

THE NEW BOSS – PEER OR SUPERVISOR?

Aparna Singh stared at the eight familiar faces gazing at her on this Monday morning, her first day as the new Vice President of Business Development at The Alverstone Group – a global project development firm. Those faces – all of which belonged to people who had been her peers as of yesterday – now looked upon her intensely as they awaited her comments for the meeting she had assembled as their new manager.

The excitement she had felt following her promotion after her predecessor's sudden departure had swiftly taken a turn to discomfort and apprehension. While Aparna jumped at the opportunity to take on the added responsibility that came with the managerial role, she was unsure of how to proceed. After all, these individuals were not only her subordinates, but also her friends and acquaintances – though she was closer to some than to others. Would she need to change the style and approach that had proven successful in the past, now that these individuals were her direct reports, so as to conform more with her and others' expectations of what a supervisor should and shouldn't do?

While she was eager to express the confidence and assertiveness that she considered appropriate for a manager, she was concerned that her colleagues would interpret such a shift in her demeanor as insincere. How could she redefine her relationship with her colleagues who were once her equals without alienating and antagonizing them? After all, she remembered how she had felt and reacted when her previous colleague, Raman, had been promoted to a similar managerial role. While he had formerly been an accomplished, gregarious and well-liked member of the team, he promptly insulated himself in the new leadership role and, accordingly, lost touch with the organization as a whole and squandered the team's confidence. What is more, his abrupt turn to a colder and more demanding style upset Aparna. She recalled how she had resented the shift in Raman's approach and the way his new position had negatively affected her personal relationship with him. She also remembered the twinge of jealousy she had felt when he was chosen for the role over her. Aparna cringed at the thought of her old peers reacting similarly to her own promotion and the possibility that her advancement would compromise her personal relationships with her colleagues. Was that just a personal cost of professional success in the workplace and a tradeoff she would need to accept?

Moreover, while she wanted to be viewed as evenhanded, she was hesitant to artificially distance herself from certain members of the team with whom she had the strongest connection and whose advice and counsel she most respected. She had always valued the feedback and suggestions of her closest peers and enjoyed their presence during stressful times. Would she now need to separate herself from these individuals so as to come across as impartial? If so, how could she ensure that her trusted colleagues would remain open with her? The situation made her uncomfortable, especially as she recalled the comments of one of her closest friends in the organization shortly after Aparna's promotion. "I'm so excited to see you in the new role," her friend had said. "I finally have confidence that we'll get the much needed resources critical to landing the Bennington project I've been

insisting on for so long!”

In addition, would Aparna need to “reset” her relationship with those individuals with whom she had clashed in the past by extending a symbolic olive branch in the form of increased attention or resources? Her gut told her that she would, though she was uncertain as to the best approach.

To Aparna, the quiet in the room seemed deafening as the team waited for her to speak. She knew that these first comments would be especially important in determining whether she would succeed or fail in her new role. She was eager to address all these considerations head-on, yet she was worried about how her remarks would be received.