

CASE 4.3

We Are Family

Betsy Moore has been hired as the director of marketing and communications for a medium-sized college in the Midwest. With a long history of success as a marketing and public relations professional, she was the unanimous choice of the hiring committee. Betsy is excited to be working for Marianne, the vice president of college advancement, who comes from a similar background to Betsy's. In a meeting with Marianne, Betsy is told the college needs an aggressive plan to revamp and energize the school's marketing and communications efforts. Betsy and Marianne seem in perfect sync with the direction they believe is right for the college's program. Marianne also explains that she has established a departmental culture of teamwork and empowerment and that she is a strong advocate of being a mentor to her subordinates rather than a manager.

Betsy has four direct reports: two writers, Bridget and Suzanne, who are young women in their 20s; and Carol and Francine, graphic designers who are in their 50s. In her first month, Betsy puts together a meeting with her direct reports to develop a new communications plan for the college, presenting the desired goals to the team and asking for their ideas on initiatives and improvements to meet those goals. Bridget and Suzanne provide little in the way of suggested changes, with Bridget asking pointedly, "Why do we need to change anything?"

In her weekly meeting with the vice president, Betsy talks about the resistance to change she encountered from the team. Marianne nods, saying she heard some of the team members' concerns when she went to lunch with them earlier in the week. When Betsy looks surprised, Marianne gives her a knowing smile. "We are like a family here; we have close relationships outside of work. I go to lunch or the movies with Suzanne and Bridget at least once a week. But don't worry; I am only a sounding board for them, and encourage them to come to you to resolve their issues. They know you are their boss."

But they don't come to Betsy. Soon, Bridget stops coming to work at 8 a.m., showing up at 10 a.m. daily. As a result, she misses the weekly planning meetings. When Betsy approaches her about it, Bridget tells her, "It's OK with Marianne; she says as long as I am using the time to exercise and improve my health she supports it."

Betsy meets with Suzanne to implement some changes to Suzanne's pet project, the internal newsletter. Suzanne gets blustery and tearful, accusing Betsy of insulting her work. Later, Betsy watches Suzanne and Marianne leave the office together for lunch. A few hours later, Marianne

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comes into Betsy's office and tells her, "Go easy on the newsletter changes. Suzanne is an insecure person, and she is feeling criticized and put down by you right now."

Betsy's relationship with the other two staff members is better. Neither seems to have the close contact with Marianne that the younger team members have. They seem enthusiastic and supportive of the new direction Betsy wants to take the program in.

As the weeks go by, Marianne begins having regular "Mentor Meetings" with Bridget and Suzanne, going to lunch with both women at least twice a week. After watching the three walk out together one day, Francine asks Betsy if it troubles her. Betsy replies, as calmly as she can, "It is part of Marianne's mentoring program."

Francine rolls her eyes and says, "Marianne's not mentoring anyone; she just wants someone to go to lunch with every day."

After 4 months on the job, Betsy goes to Marianne and outlines the challenges that the vice president's close relationships with Bridget and Suzanne have presented to the progress of the marketing and communications program. She asks her directly, "Please stop."

Marianne gives her the knowing, motherly smile again. "I see a lot of potential in Bridget and Suzanne and want to help foster that," she explains. "They are still young in their careers, and my relationship with them is important because I can provide the mentoring and guidance to develop their abilities."

"But it's creating problems between them and me," Betsy points out. "I can't manage them if they can circumvent me every time they disagree with me. We aren't getting any work done. You and I have to be on the same team."

Marianne shakes her head. "The problem is that we have very different leadership styles. I like to empower people, and you like to boss them around."

Questions

1. Marianne and Betsy do indeed have different leadership styles. What style would you ascribe to Betsy? To Marianne?
2. Does Betsy need to change her leadership style to improve the situation with Bridget and Suzanne? Does Marianne need to change her style of leadership?
3. How can Marianne and Betsy work together?