



DIARY OF AN HR PRO: EXIT WITH 'CARE'

By Aparna Sharma

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I met a TISS batchmate after years. After catching up about just everything under the sun with Vir, he said was quitting his job.

Vir was the HR head of a Rs 500-crore company that was going through turbulent times. Although his resignation was accepted, it was not made public. Management was worried that, under current circumstances, his resignation might be construed as a loss of faith in the company. Vir tried his best to make it appear business as usual. When colleagues started giving him strange looks and he overheard his resignation being discussed in the washroom, it was agreed to make the news public.

What touched Vir was how some of his colleagues responded to all this. The first call came from his secretary's mother-in-law who said that they would miss him - it was such a loss! She expressed concern about her daughter-in-law's future and implored Vir to take Arundhati (the secretary) with him. His immediate junior looked overjoyed because she had sensed it was time to get promoted. Office peons Sunil and Madhur walked into Vir's office with tears in their eyes even before the news of his resignation became public. The Head of Sales was silent but his eyes had tell-tale signs of a feeling of loss.

I asked Vir two things. How did he handle the exit and two, what had he done in the last thirty months to evoke such responses?

This is what Vir did to ensure a smooth exit.

- He was as committed to the company and his job as he was before resigning. Some colleagues taunted him by saying why was he so sincere but nothing deterred him.
- Based on his experience, he prepared a detailed profile for selecting the next HR Head. This was important since the job description did not contain specific personality traits.
- He offered to help initiate the search and help with the selection of his successor.
- Prepared a detailed Work Plan and handed it over to the CEO and nominated acting successor.
- For each of the twenty team members, put down their strengths and weaknesses.
- Had one on one meetings with each team member and gave them tips on how they could excel just like he always used to.
- Subtly nudged the CEO to give him the release letter- something that was not forthcoming since his resignation was unexpected.

- Even when provoked, he did not criticize the company, management or colleagues. Always highlighted the company's strengths.
- Prepared a status report on Statutory Compliances by HR.
- Documented all the company assets in his possession and handed them over to Administration/Finance.
- Cleared all pending expense statements and got the Accounts department to confirm in writing that no advance was pending against his name.
- Gifted the company an exquisite painting with the hope that it would be placed appropriately as a lasting memory.
- Smiled and laughed till the last day even though work was quite stressful.

Next, what had Vir done to get such heartwarming response always?

Vir was truly a people's person, a leader! He treated and spoke to all employees with respect irrespective of levels. He never looked down upon junior staff. In fact, he went out of his way to make them feel a part of the organization at all times, be empathetic to their problems and look for solutions.

Within months of his joining, he held a customer orientation program for the HR team. They were made to clearly understand that HR was a critical function that provided services to other departments i.e, to internal customers. He gave an example of an employee who visited a garment outlet. The salesperson first understood the need, choice, size. Thereafter, showed various designs and aided final selection. In this manner, he changed mindsets that eventually resulted in the HR team being more proactive, effective something that was appreciated by every department.

Vir took personal interest in the well being and progress of each team member. When secretary Arundhati had a baby, he was empathetic in granting leave/flexi timings and was the first person to wish her in the hospital after immediate family. He got his gynecologist wife to see her reports and give a much needed second opinion. While leaving, he laughingly reassured Arundhati that she could call upon his wife during the next pregnancy as well.

He pushed team members very hard on deliverables but come increment time and he would take up for them with the senior management. This earned the respect and loyalty of team members. Vir was perceived to be a hard task master who also took care of his team at all times. By taking the pressure entirely onto himself, he ensured that the team focused entirely on delivery and not get caught in inter-department political cross fires.

Vir took the lead in introducing Paternity Leave for male employees in the company. Women employees found the change path breaking even though they did not benefit personally from it. On the other hand, the changing Indian man who wanted to change his child's nappies now got a chance to do so, officially speaking.

He had a love-hate relationship with the sales department . They loved Vir's customer orientation approach, quick response to requests for recruitment or clearance of dues and customized training programs for the sales team. They hated him because he would not play cute with company rules, take short cuts or give into undue pressure.

In short, he was seen as a fair, equitable, compassionate professional who demanded high quality performance.

Unbelievably, an accidental meeting with an old classmate resulted in such thought provoking and insightful learnings.

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