

THE CHOICE – What I Learned by Making a Foolish Hiring Decision

Don't hire him. . . . He's not a good fit. . . . If you do, it will be a mistake. . . .

I heard this from a couple of key leaders after calling seeking their advice.

He has the right experience and transferable skills. . . . With a bit of coaching, he'll be great. . . .

This is what a trusted peer who highly recommended Steve told me.

A different set of opinions.

I didn't have much time to decide. I was under the gun to hire an associate to work with our business partners. I needed to recruit, interview, and fill the open position within two weeks, or I'd lose the headcount. If I lost the headcount, the work and relationship management would fall on my plate.

I moved swiftly and selfishly to hire Steve. Why? I saw *potential*, or so I told myself. I heard what I wanted from the positive advice I received and ignored the other. Acting out of arrogance, I believed that I could single-handedly develop Steve's analytical, relationship building and leadership skills.

Fast forward one year. . . .

Developing Steve took a lot of time and energy. Even though I had 10 other team members and was accountable for 18 markets, I spent 80% of my time with him and his specific market.

I didn't want Steve to fail. I saw his success as my responsibility since I decided against others' counsel. I wanted to prove that I could help Steve reach his potential.

While Steve was hired into a harsh work environment, and we believed he could breakthrough, he never gained traction with his assigned business partners or market. The business partners demanded more than Steve could deliver. When Steve stumbled, I had to compensate.

Over time, his business partners rejected him because of a perceived lack of credibility. Steve was no longer invited to meetings or trade rides, lost his ability to influence or add value.

I'd shared the business partners' feedback with Steve along the way. Trying to support Steve, I continually spent time helping him solve problems and discuss his concerns. I always encouraged him. And I was always genuine with him.

We built a plan to improve his performance and connection with the business partner. But Steve didn't follow through on the plan. He'd lost heart.

I finally realized that I couldn't develop Steve as I thought. His skillset and motivational fit weren't right for the role.

I made a mistake. . . . A change needed to happen for Steve's benefit, my team, my company, our business partners, and the company. . . . And, for me.

I had another decision to make. . . . Do I place Steve on a formal *Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)* and exit him from the company?. . . .

After consulting with my leadership and human resources, we placed Steve on a PIP. It was a tough decision but the right one.

Then, I prayed for Steve. . . . I prayed that he'd improve his

performance or that God would provide for him if the PIP didn't conclude with positive results. I also prayed for wisdom and a sensitive heart as I revealed the tough news to him.

I reached out to Steve to share our decision. As you can imagine, he wasn't happy.

Steve said, "NO ONE else faced the challenging work environment and difficult business partners as I have."

He demanded that I delay the PIP. . . .

I couldn't. . . . I wouldn't. . . . We'd put plans in place before, but he hadn't acted on them. I listed several other performance-related issues and said no.

Frustrated, he said, "This is the first job I've had where if I didn't get along with people, I could still do well at my job. I feel like such a failure."

Steve was furious at first and then began to break down.

I was moved by Steve's emotions. . . . I'd come to like Steve very much and knew he tried very hard. I wanted to encourage him amid another challenging circumstance yet be honest with him like I'd always been.

I told him, "Speaking from my heart, you are still valued and need to separate what is happening from who you are...It is up to you how to improve...90% don't make it through the process, but others experience a career transformation."

To make a long story short, Steve didn't make it successfully through the PIP process and was about to be let go.

Then, something happened. . . .

A role opened up in another part of the company that better suited Steve's skill set and was the perfect motivational fit.

Typically, an associate wasn't eligible to interview for other roles under a PIP. Because of the right job fit, my leadership, HR partner, and I extended grace to Steve and approved his interview. Showing dignity for Steve, we agreed that sometimes people are in the wrong role and want to do the right thing for him.

And guess what? . . . He got the job!

What did I learn from my experience with Steve?

- **Be an *Unselective* Listener:** Even though I sought wise counsel from others, I selectively listened to what they said. I pieced together what I wanted to hear and rationalized my decision. Admittedly, I had my own agenda, was stubborn, and acted out of arrogance. The Bible says, "Fools are headstrong and do what they like; wise people take advice." (Proverbs 12:15 – The Message). If I'd listened early on, Steve and I wouldn't have suffered through the challenging circumstances. My advice: When seeking counsel, objectively listen to others and don't filter your thoughts with pre-determined bias.
- **Show Dignity and Respect for Others:** During challenging circumstances with Steve, I always tried to encourage him, help him feel valued, and be genuine with him. The Bible says, "Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for *them*. . . (Matthew 7:12 – The Message). Helping Steve navigate through the circumstances, I consistently demonstrated respect and dignity for him. I remained professional. That's the way I'd want to be treated. Wouldn't about you?
- **Pray Always:** I didn't pray about my decision to hire Steve and moved without consulting God. It became a mess. But I did pray amid the mess, and God was faithful. He helped Steve and provided a new

opportunity. For Believers, we need to lift EVERYTHING in prayer, and it should become a lifestyle for us. The Bible says, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17 ESV). Take every moment and opportunity to pray. Make it a continual conversation with God and a way of life. If you do, God will guide you, your decisions, and circumstances.

If you listen unselectively, show dignity and respect for others, and pray always, you'll become a savvy decision-maker and leader.

Do you want to learn more about how to up your leadership skills? Visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

Preston