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## **TRANSFER TROUBLES**

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Jayant was in one of his troubled moods today. It was one of the reasons why many of his subordinates, sensing this, were avoiding meeting him. M.S. Jayant was an HRD Manager in a leading MNC pharmaceutical company, OXY India Ltd. Just this morning, he had received a letter from the Head Office at California requesting for information on a case they wanted to review. After reading the case, he realized that it was very similar to an earlier experience he had dealt with, Abhishek Kumar, who was a Sales Officer in the company.

It is a well-known fact that the company cannot do without the combined efforts of both the Sales Officers and Territory Managers. The Sales Officers are front line fighters of the company who have to deal with the doctors, convince them of the products produced by the company. Therefore special care and consideration is given to them for which reason Jayant was a little surprised to see a letter on his desk initiating the review of Kumar's case.

Kumar was a potential star performer in Bhatinda district under Territory Manager Raj Iyer. Kumar had been keeping excellent records especially with the new product "NaturaGen" He was able to get the company good business and he was aware of that. At first Kumar was confident of his position in the office and had been meeting targets and deadlines. He brought in new business for the company and always had his eye on business growth. At one point in time, one of his Territory Managers had made a comment that he worked hard only for sales of certain products, whereas some of the lesser strategic areas of working were neglected. In OXY, every individual has to commit to meeting certain goals at the beginning of the year and are assessed for their annual appraisal on the basis of achievements of goals he had set. Kumar had a track record of being 'outstanding' in the beginning which over the years came down to 'good' and later to 'average'.

Times were tough for OXY in 1998. There was a recession on the horizon, people were worried about the performance of the company, and cost cutting was the order of the day. At the Mumbai Head Office, plans were drawn up to recast the business strategy of the company. The product portfolio of OXY was rationalized, and a large number of Sales Officers were relocated to bring out the best in the sales force. This relocation was done, keeping in mind the best qualities of each Sales Officer, with a view to optimizing their contribution.

Kumar was transferred to Hyderabad on recommendations of Raj Iyer, who felt his contribution there would be more in line with company expectations. Raj Iyer had been a steady employee. He was a quiet and steady fellow. Although he appreciated the Sales Officer's efforts, he was not the one to laud and praise in public. He mostly kept his views to himself. He felt that people like

Kumar who were sharp and quick on the uptake were probably overqualified for the job. Raj Iyer had stated in his recommendations to the Head Office at Mumbai, that Kumar was a capable Sales Officer and had made commendable achievements in his area. He was probably identifiable as future Territory Manager material and should be given challenging assignments and a exposure to operations in other parts of the country.

When he was informed of this transfer, Kumar was quite disturbed. Kumar immediately wrote to the Mumbai Head Office requesting a hearing from Sudhir Roy about his transfer. About the same time, Sudhir Roy, All India Sales Manager from the Head Office held a meeting with the Sales Officers to evaluate their performance. The meeting was also attended by the Territory Managers and the Regional Managers. Roy was discussing Kumar's performance when Raj Iyer informed him about the arrogant behavior that Kumar had recently started displaying. Roy, who himself was a sharp and critical observer of people instantly recognized the potential that this bright young man showed. He seemed to be exceptionally talented.

"How many standard doctor calls do you make a day?" asked Roy, trying to find out the young man's track record.

"Oh, I make at least 10 calls a day," said Kumar proudly. The slightly arrogant tone in his voice was not palatable to Iyer.

"And how many repeat calls have you managed to make so far?" inquired Roy pleased with the high figures that Kumar was quoting.

"I have a high success rate even with the repeat calls, Sir. I manage about 2 calls per day," said a beaming Kumar knowing fully well that the answers were making the management happy.

After a few more such customary questions that needed to be answered by the other Sales Officers, Roy decided to take a tea break. He was satisfied with the numbers he was getting and had accepted the fact that in spite of Kumar's arrogance he was a man full of promise. Roy was curious to know why Kumar was behaving in that particular manner and after the meeting asked Kumar to stay back. This was the first time Roy noticed a look of worry on Kumar's face. When they resumed the meeting Roy asked Kumar some more questions related to that territory's performance and Kumar's achievements.

"How did you manage to achieve such good numbers? You must tell us so that we can use it to implement with the other Sales Officers and set you as an example" said Roy.

"Oh, Sir isn't it enough that I got these figures for the company? After all, the methods are not important for the company, the company only needs results" replied Kumar to a completely baffled Roy. Soon after Roy asked him what meant by that statement.

“So why is it that you don’t want to go to Hyderabad, Kumar? From what I hear that place is full of opportunities too?”

