

Supervision & Workload

**“People don’t leave Bad jobs,
They Leave Bad Bosses”**

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“The opportunity to guide others to their fullest potential is an honor and one that should not be taken lightly. As leaders, we hold the lives of others in our hands.

These hands need to be gentle and caring and always available for support.”

-Ken Blanchard

CASE CHAPTER 14

Rolly on the Roller Coaster: Struggling to Handle Abuse and Workload

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Abstract

The case sheds light on some of the critical issues faced by employees at the workplace. The case provides details for discussion on the idea of abusive supervision topped with excessive workload. The case talks about a retail company in the U.S where employees working in the warehouse are experiencing critical working conditions due to impolite and hostile supervisor and over-load of work and other responsibilities. The case offers its readers an opportunity to understand the issue and enhance decision-making skills on the topic address such issues through debate and discussion.

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Synopsis

It was a Thursday afternoon just before the Easter week when Rolly, the warehouse assistant at the Yee-Mart Stores Mississippi, heard her warehouse supervisor Alex shouting. He was yelling at one of the warehouse assistants to move the delivery pallets quickly so that the lorry could be released as there were two more in line waiting to be unloaded. Being a hyper store, it has two terminals to unload two trucks simultaneously. However, since the company has been downsizing due to tough economic conditions and taxes, there are only seven people left in the warehouse department apart from the three-shift supervisors. Soon as Alex reached the Cage area to drag pet food items, he saw Rolly and said, *'hey Rolly! what are you rolling on?'* Hearing that, Rolly went fuming. For a moment, she decided to reply to him but then decided not to do so as Alex would manipulate and use it to complain against her to the line manager. She knows Alex and his evil nature. She is fed up working under him but has no other option. Alex always pushes her and others in the warehouse for more work due to shortage of staff. He is impolite and frequently uses abusive language. Working under him is like sitting on a roller coaster for 8 hours and has started creating frustration and work anxiety in Rolly and other warehouse employees.

Excess of workload and abuse has become a major issue at the workplace these days (Ahmed, Khalid, Islam & Abro, 2019). Organizations are working hard to cope with the tough economic conditions through cutting down on employee numbers and the work ends up being doubled on the remaining. This resultantly puts pressure on people responsible for managing the work (i.e. managers and supervisors) to ensure they get the job done from minimal headcount effectively in a given time. In the same vein, this situation will create high job stress in the warehouse working environment. According to Autry and Daugherty (2011), job-related stress such as poor person-organization fit, and job dissatisfaction are the most important factors that influence employee turnover among warehouse operations employees. Indeed, as stated by Murphy and Poist (1993), a

Transportation and Distribution survey found that warehouse workers were among the most challenging employees to be hired, and were recorded with high annual turnover among these workers. On the flipside, unresolved issues of workload, workplace abuse, and conflict between managers and supervisors could negatively affect employees' productivity. Up to this point, the important value to be learned here is that managerial decisions regarding the "human harmony approach" of warehousing can have severe effects in terms of productivity, cost, and customer service. Therefore, the challenge of managing excessive workload and abuse to improve productivity should not be underestimated. Conclusively, majority of workplaces end up with unintended consequences at work, particularly between the managers/supervisors and their subordinates (Alzyoud & Odhiabo, 2019). Similar seems to have started happening at Yee Stores.

Yee-Mart

Yee-Mart is a retail store chain operating in the North American region, including the United States, Canada and Mexico. The company has 57 stores across three nations offering a wide range of edible, non-edible, household, homeware, kitchen, electronics and clothing. Unlike other major retailers, Ye-Mart only operates through mega stores, which they call 'hypermarkets.'

Retail businesses are facing fierce competition these days, coupled with even more stringent economic conditions globally (Deloitte, 2019). Though some quarters of the last year did show great retail results yet still a majority of them are tightening their grip on employee numbers to minimize operational costs, the report further states.

Rolly

Rolly is 38-year old Mexican American. She lives in the area of town hall with his husband and three kids. She and her husband moved to Mississippi from Arkansas in 2013 to look for better work opportunities. She has worked in the warehouse department throughout most of her

career and holds forklift license as well. Her husband serves at a local pub and together, they work to fulfill their family needs. Talking about moving to Mississippi, she said,

'we had high aspirations as Mississippi is a happening place but we didn't get much out of it. I'm not saying we are not OK; you know what I mean, but it is just that we are still in the struggling phase, working hard to make the both ends meet'

Rolly and Working in the Warehouse

Working in the warehouse is a matter of big responsibility which comes with a great deal of physical and mental pressure (Braam, van Dormolen & Frings-Dresen (1996). Job in the warehouse is not to serve customers but making sure you get all there on the shop floor to serve the customer. In other words, if the warehouse work is not taken care of effectively, the store cannot serve the customers.

