
INDUCTION ILLUSIONS

Karan Pandye was a Territory Manager in OXY Ltd., posted at Jalgaon District in Maharashtra. He was an efficient worker with the patience and tact needed to tackle the PSO's. Karan's ability to make all PSOs perform well by guiding and supporting them got him noticed by his superiors and at the same time, he was well-liked by the PSO's. At the same time, he was known to be a fairly tough task master as he believed it was his responsibility that the PSO's under him perform well.

These qualities in Karan Pandye made him believe that Dinesh Patel, a trainee PSO working under him should be given a second chance to prove himself. Dinesh Patel had joined OXY as a trainee PSO around 9 months back in February 1997. This was the time to make a final call with the superiors in the organization. The options were either to remove him or decide to give him another chance before planning to make him permanent.

Dinesh Patel was with the company for the last 9 months. When he was recruited for the job, he was thrilled, giving him the feeling of comfort of being settled in a reputed company like OXY Ltd, which would definitely help his reputation grow in the society. He thought, "This is a good time to look for a bride, as they would flock with my image". He was bursting with pride and was making elaborate plans for his future. Dinesh was an ambitious and talented young man. His potential was recognized by OXY when they hired him. He only lacked in some skills, which the company believed they could polish with both training from the company and dedication by the trainee. Dinesh was willing to enhance his skills. He knew that if he stayed with the company then his career would soar. His attitude was positive and cooperative. This led Karan to believe that Dinesh was a good candidate in his group.

Dinesh Patel had taken a month's leave during the training period, as he was ailing with some sickness. Another month later, he yet again took another leave of around 15 days for his marriage. He had missed a lot of valuable lessons from the extensive training that OXY Ltd. provided to its trainee PSOs so that they could perform not only during the training period but life long in their career. When he returned from leave, he did not make any efforts to catch up on whatever training he had missed. This influenced early perceptions of Dinesh in the minds of his superiors as well as peers. Because of his frequent absence and his inability to make up for the time he had lost, he got to be known to be a slow learner. It was felt that he lacked certain important qualities like communication, grasping technical knowledge. His performance was not found to meet the expected standards for selling OXY products.

“He is not even meeting the standard calls and personal order bookings to doctors inspite of the training.” Is a trailer of the discussions that went on between the corporate heads.

This time, an opinion was asked from Karan and Raj, the Regional Business Manager, about what decision they would like the heads to take.

“According to us we should not take such a hasty decision of terminating Dinesh. We should give him another chance to improve his performance. He should be allowed to prove his worth in the company” Raj spoke on behalf of Karan and himself. “Although he lacks some skills today he does not lack the willingness to learn which would help or motivate him perform in the future.” said Karan.

It was seen that Dinesh lacked in taking his job seriously. No desire to acquire any skill was seen during the training sessions. He was viewed as a low yielding and low potential PSO who took leave as and when he wanted. They thought that although he proved to be a slow learner and lagged in picking up, he still deserved to get a chance. They thought that he probably had some other personal reasons that he was unable to disclose which were distracting him from the job.

The heads also received a letter from Dinesh Patel himself confessing his poor performance and requesting them to give him one more chance. But the letter also said, “As much as it is my fault I would also like to bring to your notice that the changing of a regional setup during a training period and then adjusting to the new environment confuses any person and comes in the way of performance. Therefore I would like to bring to your notice that the change of region within 2 months of joining also played a role in my underperformance. Therefore I request to you to give me one more chance to make my contributions to this organization.” After a lot of discussion among the corporate heads it was decided to give Dinesh Patel another chance to prove himself. His training period was extended by 6 months. He was evidently willing to become more productive now.

After Karan came to know about the approval of the seniors for extension of Dinesh training period, he called Dinesh in his cabin to hand the letter of extension of training to him. They both exchanged smiles, encouraging each other to work together. Karan discussed the dropping sales with Dinesh. He thought it is his duty to caution Dinesh about any further lapse in performance and that it would be severely dealt with. He told Dinesh that he should be prudent and not let it happen again.

Dinesh saw this as an opportunity to open up to his Territory Manager and spoke “Sir, actually I was mentally disturbed because of some family problems. It was so serious that it even brought upon a sickness due to which I was bedridden for a month.”

“I greatly appreciate you genuine concern in me, Sir. I also acknowledge the fact that I don’t deserve a confirmation. Actually, I knew that I would be in trouble for the inconsistent performance but please believe me Sir, when I say that I am going to try harder. I will not let this company down,” said Dinesh.

Karan accepted his word as a promise and handed the letter of extension to Dinesh. After 6 months when the performance of Dinesh was reviewed, a visible and satisfactory change was seen, so the company made him a permanent employee in May 1998. This was a year and three months after he joined OXY

Karan was happy as he felt it was his hard work and guidance, which encouraged Dinesh to improve his skills, his training in making calls, communicating, convincing doctors, and chemists. On the other hand, Dinesh felt it was his hard work and dedication that helped him reach this stage. All in all, both were motivated and encouraged to work better.

