

### “LEADING EMPLOYEES ON CREATES MISTRUST IN ORGANIZATIONS”



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Marion was a marketing manager for a successful professional services company. She had been in her most recent role for the past three years, which was preceded by eight years of working her way up from marketing coordinator to manager. She had a reputation as a fast learner, hard worker and dedicated employee.

As her boss was preparing for his retirement, she assumed that she would be promoted as his replacement. They had had discussed this career goal for some time, and she knew that her boss would endorse her candidacy for the Director of Marketing. When her boss finally left and the replacement requisition was opened, she bid on the position, as was the protocol in her company.

In Marion's mind, this was merely a formality that she had to go through. She had worked hard and waited patiently for this opportunity. Her performance appraisals over the last several years were stellar, and she could not imagine anyone else being more dedicated or a better fit for the job.

In the meantime, her boss's boss - a vice president - privately had concluded that he had no intention of promoting Marion. He did not feel that she was "aggressive" enough, and he wanted someone with a fresh perspective from outside of the organization. While this was certainly his prerogative, he made an error in judgment that many people in his circumstances make: he did not tell Marion the truth of his intentions.

The VP feared that if he did, she would make an issue out of the circumstances, and possibly create an awkward situation for him that he did not want to deal with. In addition, he needed her to keep the department running smoothly for the interim. While indirectly leading her on, he discreetly interviewed other candidates off-site. Several weeks later he introduced the new Director of Marketing. This is the way that Marion learned that she did not get the job. Within three months, this valuable employee was gone.

The offending executive might rationalize that he technically had done nothing wrong, and that he did not lie. However, what he did not realize is that half-truths or lying by omission is easily seen by others. Ultimately, it is this type of behavior which creates mistrust of management in organizations, and which discourages people from wanting to work for them.

The VP could have maintained his integrity and dealt fairly with Marion by offering the following: "Marion, I know that you have been a hard working employee, and that you and Roger had hoped that you would replace him when he retired. I will certainly interview you for the position, but I must tell you up front that I am also intending to interview other candidates from the outside. In the meantime, I appreciate the professional way in which you are keeping your department running."

When The VP finally made his decision, he owed Marion the minimal courtesy of letting her know ahead of time - and privately - of the decision he had made, and why. This way even if she was disappointed at not being selected; she might not have left the company if she felt that she was dealt with fairly and respectfully.

(Adapted from author's previously published column in the Syracuse newspapers)