

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1715 Firing the Unfireable — Part 2

Jason was a star server in an upscale, highly popular restaurant. After coming on board, he quickly became a favorite of customers and coworkers alike. After several months, while his job performance was top notch and he remained a favorite of customers, his attitude toward and treatment of coworkers had gone from great to bad to worse. Rick, the general manager, had counseled Jason but with little success. Finally, it all came to a head when Rick had to terminate him over straight-up insubordination. However, firing Jason didn't bring closure to the matter. I'm Jerry Roberts, and I'll tell you why, next on the Extra Point.

Jason had been great at first, but had been a problem for the past few months. Rick, his boss, respected his talents with customers and that he was an asset to the restaurant in terms of revenue.

However, when Jason showed up to work two hours late for a busy dinner shift, refused to discuss the issue, and then mouthed off to him, Rick felt he had no choice but to fire him on the spot.

As soon as the kitchen closed for the night and all customers were gone, Rick pulled the team into a meeting to let them know the news.

People were tired from a tough shift, but most broke into smiles, laughter, and a few high fives. The head chef broke out a tray of their signature cheesecake to celebrate. Everybody thanked Rick for taking the needed action.

Rick arrived back at work just before lunch the next day, and was met with the usual pile of messages, including one from the company's HR manager, Tara.

He got a cup of coffee, went to his office, and sat down to open mail...his normal routine. The call to Tara would be anything but routine. She told Rick that Jason had gone to the company's main office, and caught up with Mark, the owner.

Jason told him that he'd had a bad day and simply lost track of time, and didn't understand why Rick had been so harsh with him. Surely, with how hard he worked and how his sales numbers and popularity were so important to the restaurant, maybe he could get a break.

Rick was about to challenge what Tara told him, when she said, "Mark told me to put him back on the payroll. He wants you to call Jason and get him back in before he signs on with a competitor. He thinks Jason will agree if you offer an apology for your earlier decision."

Stunned isn't the word for what Rick felt. He said nothing for what must have seemed like an eternity. Finally, Tara had to ask if he had heard her. He told her that he had, but didn't have anything to say. He wasn't thinking of a response for her, but what could he possibly say to the team, to prepare them for Jason walking back through the door?

Minutes passed and Rick's emotions went from shock, to dread, to anger that he hadn't been consulted before the decision was made to rehire Jason — to outrage that his boss wanted him to apologize.

To shorten the story, Jason returned and nothing much changed. He was still arrogant, still a pain in the butt, and still easily the most popular server with customers. In the weeks following his reinstatement, a half-dozen team members quit. Rick helped them get new jobs, and within 90 days, Rick moved on as well. What do we learn here?

Corporate decisions can have a negative impact on front line management and team morale. If a senior leader overrules a manager in the case of personnel matters, without bothering to investigate first, it sends a signal that the company's priorities are out of whack.

Retaining Jason sent a message to the team that toxic behavior could be overlooked if an employee was bringing in the money. (Con't.)

Ray will acknowledge it when I say that many star salespeople are allowed to get away with all sorts of things, simply because they “make it rain.”

I get that we want to retain great sales talent, but when trouble is part of that package, and double-standards for behavior follow, it erodes trust in management.

The obvious question is how could an owner make the decision to rehire an employee who was fired for cause, without first talking to the manager who took the action?

In my opinion, the better solution would have been for Mark to ask Rick if he would be willing to consider keeping Jason if, and only if, Jason accepted responsibility for his actions, and apologized to the team — and to Rick.

Rick would likely agree and then it would be up to Jason to clean up his act. If he didn't, there wouldn't be a third chance.

If that concept was presented to me, I might not be thrilled, but I could get behind it and sell it to team members.

Instead, Mark made a snap judgment based on the money factor alone, a lot of people were unhappy and it cost him in the long run.

Be careful out there.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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