

## CASE: THE OD LETTERS

Larry,

I enjoyed seeing you last month at the company picnic. I've been trying to reach you by phone, but no luck. I decided this e-mail would do until we can talk. Your secretary said you're working on another project out in the field and couldn't be reached except for emergencies. I have several projects my work teams are involved with, and managing them all gets to be pretty hectic. So I know what you must be up against. I've just been assigned a new project team to manage, the XRS Laser group, and it seems like you had some dealings with them several years back. Is that true? I could sure use someone to bounce some ideas off. I'd appreciate any insights.

Thanks, Ryan

Ryan,

Sorry to have missed your call but I was in Oklahoma City doing some work with one of my new field teams. And now that I'm back, your secretary said you were out of the area on company business. So this is what we get paid the big bucks for! I thought I'd zap this e-mail off instead of waiting for you to get back at headquarters. Your e-mail triggered some old memories. Excuse my rambling in what I will share with you. I'll add the details when I see you. Please keep this confidential.

Yes, you were right about me working with the XRS project team. I looked in my records and it was three years ago that I worked with XRS. I have been indirectly keeping in touch with how things are going there through one of my old contacts.

Their project manager, John Everet, had been under a lot of pressure from his department head, Kate Pringle, to get the project moving at a faster pace. It seems that the team was not turning out any results, and John had been the team manager for over two years. Kate talked to me about the team. She seemed to think there was some friction among members and maybe that John was causing some problems. maintenance

Anyway, Kate contacted me to see if I would go along on the team's annual retreat and maybe help them with several issues—mainly personnel stuff—and, me being an outsider, bring in a new perspective. Because the company requires an outsider from another division to go along and help with the training on team retreats, John didn't have much choice about me being there. He sure didn't go out of his way to make me feel welcome. I decided it would be wise to go easy at first until I got the lay of the land, and retreats generally have gone pretty well. Most teams have gone away from the retreat thinking they have worked out some team issues. Well, this retreat broke the mold.

Anyway, the three-day retreat was weird. The retreat started when we were all loaded up in a bus. None of the participants were told where they were going, so it was to be a big surprise. We traveled about three hours to a dude ranch in the local mountains. I was in charge of the team meetings for the initial afternoon and through the early afternoon of the next day. We initially did a few icebreaker fun exercises, followed by some nonthreatening team exercises. This was followed by reports from the teams on what they thought were effective team skills. It was really low-key stuff and, to get them going, not specific at all about their own work team.

You know, I can remember what happened next as if it were yesterday. John remained really aloof. I had previously not taking serious arranged for him, like everyone else, to be in a team. He joked around with several other men for about 30 minutes before joining his team. Meanwhile, his team went to work without him. When he finally joined them, he didn't say much. After a few minutes he got up and went over to another team and talked about getting a late-night poker game going. I did not confront him at the time, which, reflecting back on things, may have been a mistake on my part.

Well, that was the afternoon session. Not exactly a roaring success, but a number of the participants were really getting into the team exercises. The morning session of the next day went about the same. John played the part of the social butterfly. His behavior was a bit obvious to others. Reflecting back on things, I think he was intimidated. This was his first job as a project manager and I think he thought of himself as the "big cheese," the old-fashioned macho manager. I know he went through the company's team leadership courses, but he must have been sleeping.

We had a team-building exercise followed by a discussion on how team members in general could work better together—again, nothing specific. I remember that one fellow got really annoyed at John's team for joking around. He said something to the effect that this was why it took so long to get anything done. Several others agreed, but then John said that what we were doing in the teams was just a fun game and did not mean anything. That guy got the message from John and got real quiet. And so did several others. The morning session ended OK for the most part, though John and several others left early. They went for a canoe ride out on the lake. You could hear them laughing while everyone else was in their team meetings. When John and several others did not come back for the early afternoon session, everyone kind of drifted off into little groups and did what they wanted. Nothing more happened because the company structures these retreats so that the last day and a half is open for everyone to do what they want. Also, since the company provides no effective way for an outsider like me to make a report or continue to work on issues uncovered at the retreat, I had to let it go.

Well, it looks like John is no longer there and you have inherited the XRS group. There really are some good folks with a lot of potential. Sure, I'd be glad to talk to you in more detail about the situation there. Give me a call when you get back in town and you can buy me lunch.

Larry

(Use the Case Analysis Form on the following page.)

### THE OD LETTERS CASE ANALYSIS FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### I. Problems

##### A. Macro

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

##### B. Micro

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Causes

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### III. Systems affected

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### IV. Alternatives

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### V. Recommendations

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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Larry