

Case 8 The Big Promotion

Devon and Isabella arrived outside their boss's office at the same time and took a seat. Both exchanged a cordial "hello," but they didn't say much else as they waited outside. Fidgeting nervously in their seats, the two knew that only one of them was going to receive what would be the biggest promotion of their careers.

Devon and Isabella worked for a large software company and each was responsible for managing one of the company's largest divisions. Both had been in their current position for years, hoping that a spot at the company's corporate headquarters would open up. That time had arrived a month earlier when one of the company's senior executives retired. Such positions did not open frequently, so Devon and Isabella knew that this was a tremendous opportunity.

For the past month, they had prepared for their meeting with the company's CEO, Paul McAllister. Although Paul already knew Devon and Isabella well, he wanted to meet with them at the same time to see how they handled the pressure of being interviewed in front of each other.

After waiting for what seemed like an eternity, Devon and Isabella looked up simultaneously as Paul opened the door to his office.

"Isabella. Devon. Good to see you. Come on in," said Paul.

Devon and Isabella entered Paul's office and took the chairs ready for them at the front of his desk.

Paul broke the silence by saying, "Well, you both know why you are here, so there's no need to waste time. I already know your resumes backwards and forwards, and I've gathered as much information as possible from those who know you best, so now it comes down to hearing it, 'straight from the horses' mouths. I'm going to ask you both one question only, and it's the same question for both of you. Let me flip a coin to see who will respond first." He flipped the coin. "Devon, you're up."

Devon sat up with confidence, eyeing Paul.

Paul began. "To function effectively in an executive position requires strong leadership skills. Both of you have gained valuable experience as managers of your respective divisions, making decisions that have resulted in strong performances from those divisions. But you have also, as managers, followed directives that this corporate office has handed down. As an executive, this will change. You will no longer take directives—you will give them. In short, you will be responsible for guiding the future of this company, and its success will depend greatly on you. So my question to you both is: How do you plan to succeed as a leader if you are offered this position?"

"Well Paul," responded Devon, "That is an excellent question. I believe that, to be a successful leader, one must be able to exert influence. When you get down to it, that is what leadership is all about—the ability to influence others. I have demonstrated that I have this ability since I joined the ranks of management." Devon paused, collecting his thoughts. "It is my opinion that leadership boils down to what actions you take with your employees. For me, leadership is all about rewarding and punishing appropriately. I try to make my employees' jobs less complicated by stating exactly what they need to do, assigning particular tasks, setting appropriate goals, and ensuring that my subordinates have the resources they need."

Paul listened carefully as Devon continued. "Basically, I am an organizer. When employees accomplish a given task or goal, I reward them appropriately for their work. When employees fail to accomplish an assignment, an appropriate response from me is needed. If it is clear that the employee did not try to accomplish the task, then punishment is necessary, and this punishment could range from a verbal reprimand to termination, depending, of course, on the

circumstances. If the employee did not have the necessary skills or resources to complete a task, then my job is to provide those skills and resources. By rewarding and punishing employees based on their performance, I am able not only to influence employee behavior to match the goals of the organization but also to send a clear message as to what I expect."

Devon added, "I also want to note that a strong sense of fairness guides all of my decisions—I reward and punish justly. As a result, my employees are satisfied with their work and perform at high levels. So, I will bring my ability to influence behavior with me if I am offered this position, and in doing so will be able to shape the future of our company."

"Thank you Devon," responded Paul. "Isabella, how would you answer this question?"

"Well Paul," said Isabella, "I think you'll find that my perspective on leadership is different from Devon's. Although I certainly agree with Devon that giving clear guidance to employees, setting appropriate goals, and rewarding employees for accomplishing tasks is a fundamental leadership quality, I believe that it takes more than that to be a successful leader. You see, I do not believe that just anyone can be a leader. To be a leader requires a certain 'something' that not all people possess."

"And you believe that you possess that certain something?" interrupted Paul.

Isabella grinned. "I think you'll find that my record suggests that I do, in fact. You see, successful leadership is about motivating people beyond the formal requirements of their jobs. It is not enough in today's global economy to simply ensure that employees are completing their tasks. To survive, and moreover, grow, leaders must challenge employees to look ahead, to contribute ideas, and to make sacrifices for the good of the company. My job as a leader of this company is to create a vision of where we will be 5, 10, and 15 years from now. I see us creating new technologies, as well as merging existing technologies, to give our company the competitive advantage it needs to sustain growth in the long term. By sharing this vision with my employees, we will all be able to pursue the same goals."

Isabella continued, "I inspire my subordinates to see the company as their own, rather than as a means to a paycheck. I consider employee input and the different needs of each worker, and I challenge each and every one of them to think outside the box and develop innovative solutions to the problems facing us. The end result is, in my opinion, a highly motivated workforce with a common goal—to make sure our company is the industry leader."

Paul nodded, thinking about both answers. He had scrutinized each person's record carefully, and both were qualified for the job. However, the two candidates differed in important ways. Devon had built a strong reputation for being a traditional, straightforward leader, motivating his employees well, setting appropriate goals, and ensuring that employees accomplished tasks on time—even ahead of schedule. However, Devon was not known for developing the most creative solutions, and he lacked the vision that Paul knew was an important competency to have as an executive.

Isabella, in contrast, had built a reputation as being a visionary leader. Though her ideas were a bit unconventional at times, in many cases they were directly responsible for getting the company out of a jam. In addition, her magnetic personality made her a favorite among employees. However, Isabella often revealed a somewhat egotistical personality, and Paul was unsure whether this egoism would be amplified if she were in a more authoritative position.

Paul had to make a tough decision. He thought about his company's future. Things were relatively stable now, and business was good, but he knew that stability was not always certain.

"I would like to thank you both for coming today. You're making this a tough decision for me," said Paul. "I need to think about this a bit more, but I'll

be getting back to you soon." He paused, then added, "You'll have my answer tomorrow morning."

Questions for Discussion

1. Using terms from the text, how would you describe Devon's leadership style? How would you describe Isabella's leadership style?
2. Whose leadership style do you believe would be more effective, Isabella's or Devon's? Why? What, if any, situational factors might their effectiveness depend on?
3. If you were Paul, who would you hire and why?
4. What are some potential downsides to each candidate's leadership style?
5. Whose employees do you think are likely to be more motivated, Devon's or Isabella's? Whose employees are likely to have higher job satisfaction, trust in leadership, and organizational commitment? Why?
6. Based on their leadership styles, in what type of organizational structure would Devon be most effective? What about Isabella? Why?