“Sir, it is not that I don’t want to go to Hyderabad, it is just that I feel more comfortable in Bhatinda or some district near my native place” replied Kumar with concern written all over his face. It was obvious he was taken aback at the question, as he wasn’t expecting Roy to broach this topic.

Kumar was not used to such line of fire from his superiors. He had always felt that he should be respected due to his ability to get in good figures. He knew he had achieved and deserved better treatment than this. He thought Raj Iyer was not taking care of his needs and thus had felt it necessary to write to the Head Office at Mumbai and even to the California Office. If they failed him, then he always had recourse to the FMRAI who had often fought the cause of other Sales Officers.

“But there is an opening at Hyderabad and we need a dynamic fellow like you there” said Roy who wasn’t going to give up and wanted to find a solution to this problem.

“You can tell that to my Territory Manager Sir. He is the one who wants to get me transferred out of here.” replied Kumar a little angrily this time.

“Come on, you know no one is trying to get you transferred out of here. You know that the company is not doing too well and we are reworking our marketing strategy and rationalizing our sales force. There simply was an opening and you were the most likely candidate for the job, that’s all” said Roy.

“I don’t think so Sir and just the fact that my Territory Manager complained to you about me tells me that you favor him over me. You don’t care about Sales Officers like me. But don’t think that you people can make me do things you like. I have connections that will make things bad for the company. You please remember that.” said Kumar, completely out of control by now.

Roy realized that Kumar was not aware of the things he was saying and the allegations he was making. He thought it best to end the conversation there. He did not want to get Kumar flared up so that he would say things that he might have to regret later. With that Roy dropped the topic and talked about something else. Roy was the last man for all that Kumar had said as everyone knew the respect that Roy carried with him. He was one man who sincerely believed that Sales Officers are the heart of the company. He was always the one to jump to their rescue if he felt that they were being treated unjustly. Roy also believed that if the Territory Manager gave Sales Officers the right kind of guidance then it would be beneficial to all. He thought that the Territory Manager should give positive feedback as often as possible. The Sales Officers should be encouraged when they have achieved targets. Not only should this be done verbally but also by way of a small congratulatory note, which is also to be marked to the Regional Managers. The

Territory Manager is supposed to keep a check of the work done by the Sales Officer regularly but even that has to be done in the right way.

As Roy reflected on his own value system, he felt the Sales Officer should be given enough leeway and freedom to do his own thing but make sure that goals were being reached. Roy also thought that if negative feedback was necessary then it should be given at the right time and made palatable with some sugarcoating. The Territory Manager should not make the negative feedback so forceful that the Sales Officer starts turning against him. He recalled some lessons from a management book by Kenneth Blanchard where it was written you have to catch people doing things right!

When Roy was pondering over what Kumar had said he decided to find out if his Territory Manager was supportive of the transfer due to any personal vendetta. Upon inquiring Raj Iyer's history, he found no other allegation or complaint against him other than this one. Iyer had an impeccable record with the company for the last 27 years. His team members and colleagues held him in the highest esteem. This certainly added credibility to Iyer and it seemed that Kumar was only cooking up stories to stall his transfer.

When it was seen that Kumar's performance was sliding in his district and he was now getting average or below average ratings, the management decided to look in to his case. The case was then passed to Jayant in HRD at this point.

After some days when Kumar came to know that Jayant was now in charge of his case, called up Jayant on his direct line and said "Sir I request you to stop my transfer to Hyderabad. The schools in Hyderabad are Telegu medium and my children are studying in a Hindi medium school, they will have problems with the transfer. Therefore I do not accept my transfer to Hyderabad. I am not ready to work there so, please stop this transfer"

Jayant said "This is your problem. This is no reason for the transfer to be stopped as all Sales Officers have to accept the transfer orders issued to them which is a business requirement for the company."

"But Sir, my Territory Manager has encouraged this transfer as our style of working is different. It is just personal revenge that is targeted at me. But Sir, I have always done my part of the work with dedication and hard work. Sir, I would like to bring to your notice that, I am the only Sales Officer that has been transferred out of the state when there are vacancies available at Amritsar and at Patiala where I have no problems reporting as it is close to my native place. But it is because of this Territory Manager that I have been transferred to a place I am not comfortable working at." said Kumar. But Jayant was not convinced with any explanation that Kumar gave as he had investigated about the matter earlier and found out that it was only a business requirement that had resulted in Kumar's transfer to Hyderabad.

“I give you two weeks, Kumar to stop all your appeals and get to work at the Hyderabad office,” said Jayant.

Few weeks passed by and Mr. Jayant got news that Abhishek Kumar had not yet taken charge at the Hyderabad office. Jayant became a little uneasy and sat writing a letter to Kumar stating that if he did not take charge at the Hyderabad office they would have to take some drastic actions against him. Fearing the warning from Jayant, Kumar immediately went to Hyderabad and took charge of the work at that office. It was however seen that the quality of work done by Kumar was not the same. After around 8 days Kumar requested for a sick leave of around 10 days, which was granted to him as he had pending leaves which he could take.

