

The Crisis in Advisor Company

Maria is working for the medium sized company Advisor. She specializes in consulting focused on media and marketing. She is 32 years old and has several serious successes on her account. Advisor is a consulting and marketing partner, focused on medium firms looking for new ways of communication. Typically the Advisor is responsible for marketing change management, redefinition of brands or image changing campaigns. Every project is carried by a team consisting of a few members.

During last years of professional career Maria was promoted from a position of a trade specialist (her main task was acquisition of new customers) to a manager. Finally she reached the role of an independent manager. She used to work with a team consisting of approximately 10 people. She also switched from customer relation area to project management and she was very happy about it.

Now her team consists of PETER (expert on ads and copywriter), KUBA (expert of press and media), PAUL (expert of internet related things and new technology), KATE (lawyer), MARTYNA (young specialist focused on advertising business and social media) and two young guys: MATTHEW and MICHAEL (who are interns).

Lets describe the team with some details:

Peter has the roughly the same experience as Maria (he is also in his early thirties). He was offered with promotion many times (reaching the managerial rank) but every time he declined. He said he had no interest in changing his responsibility. Peter is fascinated in work in advertising and creation of marketing campaigns. He dislikes all things connected with management, budgeting, issuing control and monitoring progress. He is a type of calm professional and definitely he is not an leader. Associates appreciate him because of his expert knowledge and experience. He has problems with listening to the opinions of other team members. Peter claims that only things he worked on are sufficiently considered and designed. He will gladly recognize ideas from another person, but only after he analyzed them. When faced a discussion between team members Peter typically would step back silently, take no interest in exchange of opinions and he would bring his fully designed idea on next meeting.

KUBA is the exact opposite of Peter. Explosive and extroverted, loves to be in the center of all things. Twenty-five years old Kuba this "natural born media predator". He is always raining ideas from his sleeve, though some of them are detailed. Cuba is the visionary leader and the inspirer. He outlines the strategy (usually good!) but passes the details to others. He sees himself as a perfect professional, especially in the areas of ads: press, radio and television. He

is very good at costs management. Cuba is a good example of an expert oriented on effects. For him project outcome and score is the highest value. People, relations, other things are secondary. In a marketing campaign, he judges only from the efficiency point of view.

PAUL (29 years old) is a technology fanatic. He is a strong supporter of using Internet channels in marketing communication. Television, press or posters are a waste of money for him. Paul has interesting ideas, but they are often so full of technological jargon that it is not always easy to understand them. In addition, when asked for explanations, he can be slightly ironic ("you know, if you didn't work on an old PC, but finally bought a tablet... its 21st Century, for Matrix sake!"), and even mean. At a meeting, it is sometimes difficult to make contact with him, because he hides his laptop (Mac, of course) and taps the keys staring at the screen. It's hard to tell if he's taking notes or surfing the web. On the other hand, his Internet campaigns or website designs arouse widespread admiration.

KATE (42 years old) is a lawyer and accountant. She often calls skywalking Kuba to the Earth, pointing out him defects of his visionary, mind-stretching ideas (the lack of budget, inability to cross the boundaries of law, doubtful justification etc.). Kate is factual, rational, steady but can go into discussion with "no step back" policy. She does not like when someone criticizes her opinion, especially in her areas of competence (being the only person with the group with both legal and economical education and she knows that is the "strongest link in the chain"). Her self-esteem is, however, a pose. Kate has a problem how to accept if a younger person criticize her, because deep in her heart she is afraid of the next generation.

MARTYNA (24 years old) is a recent company acquisition. This calm girl falls into the idealist type of person. Her recently defended master thesis concerned ads social marketing ethics. For her, marketing is, first of all, a responsible way of communication. Ethial approach to business is important for her, as she has deep spirituality and religiosity (she graduated from a respected catholic university in Lublin). She protests fiercely when designed advertisement campaign crosses her beliefs or is an abuse of trust. On this background Martyna often comes into disputes with Kuba.

MATTHEW and MICHAEL are students recently taken on internship. Both have obtained assurance, that if they show good progress, they would have a chance on employment in Advisor company. Matthew is a graphic designer (studying in the local Academy of Fine Arts), and Michael deals with management. They both have big motivation to the work.

Two months ago Stephen, the branch director of media projects and a direct supervisor of Maria (and other teams), had a serious car accident. It is obvious, that by the next year he will be in no condition to work. That is why the CEO of the Advisor in an emergency mode enrolled Greg. This 53 years old manager is high class expert in management. His portfolio of completed projects is impressive. For recent 5 years Greg worked in USA, for a large company of similar profile to Advisor.

