

HIRING 'FRIENDS AND RELATIVES' CAN BE A LIABILITY RATHER THAN AN ASSET - BE CAREFUL

'THE INTERNATIONAL BREADS AND AN EXECUTIVE'S EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT'



Two pre-schoolers sang cheerfully in the back seat of the old Volkswagen as their father, Basaba, headed for the city. Having been a cook at a remote 'Italian-owned' Seminary, he had just landed a job as Chief Chef of 'Migati delights', a city-based bakery. Needless to say, this breakthrough meant that life was just about to change for the better.

As he sped through the all-too-familiar rugged road, Basaba's mind wandered. Looking back, he could not help but thank God for his new job; considering that despite the rural tranquility, life had not been easy. For starters, his wife Sanyu, a city-borne, had always mourned the lack of amenities and other indulgencies associated with living in the capital city. To make matters worse, efforts to find an 'English-medium' kindergarten for the children had been futile.



EMOTIONAL
PERSONAL
ATTACHMENTS IN THE
WORKPLACE CAN
DENT PRODUCTIVITY



He still echoed the endless arguments that had become the order of the day, with Sanyu insisting that Basaba should just discard the 'low-paying' cooking job and return to the city. "Eh!, God has remembered us", the relieved chef muttered under his breath. With the new employment, his family's lamentations were about to become history.

The interview had been quite tough considering that many candidates had applied for the position. But Basaba's experience was unbeatable since his ex-boss, an Italian Chef, had exposed him (Basaba) to a wide range of international cuisines. Therefore, it was no surprise that Basaba had outshone all other applicants.

On arriving in the city, Basaba's family settled pretty quickly...; apartment...; kindergarten...; and in no time, the new Chef had reported for work.

During the first meeting, the General Manager, Yona, carefully outlined what 'Migati Delights' expected from Basaba. Apparently, despite the Bakery's outlet being conveniently located, sales had plummeted causing huge debts due to unpaid bills. "We are facing escalating competition here", the boss explained, a bit defensively. "In fact, many of our long-time customers have defected to other bakeries... we need to return those customers first, and then get new ones", Yona emphasized. Basaba pledged to do his best.

Soon thereafter, Yona introduced Basaba to the Assistant Chef, Birabwa, and others in the Kitchen department. Right from day one, Basaba discovered that indeed, the recipes used at the bakery left a lot to be desired. "We must turn this bakery around", he proclaimed with enthusiasm during departmental meetings; excited that his contribution would soon be visible. And true to his word, the chef changed the bread recipes within just one week.

The reward for his efforts came a fortnight later when the boss congratulated Basaba openly. "We are proud to note that our sales are picking up", Yona beamed, patting the Chef on the back. It was obvious that customers had regained confidence in the Bakery, displaying their satisfaction with the new breads. And, the boss was pleased - what more would a man want?



Therefore, it was a dawning surprise, to say the least, when the boss called Basaba, only a few weeks thereafter. "My friend", he said, "our sales for the last fortnight are not as high as we had anticipated! Anyway, customers are weird sometimes" he added; "just keep your eye on the figures". But although Yona's air had sounded casual, Basaba could not just 'let things lie'. "There must be an explanation for this", he said repeatedly, as he and his wife Sanyu sipped cups of coffee that evening.

During the week that followed, Basaba decided to investigate. It was not long before his efforts yielded fruit. The findings were far from what he could have suspected. Apparently, despite express instructions that Basaba's new recipes were the ones to be used, Birabwa, the Assistant Chef, had been forcing the cooks to use old recipes. "Sir", one commented; "it is difficult for us to say no..., she threatened not to sign our claims for overtime!" A scared old watchman who preferred anonymity whispered, "Boss, what Birabwa says goes.; in fact, disobeying her could spell dismissal". To add salt to injury, one of the drivers disclosed that Birabwa was an ex-cleaner who had risen through the ranks due to favours from Yona. "It's no hidden secret that the two have some romantic thing going... Plus, she is Yona's sister-in-law ...", he added with a sheepish sneer.



The shocked Basaba summoned Birabwa; to establish if she had indeed instructed the employees to revert to the old recipes. Much to the Chief Chef's dismay, the girl confirmed the allegations, arrogantly insisting that many customers had been complaining about the new breads. "I will not tolerate this behaviour", a furious Basaba retorted; immediately calling for a meeting where he strictly commanded that his new recipes should be used. But the directives were a spent force since the old recipes continued to be the order of the day; as Birabwa's instructions persisted. Soon, the situation became uncontainable. Basaba opted to report things to Yona who summoned the two (Basaba and Birabwa).

However, the Chief Chef was in for another shock. For after Birabwa had conveyed her side of the story, Yona reprimanded Basaba: "Chef", he said, as he swung in his leather chair; "I do not see what the difficulty is here...! Remember you are new..., just try to bond with your supervisees rather than frustrating their well-meaning efforts".

Basaba could hardly believe his ears! How could Yona dare side with Birabwa, when it was so obvious that the girl was in the wrong? Back at his office, he replayed the day's happenings over and over again; feeling confused, betrayed and belittled. "I don't think I should continue working here", he thought; missing his job at the Seminary for the first time since he left.

Basaba's yearnings seemed to have touched God's heart. For two months later, he was offered a job as General Manager of an upcoming bakery nearby, called Mukisa Kitchens. The owner, Musa, was quick to promise that he would support Basaba entirely.

As soon as the Chief Chef 'shifted base', Mukisa Kitchens took off by storm, with customers publicising the delicious new breads sold at the bakery. Inevitably, an exodus followed as customers shifted from 'Migati delights' to Mukisa Kitchens.

All this happened three years ago, and as I speak, not only is 'Migati delights' history, but Yona and Birabwa are on the street.

Do you know that many employees complain about the poor performance of workmates hired through informal connections with bosses? Needless to say, such emotional and personal attachments are unhealthy if encouraged in the workplace as they commonly blind executives, driving them to make wrong, irrational decisions due to conflicts of interest.

"Does that mean that we should never hire our friends or relatives?" one may ask. Here are a few points to consider: What are the Human Resource Policies of your organisation especially with regard to conflict of interest? Do you trust the person to objectively perform and not abuse boundaries? Are you able to issue disincentives in case she or he fails to meet his or her job obligations? Will you or the person be able to maintain a demarcation between 'home issues' and 'office issues'? Even then, filling a department or organisation with relatives raises eyebrows; and could 'red-flag' your emotional intelligence and foresight. For instance, if a death of a family member occurs (God forbid), will the entire entity request for an 'excuse from duty'? Such questions should be asked before one crowds his or her department with 'friends and relatives'; as doing so can easily dent your organisation's bottom line performance; and could be very costly to the recruiter, his or her peers, the organisation and other stakeholders that she or he has been hired and trusted to serve.

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