

HR: For the People?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study follows the career of Robert Peters (pseudonym), a middle level manager who faces numerous challenges as a team manager during his fledgling years. He is constantly questioning his role as the managerial representative who has to take care of his team members, their interests, and professional welfare. Scenarios such as the ethicality of senior management in ordering their lower level managers to spy on the employees during unfolding of trade unions activity, employees' rights during various change processes, disciplinary actions taken on employees which may lack human compassion, and issues pertaining to equity due to bias and nepotism are explored. This is an effort to understand the unequal quotient between labor and management, hidden depths in human resources (HR) role and functions, and ethical dilemmas which HR managers confront during their corporate career. This case study will enable readers to critically reflect on the responsibilities of HR, including its challenging role as the intermediary between the labor and management.

CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

Robert Peters is a middle level manager who works for a major advertising and sales company based in the United States. He is employed within the manufacturing sector and is responsible for overseeing people and processes within the business. Robert studied engineering and management in college and started with this company upon graduation. He was given extensive entry-level training, and amassed additional capability through practical application. Robert was also introduced to the company's various HR policies and procedures as a part of his comprehensive onboarding. He aspired to become a personnel manager at some point later in his career and had a great rapport with people in general. At that time, the company hired its managers at the ground level to allow them to build skills on the front line as a basis for growth within the organization. The business model also enabled operations level personnel to lead various aspects of the production process. Along with other employees within the organization, Robert ensured production requirements were met to deliver customer orders. For fifteen years, he advanced through the ranks with a respectable level of success, but not without meeting his share of challenges.

At the start, Robert was a team level manager responsible for four operating shifts of personnel. The workdays were long, and the requirements were intense, but teamwork was among the best in the field. Robert had a work ethic that made people want to do things he asked of them. He garnered the respect and adulation of his team, being regarded as a dependable and a caring manager. When employees had a personal need, Robert would go out of his way to make sure it was satisfied to the best of his ability. He knew many of the team members on a personal level and would talk with them about their hobbies or outside work interests. Robert also knew names of their family members, and frequently inquired about their well-being. He was considered a genuine person – someone the teams could talk to and confide in. The people within his department trusted Robert and this relationship yielded stellar results. Through strong system execution and a workforce of supporting technicians, Robert was promoted to department manager. In this new role, Robert's responsibilities expanded, and workload expectations grew in multiples. Even then, he still had close contact with the team and desired to do all that he could do for them. He continued to ensure team celebrations were scheduled when results exceeded target and prioritized service anniversaries and other milestones. Robert enjoyed the fruits of his labor, but he faced many unexpected challenges along the way. These issues are tied to conflicts between management and personnel in Robert's care, which he must navigate tactfully for the advancement of his career.

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