Greg is quite different than his predecessor. The very day, he replaced Stephen he called all managers to a meeting. He introduced himself shortly (according to US standards of introduction he started from describing his successes in recent projects), outlined own plans for management the Advisor and asked everyone to prepare reports from their activities and plans. Maria she left the meeting with in not very pleasant mood. It seemed, that the new chief is a "besserwisser" and will treat her as a beginner. However, she prepared the report to her best knowledge.

The next day held another meeting. Greg listened carefully to the information about projects, but he seemed to be not very happy about the overall image. Then he presented a few slides with his detailed analysis of Advisor situation. He compared the company's cost profile with his own calculations and benchmarked the results to the estimations on direct competitors. The conclusions that appeared later were gloomy. The cost of wages was relatively high and became a weight that impeded the acquisition of new customers. Advisor was clearly over the market prices. Moreover, the current projects' progress was not satisfactory. He placed the responsibility on team leaders to impose more efficiency on the teams.

Greg stated that according to his experiences in business, the company must take care about customers by lowering costs that hindered new activities. He suggested that Advisor should reduce employment over the next year. Each team leader should evaluate their team members over the next month and define a "suitability hierarchy." From among the "least useful" Greg will choose people who will be reduced. He also asked project managers to prepare individual "flashcards" describing their employees briefly.

Despite this, the new director emphasized that he has trust in team managers. He declared his full support and help with the management.

Team managers, of course, began to protest, recalling that until Stephen's accidents Advisor seems to be doing fine, but it did not help much. Greg listened to their opinions, but then he recalled slides on which he compared the cost structure of Advisor and the largest competitors. It turned out that indeed, the wage fund significantly increases the pricing and makes it difficult to win contracts. It was hard to discuss with numbers.

Maria returned to the team in a minor mood. For the time being, she refrained from commenting, wanting to think over the whole problem. She was hesitant to tell her team about the Greg's speech, especially since they were working on a hugely important campaign that could generate a lot of revenue. She decided to wait two days until arrangements were made for the new project.

Unfortunately, it did not work. A day later, the things went mad. It turned out that her team already knew about the planned cost-cutting activities and that they considered the lack of information from Maria as an attempt to hide this information. There was a joint team meeting, where each of Maria's subordinates expressed their dissatisfaction in a rather sharp tone. The co-workers did not want to tell her how they had learned about the course of the meeting at Greg's. The unpleasant conversation ended with Maria's request to wait with the matter until the next stage of the project was closed. She agreed with the team that they would come back to the topic in a week.

The work progressed slowly. Maria noticed that none of her subordinates work with the same commitment as before. In addition, four people from the team asked her for individual meetings.

Kuba said that he expects Maria to evaluate his involvement so far. And that's before the meeting next week. He did not hide that he received a job offer from a competing company and would like to make a decision by Friday at the latest. He loyally warns that the proposal is interesting and involves going abroad. This perspective seems promising for him.

When Martyna arrived, she didn't say anything for a long time, but finally she stammered that she was in a very difficult situation and didn't really know how she should behave. The point is that she knows the source of the "leak" of information from the meeting with Greg. It turns out that a Matthew (intern) is Greg's son from his first marriage. Neither a student or his father talked about it, and Martyna found it out completely by accident. She also knows that they keep in touch, and Matthew visits the director's house every weekend. On the one hand, Martyna believed that she should not tell Maria about it (she did not reveal this information to her teammates), but on the other, she considered hiding this fact (about family ties) as unethical on the part of the boss.

Then came Kate. In a very emotional conversation, she confessed that she was in a difficult situation. It turned out that her husband is seriously ill, and they are expecting a child (he is in the first months of pregnancy). She also realizes that she will probably have to spend part

of her pregnancy at home and would like to hear from Maria if and how her confession will affect her judgment.

Michael (the art intern) came to the interview very nervous. He made sure that no one could overhear (even by accident) their discussion, then placed a yellow post-it note on the table. On the piece of paper in clumsy letters was written: "We don't want faggots here." In a calm, but emotional voice, he confessed to Maria that he was indeed gay, but he never informed anyone from work about it. Apparently, however, someone found out about it and played nasty on him, causing a lot of pain. Michael has no idea whether the author of the anonymous card is someone from the team or simply an employee of the company. However, he is afraid that this information will reach Maria and, despite the statutory prohibition of discrimination, will affect his assessment.

What are the problems and decisions that Maria faced? How should she take care of them? What is the main problem of the company? Could one predict this situation? Or maybe it's one of the disaster that can't be evaded?