

Becoming Involved in Employees' Personal Issues

Written by Steve Marr

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We all have employees who come to us and share personal problems and information. My experience has taught me not to become overly involved in an employee's personal challenges. I listen and endeavor to triage the situation when somebody is venting legitimately. For example, if a spouse has a cancer diagnosis, I allow them an opportunity to express their pain and suffering. We need to be good listeners.

There are several reasons I don't get involved in staff issues such as financial difficulties, marital concerns or other personal issues. I avoid this, not because I don't care, but because when I insert myself into an employee's problem; the situation becomes partly my problem. I don't give investment advice because if what I suggest goes wrong, the person will likely blame me even if other ideas turned to gold.

Also, I may not have the full story. If a person discusses their marriage issues or complains about their spouse spending too much money, I only have part of the picture. Half of the picture will frequently lead to disastrous advice.

Besides, in many cases I am not qualified to dispense counseling advice. For example, where addiction may be involved, I can share resources and agencies for assistance. If the problem is financial, I can refer them to a budget counselor. I may suggest a marriage counselor when appropriate. These experts have the time and energy to develop a full picture of the situation and dispense counseling. I avoid becoming part of the problem if the situation deteriorates.

King Solomon wrote, "Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears." (Proverbs 26:17, ESV) The picture I get from this verse is what happens when you grab a strange dog by the ears. Sooner or later you must let go and the dog may bite you. When we get overly involved in our employees' personal issues even with the best intentions, we get bitten and sometimes badly.