

Delegation Exercise

B. Cold-Alert

The Situation:

This morning you were invited to a meeting with your boss and high-level staff people from Sales & Marketing. The meeting was about ***Cold-Alert***. At the meeting the product manager for ***Cold-Alert*** and a lawyer from the corporate legal staff laid out the situation.

The Briefing on Cold-Alert:

Cold-Alert, as you know, is our new over-the-counter cold medicine. It was formulated to be used to enable someone to take a powerful drug that would fight the side effects of a cold yet stay alert at the same time. It was launched about a year ago and has been successful beyond our imagination.

Today, a story in the New York Times described how pockets of society have begun to use this cold medicine as a way of staying alert even when they don't have a cold. Often, people are taking two or three times the recommended dosage. Also, they are taking the drug over a much longer period of time than the recommended period. Apparently, ***Cold-Alert*** does not have the side effects of other stay-awake, over-the-counter drugs which usually are caffeine-based. So, people, like long-haul truck drivers, are using it in place of the caffeine-based alert drugs. Teens apparently are using it because two or three tablets taken together gives them a feeling of intense alertness and sensitivity to their surroundings. This drug has not been tested for such use.

Everyone in the room was concerned about the possible long-term impacts of the misuse of the drug which are currently unknown. The product manager was also interested in the possible use of the active ingredients in this drug in other over-the-counter products or as a prescription drug for illnesses like narcolepsy.

Your tasks:

- Select a member of your staff to head up a team to investigate the problem and develop recommendations. Assume you can select any of your current staff members to head up the team. Be prepared to explain why you selected this person and how that will impact the delegation process.
- Think through how you will delegate this assignment to the person you have selected; be prepared to act out this conversation with your coach.

Questions – please prepare answers to these questions for our next coaching session:

- Describe in your own words what is going on.
- In your own words what is at stake for the company.
- Based on what you currently know:
 - What are going to be the most important 5-6 things for you to do on this problem in the next 24 hours? Why?
 - This is a highly visible problem, what are the most important pitfalls to avoid? Why?
- What 5-6 key criteria should you consider in selecting a member of your staff to head up this project team?
- Who would you select from your current direct reports? Why?
- What are the key strengths and weaknesses of this individual relative to accomplishing this task effectively?
- Prepare a set of notes to guide your delegation of this key activity with the individual selected.

Instructor Notes:

- Give the individual a copy of this situation a few days before the coaching situation, and ask them to prepare answers to the questions attached.
- Go over these questions (give in pre-work):
 - Describe in your own words what is going on.
 - Strong concern that negative publicity will tarnish the reputation of your product and company – regardless of the facts or right or wrong.*
 - Concern that liability issues may be involved – why the lawyer is there.*
 - Need to act fast.*
 - First order of business is to establish the health issues surrounding taking multiple times the recommended dosage, and secondly to determine the health effects of prolonged use. Challenge to do this effectively and quickly, for both health issues and to deal with potential negative publicity.*
 - Last the issue is potential opportunities this poses*
 - In your own words what is at stake for the company.
 - Tarnished image if misuse causes significant health problems*
 - Having the drug become a prescription drug, losing a lot of its market potential*
 - Possibly having law suites brought against the company, right or wrong – especially if the warnings about over use on the label are not sufficient.*
- Based on what you currently know:
 - What are going to be the most important 5-6 things for you to do on this problem in the next 24 hours? Why?
 - Gather additional key current information about the problem. Get more in-depth briefings on the issues involved. (This will help you make a better selection of the project team lead)*
 - Develop selection criteria for the team lead. Get buy in on those criteria from other key stakeholders.*
 - Make a short list of possible candidates from your current staff, and evaluate them against the agreed to criteria. Identifying strengths and weaknesses, and how you will have to manage differently depending on who is finally selected.*
 - Talk personally to each the two or three front runners to head up the project team, find out what else they have on their plate and how assigning them to this project would impact other work. Gauge their enthusiasm for the project, as well as, any constraints they might have (e.g. going on a two week vacation in two weeks) regarding giving 150% to this project..*
 - Review your decision with key stakeholders to make sure there are not any major problems.*

- *Effectively delegate the project to the person selected, and explain to the other persons who were on your short list (that you meet with to discuss the project with) why they were not selected for the task. Make this conversation an up-beat and positive conversation. (Note – this is seldom done, but if done well, can be a very effective motivating and developmental conversation).*
- This is a highly visible problem, what are the most important pitfalls to avoid? Why?
 - *Only looking at the assignment from a scientific perspective. (There are a lot of sensitivities here, must be aware of them)*
 - *Being inflexible in approach. (It might be best to try to come up with a design that gives quick, but useful results that can guide policy issues, while doing more rigorous scientific research to get definitive answers.)*
 - *Telling management what it wants to hear because someone is afraid of the negative consequences on their career. (This will backfire on the company and the individual).*
 - *Putting the cart before the horse. That is, focusing too much energy on the possibilities for new applications of the active ingredients, before dealing with the threats involved. (The reputation of the company is partially at stake – would send the wrong message.)*
- What 5-6 key criteria should you consider in selecting a member of your staff to head up this project team?
 - *Leadership – ability to lead a team in a crisis or pressure situation*
 - *Decisive*
 - *High sense of urgency to get things done*
 - *Energy level must be high, and they must be available to work intensely on the project for a significant period of time.*
 - *Must be a self-starter and able to figure things out for themselves.*
 - *Solid technical credentials are a must – but they can be strengthened by other team members – leadership is key.*
- Who would you select from your current direct reports? Why?
 - *Here you must get them to justify their thinking against the agreed to criteria.*
- What are the key strengths and weaknesses of this individual relative to accomplishing this task effectively?
 - *Probe for a well-rounded answer to this question.*
 - *Now that this answer is out, does it seem like the initial choice is still a good one?*

- Prepare a set of notes to guide your delegation of this key activity with the individual selected.
 - *Ask them to describe how they are going to delegate this assignment, and what choices they made in how to delegate the assignment (based on who they are delegating to).*
 - *Ask them to tell you how this delegation might be different from the delegation of a less sensitive and less urgent task to the same person.*
 - *Ask them to tell you how the delegation would have been different if they had selected one of the other people on their short list and why it would have been different?*
 - *Play out the delegation – playing the role of the person being delegated too.*
 - *Debrief!!!*