In any performing organization every employee is required to improve, that is perform better than before. This was not seen with Dinesh. Dinesh was lacking in some skills even today. Every day Dinesh, like his colleagues, was required to meet 8-9 doctors and 2-4 chemists for selling their products and building relations with them for loyalty. But most of the time it so happened that he did not even meet all of the doctors he had to in a day. Many a times it was noticed by the regional field trainer that Dinesh did not complete his calls daily.

During the same time Karan was also worried about Dinesh as he did not even complete his doctors list nor did he update it or change it to show improvement. Karan, a little frustrated called him in his office. He said, “What is the matter with you Dinesh? Why don’t you come to update your doctors lists. Is everything going on fine? Are you meeting all the doctors and chemists as per your schedule?”

“Actually Sir, many times it so happens that I am stuck convincing one doctor and detailing him about the products that, I have to just skip some doctors. In turn it happens that most of the doctors are missed and I am not able to meet my targets. Please Sir, do consider that. You know I am apologizing profusely for not meeting the company standards. I will try my level best. Please have a look again at the end of this month. Please, Sir.” pleaded Dinesh.

“Okay let me help you with this.” Said Karan. “I’ll change the doctors and the chemist list for you. (Giving him the new list). Most of the doctors in this list are those who are loyal in buying our products. What you have to do is just visit them off and on to know their requirements and inform them and detail them of the new products we are coming up with.”

“You will have to hone your skills too. To do better retailing and selling of the product to the doctor you have to have a thorough knowledge of the product. You will have to be more frequent and maintain good relations with the doctor so that he can feel free to ask you any queries. You must also develop proper communication skills before you start the next project.” advised Karan. “Yes Sir. Thank you for the inputs.” said Dinesh walking out of the room.

After a few days when Karan tracked the working of Dinesh he found that even now when he had changed his doctors list he did not sell the products as they had planned. This worried Karan and soon enough the RBM and Sales Manager called a meeting with Karan regarding the

dropping sales in Dinesh's area. This was the second time that they would have a detailed discussion over the matter. This time they discussed the possibility that Dinesh had been fudging the details in the logbook about meeting the doctors. When they checked all the records, they found that he was putting in wrong entries misleading everyone to believe that he was actually going on those visits. This was very wrong and completely against the company policy.

The seniors also got complaints from the group members about how Dinesh's attitude was catching on. The other members were also showing signs of poor performance and they were demoralized and angry at the management's tolerance of Dinesh's performance. They thought that it was unfair that Dinesh be given innumerable chances by OXY inspite of being a consistent non-performer. They thought it was unjust and if one employee was given differential treatment then it would not matter even if they did not meet the targets. In light of all these complaints, the seniors thought it best to change the environment, in which Dinesh worked and give him one last chance to prove his mettle. Maybe a change in the working scene to a different territory would prompt Dinesh to turn over a new leaf.

They intimated Dinesh of the change and it seemed that he had received it well. However, after a few weeks the management was shocked to receive very fiery letters from Dinesh concerning his transfer. He alleged the management of various things.

He wrote "Sir, I was forced by my seniors to sign the confession letter that I had given OXY before I got the confirmation in this organization."

He also accused the seniors (i.e. DM, RBM and Sales Manager) of harassing him and humiliating him repeatedly. He said that the performance appraisals, which showed that his performance was rated below average in 2001, poor in 2000 and below average in 1999, were all false and not based on the facts.

The managers advised Dinesh not to be so hasty in making these allegations and asked him to review what he was saying. They asked him not to indulge in these desperate measures and have a discussion with the concerned superiors, but were to no avail. He was advised to be enthusiastic about his transfer and that he should consider himself lucky as he was being given another chance. Dinesh bluntly refused to obey the transfer. At this point the HR called him to have a meeting with the Head Office seniors as well as his own DM, RBM and Sales Manager.

The meeting lasted for over six hours and still the managers took that valuable time from their busy schedules to pore over all the details of Dinesh's case. They analyzed every aspect and questioned Dinesh thoroughly. It was an open discussion and Dinesh was allowed to speak freely about his problems.

"Why didn't you say anything earlier about being harassed or being forced into signing letters, Dinesh?" asked Mr. Koyare gently. He was the HR head and looking into the case.

"Well, I... It so happens...it's just that..." stuttered Dinesh.

“Okay Dinesh, if we agree to your blames. Then I feel a transfer should work fine. A transfer would help you get rid of the seniors and help you perform. Isn't it? I feel you should definitely go in to accept the transfer then.” Said Koyare.

These were some questions Dinesh had no answers for. He could not explain why or what it was that was preventing him from stepping forward earlier. He was still adamant about being transferred and refused to go anywhere. He wanted to be transferred in the same region and was unwilling to go anywhere else.

Based on these meetings and the past performance appraisals records, OXY Ltd decided to let go of Dinesh. They thought they had given him ample opportunities none of which Dinesh could capitalize on. It was definitely time to let him go...

Questions

1. What do you think was the core of the problem in the case of Dinesh Patel?
2. Do you think that he could have turned around had things been done differently by OXY Limited?
3. What were some of the early warning signs that ought to have been picked up by Karan in this case? Why were they missed?
4. What do you think is the role of the Territory Manager in turning around non-performing PSO's?
5. What would you recommend that OXY Limited should do to prevent such problems in the future?