Written by Julie Desmond
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You arrive at work thinking you have an opinion, and by the end of the day you have caved under corporate mandates, internal emails, office politics and red tape into an agreeable, agreeing drone, spinning through another week on the corporate hamster wheel.

My kid has a hamster. That hamster has a wheel And for a while now the wheel has been squeaking. All. Night. Long. It's an issue. A little oil? Doesn't help. Shut it away in a closet and keep the door closed? Still too loud. Buy a new one? Nope, too cheap for that. Remove the wheel altogether? Can't, because the hamster, apparently, then wouldn't know what to do with herself. I think this is what some managers think about their employees, that if they weren't micromanaged into an endlessly agreeable spin, they would not know what to do with themselves.

For example, Kris and Terry are responsible for sales in separate divisions of the same organization. Both said their compensation structure was "messed up," meaning they were not getting credit for all of their sales and no one could tell them why. Terry resigned himself to the system. He chose to follow the corporate mandate to bring in new business while keeping an eye out for new job opportunities.

Kris isn't a fan of the hamster wheel. She has questioned the commission structure since day one. A little oil, a high level explanation of the budget, did not help. She repeatedly asked for more information. "They" told her it's just the way it is and basically shut her off. But she was still too loud. She continued to bring in new accounts and develop her sales team, making it difficult to replace her, but she was insistent that there had to be a better, fairer way to compensate the sales team. So "they" did what any caring and intelligent hamster owner would do.

They took a closer look. They sat with Kris and asked her a few questions. When they saw that she had a thoughtful, business-centric perspective, they eventually sought her view on everything from sales leads and contract negotiations to commission breakdowns across the organization. They looked at her team's budget and compared that to other teams doing similar work. Basically, they dumped a bottle of oil on the wheel and hoped for the best.

And they got the best. With Kris' insight, management is now able to pinpoint areas where the company can refocus its efforts and realign its sales targets. Without changing the bottom line,

they changed the commission structure to be more reasonable, and committed to involving salespeople in contract negotiations going forward. Finally, they get to keep a valuable employee whose strategic awareness and persistence will benefit the company long term.

Today's lesson: the employees who really move an organization forward are those who do outstanding work while continuing to squeak until they get what they need, proving that a disagreeable hamster is sometimes good for the team.

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