especially under the leadership of Kilfoyle and with an effective onboarding plan. If her team could fully utilize its talent, then she could build an exciting and successful career at LMC. She felt a responsibility to provide a smoother transition for the next group of recruits, and she saw an onboarding program as a way for her to establish herself as an invaluable member of the team.

Pan enlisted the help of a technician on her team, Scott Dudley, to design a new onboarding program. Pan added a wealth of decision-making logic to the team’s training guide and managed communications among technical directors to arrive at a consistent set of standards. This provided a level of clarity for recent hires while also reducing the amount of reworking required by PAs. Having reduced ramp-up costs by 60 per cent, this onboarding initiative was a major success.

Pan and Dudley struck up a conversation with the company’s corporate social responsibility champion, Donna Willis, who was coincidentally also working on an onboarding program. Willis decided to adopt and launch the structural team’s onboarding program as a company-wide standard in November 2014.

During her annual performance review with Burgundy, Pan was promoted to a position as an intermediate engineer/scientist. Encouraged by the recent success she had achieved in the onboarding program and the team’s pending leadership change, Pan brought up the Bearings Tower project again with Burgundy, along with her concerns about his technical expertise. Burgundy was genuinely apologetic about his previous behaviour and revisited his work to ensure that this would not happen again in the future. He had recently travelled to volunteer in underprivileged communities in Asia, where he had developed a new appreciation for the comfort of his lifestyle in Canada. Pan saw a positive transformation in Burgundy, and this restored some of her respect for him.

Innovation and Personal Development

Kilfoyle had been back in Canada for nearly six months, and the team environment had started to improve. Pan was thankful that her earlier perseverance had paved the way for her to establish credibility and gain increasing influence in her team’s operations. Pan saw research and development and innovation as LMC’s next challenges. With a rapidly changing landscape and downward pressure on price, the structural team needed to innovate to become more efficient. Pan had been spending 10 per cent of her time over the last year on technical development and had made significant efficiency improvements to her individual workflow.

Having received some positive feedback, Pan saw further potential for Octave. She had developed a script that could be used to process information within the building science, sustainability, and forensics teams, and she had shared her creation with several colleagues. Their praise inspired Pan to share this tool in a company-wide demonstration. She enlisted her collaborators’ help in sharing the session with their teams and offering testimonials based on their experiences. Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, and some teams adopted the tools as team standards. The chief executive officer, Aaron Sullivan, commented that he was impressed with Pan’s initiative. Following this first session, Pan expanded the demonstration into a monthly series to demonstrate tools and best practices for other employees.

Leadership and Personal Development

By February 2015, Pan had been nominated to take part in a leadership development program. This gave her exposure to emerging leaders across the company and to coaching support from the head of LMC’s corporate division, Mary Cross. There would be an upcoming change to the structural team, and Pan expected to have a good chance at becoming a supervisor.

At the same time, Pan thought about the next steps in her career progression. She could pursue a graduate degree in engineering in order to rise through the ranks of the structural team to become a technical expert, or she could explore a management-oriented path. Pan had also been speaking to a former classmate, whose structural engineering consulting company, URS Incorporated (URS), had offered her an account management role, which included a raise and financial support for part-time studies.

Lunch and Learns

Inspired by conversations with other leaders, Pan saw an opportunity to launch a series of lunch-and-learn sessions for personal development. She thought improved personal development and a strengthened internal network could help her gain access to a pool of untapped expertise and improve company performance. Pan casually brought up the idea with a few team leaders, then decided to send out a company-wide invitation to a lunch-and-learn session based on a TED talk. Pan was a fan of Simon Sinek, and chose his TED talk, “How Great Leaders Inspire Action,” to facilitate a discussion about leadership.

Shortly after sending out this invitation, Pan received an email from Kilfoyle saying that he was concerned about this session and that, “We have to talk.” As it turned out, a similar initiative had been shut down by the chief executive officer years ago because it had been critical of the company’s leadership. Kilfoyle feared that, without explicit signoff from senior executives, this initiative would suffer the same fate.

Pan now needed to decide whether she should proceed with running this session or cancel it. Cancelling the event would look suspicious, whereas running the event might bring opposition from Sullivan and jeopardize her chances of becoming a supervisor. She expected a competing job offer from URS to materialize within the next week, and she continued to consider options for graduate studies in engineering or management. After years of hard work, Pan felt that she was finally at a turning point at LMC—where she had the credibility and momentum to drive the next phase of innovation.