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DEAR CHIEF: I’m sitting in an airport in Houston and am agonizing about returning to my office in Portland, Maine. Yesterday, during a quarterly headquarters meeting, I agreed to commit my team to a project I know they’re not going to like. I normally like to discuss matters with them first but on this occasion I didn’t get that opportunity as I had to make a timely decision. Therefore, I made the decision without their consent. I hope they’ll be understanding of this and will not give me too much push-back. Ugh.

HAD TO DO IT



DEAR HAD TO DO IT: First, if you had to do it, you had to do it! From your vantage point at that particular point in time, under those circumstances, you are being paid to make a decision and that’s exactly what you did! That’s part of your responsibility as a leader.

It is true most people don’t like a decision being made for them without their consent but sometimes the nature of the situation dictates a leader to be decisive due to the severity or timing of an event or required action. Ideally, it is nice to involve your team in the decision process from the beginning but emergencies or unusual circumstances can make that option impractical. When

Show them the silver lining

you get back to work, briefly explain why you made the decision and why it’s important for the team to accomplish the project. They should understand even if they don’t agree.

Your decisiveness in this situation should not be a problem unless you make decisions in this manner all the time. If you do, you’ll certainly have some frustrated and unhappy teammates. If this scenario occurs only once in a while and you effectively communicate issues with your people, then you shouldn’t be worried about how your people are going to react. They’ll be fine.

Whenever you inform your team they are being assigned a project they don’t believe in or have no control over, it then becomes important for you to help them take ownership of the decision and subsequent tasks. This is not easy but it is necessary. You can start by acknowledging that the assignment may not be the best scenario for the team. This lets them see you are understanding of their frustration and that you’re not always looking through rose-colored glasses.

Next, be sure to briefly let them air their grievances. Keep things from getting nasty and don’t make excuses for every complaint. Sometimes letting them vent will be enough for them to get on board, but usually you’ll need to go a few steps further.

After letting them blurt out some

grievances, it’s time to turn the tables on them to see if they can come up with any positive aspects to the project. Maybe they have some good ideas or new concepts they can test to make their efforts in this project go smoother. Or perhaps this could be the ideal time to get them the software they’ve been asking for, especially if it can aid them in accomplishing the project. If there’s anything else you can provide for them that will generate excitement, consider getting it if feasible.

When you look hard enough, you can find and expose the silver lining in almost any situation. The more often you show your team how to identify the upside of a given situation, the more often they will come to your side after you make those tough decisions without their input or consent. Furthermore, when you strive to do “the right thing” when making decisions, your team will trust your judgment over and over again. And lastly, when you show you care about your people on a daily basis, they will care about you during those challenging and defining moments.



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