A Turning Point for David

You close your office door and take a few minutes to breathe. Your meeting with David could have been a disaster in a dozen different ways. Instead, it actually went well. By emphasizing your shared passion for innovation you managed to establish a safe foundation for an open discussion. You expressed your concerns about David's lack of reliability and together you outlined a plan for improvement. Although he wasn't happy, David didn't dissolve into one of his famous fits, and he committed to making the changes you agreed on.

However, you know your work is only half done. It was important to talk to David face-to-face, but now you have to document your conversation. Putting it in writing will solidify his commitment and allow for real consequences. Before outlining your message, you review your notes about David's performance and make some new ones regarding today's discussion.

David Federro

Two years ago you arrived at PrinTech as the new Vendor Integration Manager, and it wasn't long before you realized one of your programmers, David Federro, was going to be a problem. David is brilliant. In fact, your own reputation as a rising star in PrinTech's management is partly due to the APIs David has created to enable client web services.

Unfortunately, David is far less reliable than brilliant. He misses deadlines, ignores phone calls, and no one knows when he will be in his office. You've found it hard to address these issues because David's pattern of behavior was well-established before you joined the company, and previous managers gave him free rein as long as he kept producing high-quality work.

Several team members have told you they find David difficult to work with, describing him as surly and nonresponsive, and complaining that his portions of projects are consistently behind schedule. You suspect another programmer's recent departure was partly due to the way David left her hanging on a project and publicly demeaned her when she confronted him. On the other hand, the quality of David's work is universally recognized. Some key clients have asked that their projects be given to him, even though you occasionally have to make excuses for his failing to meet deadlines.

David's performance over the past few months has been particularly problematic. He missed a week of work and was out of contact. He later claimed to be working from home but had not obtained prior permission. On another occasion, you had to reassign an important client's project to a different programmer when it became clear David would not complete the job. You've come to the conclusion that David is on a trajectory where the problems he creates will soon outweigh the value he brings.

Your boss, Amanda Paik, agrees but has made it clear she hopes you can keep such a talented employee.

The Plan for Improvement

When you spoke David explained that he enjoys his job overall, and takes pride in his reputation for making innovative contributions. However, when he feels uninspired by a project he has a hard time focusing on his work. He revealed that during his personal time he is working on an open source project to help refugee relocation agencies manage their services, and he is clearly passionate about this volunteer work. He said he dislikes collaborating because other team members "hold him back" with their "lack of imagination" and "skill deficiencies." He also explained that the reason why he recently missed a week of work is that a childhood friend passed away.

You and David agreed that his ability to contribute to the company's success hinges on whether teammates and clients can rely on him. Together you made the following commitments:
- David will meet deadlines and understands that failure to do so will leave him ineligible to receive the usual year-end bonus and may result in termination.
- David will behave collegially with teammates and be more responsive to phone calls and emails.
- David will ask permission before working from home and will promptly inform you of illness or emergency.
- You will schedule regular check-ins with David to monitor progress toward project deadlines.
- You will include David in project origination meetings, allowing him to influence the scope of projects and suggest alternative, more innovative solutions.

Remember that the wording of your notes does not necessarily mirror the wording of your conversation with David.

Assignment

Write an email to David summarizing key points of your conversation, including your concerns and the areas of improvement you and David agreed to. Your email should be clear, concise, well-organized, and well-designed. Your purpose is to ensure David understands expectations and to establish his accountability for improvement. You want this to be a meaningful turning point for David, so your email must also preserve a positive relationship.

Address the email to David Federro and CC the Vice-President of Client Services, Amanda Paik, and the Director of Human Resources, Neil Woerkom.

Important Note

At the end of your response, please include the following information:

I give permission for Association for Business Communication and C. R. Anderson Foundation to use my name and document for educational or publicity purposes.

_____   _____

Student Name   *Date*