



## Case Study

### Protecting & Restoring Talent in the Face of Adversity

**How do you save a valuable leader (and not lose her heart commitment to your organization) when you are under the gun to fire her in the face of a potential loss of over 1 million?**

In today's demanding business environment of non-stop consolidations and system changes, leaders are stretched in all directions. Their plates are full and, it seems, getting fuller. In this environment, it can be difficult to keep a close eye on all responsibilities and oversights can happen. Sometimes because of the consequences of the mistake, the initial reaction is to terminate the offender. The facts may support this response. Often, what lies beneath the surface can tell a different story. In times like these, leaders need to muster the courage to do the right thing. Doing so will help you achieve higher business results. It will also have a positive impact on people and overall talent development, and help the organization benefit in the long run.

I experienced one of those times when I was named senior manager of a large, significant division. One of my new direct reports was Beth. Beth had been with the organization some 15 years and was a person of strong character and technically savvy. Unfortunately, she was stretched beyond her ability to give the proper attention to all her responsibilities. This caused her to lose focus on a critical area. An annual audit of a significant control account identified exceptions exceeding \$1 million and placed the company at risk of losing the full amount. Shortly thereafter I came under strong pressure to fire her.

Fortunately, my executive and the president of the organization were willing to allow me time for a quick and thorough assessment. This gave me the opportunity to investigate the facts, develop and staff a loss mitigation task force and propose a reasonable plan of action concerning the potential loss, the structure of the division and Beth's future.

After the investigation and much discussion with stakeholders, I was able to show my executive that, while Beth had indeed mishandled this responsibility, it was also true that she had had too much put on her plate, even by today's rigorous standards. Examples helped demonstrate the reality of this. I concurred with my executive's request to give Beth a new appraisal and drop her performance rating. We agreed to re-organize the division, form a task force of loaned associates to mitigate potential losses and place Beth in a more manageable position.

Beth was certain her career was over and thought it was best to leave the company. It took many discussions to assure her that her career was far from over. Eventually, she began to experience the truth of this.

These leadership actions and Beth's professional response saved a person of strong character, abilities and commitment to the organization. A few years later, Beth was one of four company-wide associates rewarded with an expenses paid trip to Hawaii for her contributions in the successful conversion to the new accounting system that had been at the root of her loss of focus. Following the conversion, Beth was eventually promoted to Senior Vice-President in charge of all updates and changes to this company-wide system. She continues to serve her company well in this role! The \$1 million at risk was managed by the task force and the eventual losses were minimal!

## **You might consider these steps if you are facing a similar situation:**

1. Acknowledge the severity of the situation with all stakeholders. Express your commitment to investigate the concern immediately.
2. Demonstrate a clear sense of focus, direction and organization and immediately begin implementing near term triage.
3. Keep all stakeholders apprised of your investigation and findings regularly.
4. Create a team of borrowed and experienced associates to bring focus, resources and resolutions to the problem areas.
5. Consider re-organizing the work functions long term in light of business needs.
6. Begin to build a trusting and open relationship with “your” Beth. Be honest and truthful, pulling no punches. Make sure she knows you are on her side.
7. Begin to share the good you see in Beth with Beth, your executive and others.
8. Following a thorough investigation, recommend a near term and long term plan for the area and for “your” Beth’s development.
9. Provide on-going updates on progress. Celebrate achievements!!
10. Move on to the next challenge!

***Are you seeking to do the right thing in a similar situation? Doing the right thing will increase business results, have a positive impact on people, talent development and your organization will benefit in the long run.***

***If you would like a free Executive Management Assessment with me to discuss how I can help you achieve the greatest success possible, please call me or email me and we’ll get clear about the best immediate next steps for the success of you and your team.***

***Bob Reissiger***

***REISSIGER Coaching***

***Bobr@coachingthecompellingway.com***

***[www.coachingthecompellingway.com](http://www.coachingthecompellingway.com)***

***770-279-9965***