



## ...IT'S ALWAYS THE FIRST TIME

More than ten years ago I have been appointed as a Division Manager of a regional Austrian bank and it was the first time in my career that I was on a high position. I was very euphoric and highly motivated when starting on the new position and in my introduction statement I told to my associates – what maybe every manager is telling his or her employees at this stage: “I’ll be there for you whenever you need me!”

The first weeks on the new position passed by and I kept my promise: whenever someone asked for a meeting I immediately took a look into my calendar and booked some additional time. By the way: This was one of the reasons that **my calendar was filled-up very quickly and this is how I made myself busy almost all the day.**

People came into my office for different purposes: Some of them told me about their bad relationship with other colleagues and some just offloaded their private problems to me. Other colleagues in turn thought that I might have certain skills and competences and came up with some technical questions. And again others tried to avoid the usual decision-making process by approaching me directly and therefore expecting immediate and uncomplicated decisions – without a lot of questions from certain committees.

So, I listened very carefully to all of them, paid a lot of attention to all their issues and at the end I got their problems transferred on to my shoulders.

Of course, I also wanted to demonstrate that managers are used to work much harder and that they are able to stand much more pressure than “normal” employees, because I had to find arguments for my increased salary and the business car, which was visible to them. And not just this, I tried to be the ideal boss in all aspects, which also meant answering the phone within 3 times ringing and replying to all the e-mails within 24 hours ... as we told it to our employees in our “20 company rules”, too.

And then something very strange happened to me one late afternoon. I was standing in my office, thinking about some complicated solution for a problem I received half an hour ago from one of our Department Managers and looked more or less “helpless” through the window. At first I didn’t really realize it, because there were too many people down on the street and in front of the bus station, but after some time when I took a more precise look I saw many of our employees leaving their offices including our Department Manager. And then I said to myself: “Hey, this can’t be: you as one of this bank’s top managers are here for your staff the whole day and when they are leaving their offices after usual working time, you can then finally start doing **your job: finding solutions for the problems your associates offloaded to you!** Aren’t we supposed to be a team?”

And while standing there and being personally very disappointed the following questions crossed my mind:



1. Am I doing the right tasks for the position I've been appointed?
2. Didn't my assistant support me enough?
3. Did I promise too much to my associates at the very beginning?

The answer to question # 1 is absolutely "YES", but when looking back to the last 10 or 15 years I came to the conclusion that the "HOW" was wrong.

From today's point of view I can say that it's one of the manager's most important responsibilities to deal with his or her staff and their problems. And according to my experience you have – sometimes and in certain exceptional cases – also to deal with their private problems, especially when you lead your team not just with logical, but also with emotional drivers. But what I would do differently today compared to ten years ago is rather **listening to them and – by raising competent questions – leading themselves to achieve results or conclusions**. Then (a) your associates would learn to develop solutions for their challenges and (b) you as a Manager would not have to take the entire burden on your shoulders.

Question # 2 is a more provocative one, because my assistant at this time supported me a lot. The problem was more on my side, because I didn't delegate enough tasks to her: maybe because I didn't really believe in her skills – **what a shame!** – or I simply continued doing most of the administrative tasks as I did during the previous years, before I even cooperated with an assistant.

Some years later I had the pleasure to get a new assistant and we really worked as a team. The difference was just that she took over almost all my administrative tasks and I fully trusted her.

And the answer to my last question # 3 is again "YES". Why? Because for managers it's like with politicians: **whatever they express at the beginning of their appointment, regardless if they had time for a proper analysis or not, their audience (voters or employees) will take it as for granted.**

Especially during the first few days or weeks people are expecting a lot from newly appointed managers: opinions, evaluations, ideas for changes, etc. But be careful with certain statements, because if you don't know your company very well at this stage – and this is quite normal when you just became appointed to that position – the listeners don't give a damn about it. And at the end your employees (or voters, in case you are a politician) will from now on measure and compare your achievements with what you've said at the very beginning.

Dear Reader, I'm quite sure that you answered my questions for your own situation as well, didn't you? If you did so, what is the result? And if you would like to share your result with me, it would be my pleasure to receive your E-Mail to [mojakariera@finance.si](mailto:mojakariera@finance.si).