Talking about this to Rolly she said,

'working in the warehouse is pretty tough. I have to push pallets, drive forklift, drag heavy cages. Not only this, working hours in the yard for unloading deliveries in the hot, cold and/or rainy days is another hectic piece of work. It is not mental but also physically demanding too. We have to plan on segregating the deliveries for each section, supporting the sorting of stuff, securing and storing the stuff carefully and a lot more. Trust me, this is way beyond what people on the shop floor do' Talking further on it she said, *'though I am working here since 2014 and know everything about my job, however, since it requires a lot of mental and physical energy, it gets very exhausting. See, I'm a mom of three, and I have sometimes to go back home and do the cooking too and this job leaves me with no energy to do anything after a long 8 hours shift.*

Alex

Alex is one of the three warehouse supervisors in the Yee-Mart store where Rolly works. Alex has worked with the company in the same store

for 13 years. He started as a warehouse assistant and now warehouse supervisors. He is the oldest amongst the three supervisors and therefore enjoys authority above all to a certain extent. Alex is also the one who makes the schedule for the warehouse team and is also responsible for any administrative affairs. In sum, he is experienced and influential. He is different when it comes to working, he wants everything to be done as quickly as possible, which makes him aggressive and up for an argument with every other person.

Battle on the Ground

After nearly going through one of the toughest Friday evening shifts of the week where Rolly and other warehouse employees worked non-stop; some of them even compromising on their lunch breaks (on their lunch breaks *(by shortening it)* to get the job done in time; so that they all go and enjoy the weekend happily; Alex came rushing from the office and said, 'guys, Paul has called-in sick and we are already down as Ailene is on holidays so I want any two of you to stay. Looking at four of them including Rolly he said, *'guys come` on I don't have hours to stare at your faces, you will be paid overtime.'* Hearing that, Rolly said I cannot do that Alex, I have kids waiting for me, sorry. *'Similar reply came from others as well as no one wanted to work for Alex and tolerate his impolite behavior for few extra bucks while sacrificing the weekend night,'* said Rolly. *'I had a tiring day and so everyone else, but things went smooth as John was the supervisor, but the next shift was of Alex. People would have thought of staying for a couple of hours to support which we usually do but seeing him (Alex) being In-charge, they all decided to complete their regular hours and leave,'* she added further.

Alex went furious and started yelling at everyone. Rolly and others did not respond and went back to the chiller and dumping area to finish their work. Seeing that Alex went crazy and started using abusive language. He yelled at all of them saying, *'you people just don't wanna help me. I knew it you m*****.'* When he said this, Rolly was near the dumping area and so could hear him. She returned to him and started shouting at her saying, *'why are you abusing? how you dare use such a*

language.' His slang language made Rolly go mental. People came rushing from the shop floor hearing the screams and took both of them away from each other.

Dave Murray, the Store Manager, was called in to control the situation. Dave immediately apologized to Rolly and asked her to go home saying, *'please relax, don't mess up with your weekend. I will speak to him and look into the issue.'* *'Dave, everything has a limit and Alex crossed the limit this time. Everyone working in the warehouse is a witness of how he treats us and talks to us which is why no one wants to work with him. We feel as if we are in hellfire when we are scheduled to work in his shift only because of his uncivil and impolite behavior. I am coming back on Monday and will meet the personnel manager to file a grievance against him'*, Rolly replied.

Rolly went to changing room, took her belongings from the locker, signed out and left. It was an unfortunate end of a working day, which ended up spoiling Rolly's entire weekend night and the rest of the Saturday. She discussed the matter with her husband to see what she should do. The incident made Rolly so demotivated that she started thinking of even leaving the job.

Suggested Readings

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Discussion Questions

Q1. Who is Rolly, what she does and how you see Rolly as a typical family person?

Q2. How do you see Alex and his work behavior?

Q3. What could be the possible reason(s) behind Alex`s uncivil behavior at work?

Q4. How do you see the refusal of extra hours to Alex by the warehouse employees? What could have been done by Alex in this regard?

Q5. What are your suggestions to Rolly for Monday?

Q6. How can such incidents turn out to be critical for Yee-Mart?

Q7. To avoid such incidents, what suggestions do you have for the management? Justify.

Exhibit 1: Map of Mississippi



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