During that time Kumar spoke to the FMRAI office bearers in Bhatinda as he thought they could help him get a transfer back to Bhatinda or any nearby place. With their guidance he sent a letter to Jayant and to Sudhir Roy (Sales Manager) “I cannot adjust to this new environment due to the climate changes and communication problems. So I request you all to transfer me back to a region close to my native place. If my request were not considered this time I would have to take legal actions against the people concerned. Also the doctor has asked me to take complete bed rest for some time because of the bronchitis which has aggravated due to the change in weather, I request you to extend my leave for 3 more weeks.”

After few days Kumar again received a letter from the company asking him to join the Hyderabad office, as they were not convinced by the excuses he was giving them. They clearly said that he was not even attempting to adjust himself to work in the new office. Out of the 11 months from the date he was asked to report to the Hyderabad office he had actually worked in the office only for 65 days citing various excuses for abstaining from work. Kumar once walked into Sudhir’s office during a conference at Mumbai, and said “Sir if you do not take quick action against my transfer I have other ways and means to handle it. So I am just here to warn you so that you avoid getting yourself into trouble”. He was now getting on the nerves of Jayant and Roy as they decided they had to handle this matter more seriously from now on. After discussing among themselves they decided to talk to him and make him understand that even if his Territory Manager was unjust to him he should not be involving that matter with his transfer. They wrote a letter to him requesting for a personal meeting with them as they wanted to counsel him over the matter.

He met them after two days and explained to them why he was so keen in getting transferred back to Bhatinda or to another town nearby. The other two also tried to explain to him that it was no personal grudge against him that caused his transfer and that it was purely a business requirement that he should accept. They also promised to him that if he worked with interest for some months they would definitely transfer him back to a place of his interest. Kumar was getting a little irritated as the two were yet trying to convince him to join the Hyderabad office. Till the end he was not able to convince the two to transfer him back to Bhatinda. At the end of the meeting he was told to join the Hyderabad office within 3 weeks.

Things had started getting out of control for Kumar, as now the people at the Mumbai head office had started revolting his appeals. He therefore wrote a letter to the California head office stating the reason for his transfer to a place like Hyderabad and his reason for refusing to join in there. Within few days Jayant got a letter from the California head office requesting for all the relevant information about the case. After some days Jayant received a letter from the California head office stating that there was no injustice done to Kumar in the transfer and that they should handle the case as they were doing earlier.

When Jayant got a positive response from the California office, he became more confident that they were doing the right thing by being adamant at the decision of not transferring Kumar back to a place of his convenience. He sent a letter to Kumar stating that his request to the California head office had also failed and that it was time for him to report to the Hyderabad office. Kumar again resorted to FMRAI who went to talk to the Territory Manager of Hyderabad accusing him of not treating Kumar with interest. Sushil Joshi was working as Territory Manager at the Hyderabad office for nearly 20 years now. Never in his lifetime had any Sales Officer accused him of injustice. This was a plus point Sushil Joshi had which helped him justify himself to the FMRAI committee. They had to agree to the justification as this was the first time they had received complaint against Sushil Joshi in the last 20 years. They agreed that it was just a ploy on the part of Kumar to get a transfer back to Bhatinda district.

After many reminders and many warnings given to Kumar the company had to take the drastic step of terminating Kumar. Therefore finally it was decided that Kumar be given compensation for the service he had offered to the company. They also gave him a last and a final date to report to the Hyderabad office. But as before, Kumar did not consider this date also. The final communication thus between Kumar and the company was through a letter from the company stating termination of his services in OXY.

This flashback of the termination had sent shivers to Jayant as he did not wish to go through the same procedure of termination for another OXY employee. Jayant was upset and just thinking of ways and means in which he could counsel this person who had definitely served OXY more dedicatedly than Kumar had and had more potential from which the company would benefit. As an HRD Manager, he was concerned about several issues.

Questions:

- 1) Do you think that the Territory Manager, Raj Iyer had some vested interests in transferring Kumar out of his territory?
- 2) What do you think Roy could have done to support Raj Iyer?
- 3) At what points in the story do you think that Kumar could have responded more proactively?
- 4) Do you think there was a conspiracy to terminate Kumar or was he treated fairly?
- 5) Do you think that the termination of Kumar could have been avoided? What actions would you recommend Kumar, Roy, Jayant and Raj Iyer to take to have avoided such a negative outcome?

- 6) What kind of roles would you recommend be played by Roy, Jayant and Territory Managers for such cases in the future?