

Advisor's Crisis

Maria works for the consulting firm Advisor. She specializes in media- and marketing-oriented consulting. She is 32 years old and has accumulated several significant successes.

Over the course of her career, Maria has risen from the position of Sales Representative (responsible for acquiring new clients) to the role of independent Team Leader of Content Experts. Her team consists of:

- **Piotr** (advertising specialist and copywriter)
 - **Kuba** (print-media and press specialist)
 - **Paweł** (internet and new-technology expert)
 - **Kasia** (lawyer and accountant)
 - **Martyna** (junior specialist in social advertising)
 - **Mateusz** and **Michał** (interns)
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Team Member Profiles

- **Piotr (30)** has tenure equal to Maria's. He has been offered promotions to team leader several times but has shown no interest in managerial responsibilities. He is passionate about creating and designing ad campaigns, but dislikes project management tasks, budgeting, and progress monitoring. A calm professional, Piotr is respected for his deep knowledge and experience, but struggles to listen to others' ideas—he only embraces suggestions once he has thought them through himself. Typically, he withdraws, then presents a fully formed concept at the next meeting.
- **Kuba (25)** is Piotr's opposite: fiery, extroverted, and loves being the center of attention. A true "media animal," he constantly generates ideas (some only loosely fleshed out). He is a visionary and inspirer, confident in his skills—especially in print and TV advertising—and excels at cost management. For Kuba, success is measured purely by project efficiency and ROI.
- **Paweł (29)** is a technology fanatic, convinced that digital channels are the only worthwhile medium—traditional TV, print, or posters are a waste of money. His ideas are innovative but often laden with jargon that others find hard to follow. When asked to clarify, he can be sarcastic ("if you'd stop using that old PC and buy a tablet..."), and in meetings he often hides behind his MacBook, typing furiously—hard to tell if he's taking notes or surfing the web. Nonetheless, his internet campaigns and website projects win widespread acclaim.
- **Kasia (42)** serves as both lawyer and accountant. She frequently grounds Kuba's grand ideas by pointing out budget constraints, legal limits, or shaky rationales. Fact-driven yet capable of fiery debate, she resents criticism in her area of expertise—being the only lawyer on the team, she knows her opinion carries the most weight. She sometimes struggles to accept feedback from much younger colleagues.
- **Martyna (24)** is a recent hire, a quiet idealist whose thesis focused on social advertising. She views marketing as a responsible form of communication, and business ethics

matter deeply to her—rooted in her spirituality and the fact she studied at the Catholic University of Lublin. She protests any advertising she feels betrays public trust, leading to frequent clashes with Kuba.

- **Mateusz** and **Michał** are interns given assurances that strong performance could lead to permanent positions. Mateusz studies graphic design at the Academy of Fine Arts, while Michał studies Management. Both are highly motivated.

The Leadership Change

Two months ago, Stefan—the Director of Media and Maria’s direct boss—suffered a serious car accident. It quickly became clear he would be unable to work for at least six months. In an emergency move, the company’s CEO appointed Grzegorz in his place. Grzegorz, 45, is a top-tier management specialist with an impressive portfolio of successful projects. He spent the past five years working in the U.S. for a large consulting firm similar to Advisor.

Grzegorz could not be more different from his predecessor. On the very day he was announced as Stefan’s replacement, he called all Team Leaders to a meeting. He gave a brief self-introduction—by American standards highlighting his project successes—outlined his management plans for the division, and asked that each team leader submit a report on their recent activities by the next day. Maria left that meeting feeling somewhat belittled, as if she were a novice.

The New Directives

The following day, Grzegorz convened another meeting. He reviewed each project report—and found most unsatisfactory. Still, he said he trusted the leaders. He asserted that, based on his experience, the firm must prioritize client service by reducing operational costs. He suggested that over the next year, Advisor should cut headcount. He asked each Team Leader to assess their team members over the coming month and establish a “usefulness hierarchy.” From the bottom tier, he would select those to be let go. He also requested that project leaders prepare individual “profiles” (brief memos) characterizing each employee.

Although the Team Leaders protested, it had no effect. Grzegorz listened politely, then presented slides comparing Advisor’s cost structure with that of its largest competitors—revealing that payroll expenses were indeed driving costs up and hindering new contracts.

Team Fallout

Maria returned to her team in low spirits. She withheld commentary, choosing to think through the issue—especially since they were in the middle of a critical campaign with potential for high revenue. She decided to wait two days, until the new-project details were finalized.

The next day, however, the “scandal” exploded. Her team already knew of Grzegorz’s plans and accused Maria of hiding the information. A heated meeting ensued, during which each team member voiced dissatisfaction. They wouldn’t say how they learned about the meeting with

Grzegorz. The tense session ended with Maria asking for a week to finish the current project phase before revisiting the matter.

Work proceeded slowly—and Maria noticed that no one was as engaged as before. Furthermore, four team members requested individual meetings.

Kuba demanded feedback on his performance—and wanted it before the next week’s meeting. He revealed he had a job offer from a competitor abroad and needed to decide by Friday.

Martyna, after long silence, confessed she was in a moral dilemma: she knew the source of the leak. She had discovered that Mateusz is Grzegorz’s son from his first marriage—information neither had disclosed. She also knew they maintained contact (Mateusz visits his father every weekend). Part of her felt she shouldn’t involve Maria (she hadn’t told her colleagues), but she also felt hiding this was unethical on the part of management.

Kasia, in an emotional conversation, revealed that her husband is seriously ill and that she is in the early months of pregnancy. She knew she might have to spend part of her pregnancy at home and wanted to know how this would affect her evaluation.

Michał arrived visibly upset. After ensuring privacy, he placed a yellow Post-It on the table reading, “we don’t want faggots here.” In a trembling voice, he admitted he is gay but had never disclosed this. Someone had discovered it and played a cruel prank, causing him deep hurt. He feared that, despite legal protections, knowledge of his sexuality would influence his evaluation.

Questions for Maria

What problems and decisions is Maria facing?

How should she approach them?

Could this situation have been avoided? Or is it one of those crises that could not be predicted?