

## Case 25

### *Disciplinary Action*

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### Reverse Action

Nobody knew, for sure, why Shri R.P. Mishra, the new Director, Urban Estates, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, was called Charlie. Many government officers wanted to become friends of the Director of Urban Estates because he was responsible for allotting residential accommodation to government servants at Lucknow. Charlie was very intelligent and had simple habits. He did not drink or smoke or gamble. He ate simple vegetarian food. His only weakness was seeing Hindi feature films for which his staff was sent regularly to purchase tickets, in advance. He was very honest, though he was known to have used his intelligence to justify some actions, which were taken for the progress of his career. However, he tended to become a strict disciplinarian as he climbed the steps of hierarchy in the bureaucracy. He felt that such an image would help him in moving up faster in his career. Shri Mishra's reputation in Lucknow was of a fair-minded officer. Government employees, who came in contact with him, were confident of a just behaviour. However, administration at Lucknow had been politicalised and there were many power centres at various levels. Some individuals wielded power due to political patronage and used it to getting their way. A house, being allotted out of turn, being allowed to retain a house longer or being permitted a change of a house, etc., was by itself important personal achievement. Getting these favours for others, e.g. a follower of a political leader or an influential bureaucrat, etc., was worth

trying if the Director, Urban Estate was favourably inclined. Anybody would have made enemies in such an environment, by being strict and honest. Charlie was no exception, though his general image helped him make lesser number of enemies.

Shri R.P. Mishra's, Private Secretary (PS), retired and posting of a new PS was held up due to some administrative reasons. Shri Mishra was very handicapped because he was flooded with telephone calls many of which were earlier handled by the PS. Further, typing, handling of mail and files, etc., were presenting a problem. Shri Mishra did not dictate his correspondence, but believed in correcting the drafts put up by the juniors/staff. Shri Mishra's peon used to execute the tasks of the PS during short periods of absence of the PS but clearly the responsibilities were difficult to be handled by the peon on long-term basis.

One day an upper division clerk, Mrs Loveleen Kohli came to Shri Mishra to obtain some clarifications about the corrections made by Shri Mishra on a draft that Mrs Kohli was typing. Shri Mishra found Loveleen to be smart and capable. Shri Mishra explained the problems being faced by him without the PS and asked if she would like to function as his PS, temporarily, till a permanent incumbent is posted. Loveleen jumped at the offer and had occupied the cabin of the PS before the day ended. Shri Mishra found Loveleen to be efficient and ambitious, since she set out to develop contacts with important officials using the designation of the PS to the Director, Urban Estates. Things moved smoothly for 8-10 days, but slowly Shri Mishra became aware that Loveleen was very punctual in leaving the office at 5 p.m., but usually came late by about 15 minutes in the mornings. Shri Mishra asked the Office Superintendent, OS, who was responsible for monitoring the signing by the employees in the attendance register, to pay attention to this aspect. Loveleen learnt about it and threatened OS that she would use her proximity to the director to somehow harm him. OS did not want to be troubled and reported that Loveleen did leave at sharp 5 p.m. because she lived far away and it was not safe for a lady to be travelling alone, late in the evening. OS also stated that Loveleen did come late by a minute or two on some occasions, since she had to drop her children at school. Shri Mishra was informed that late coming up to 5 minutes on some occasions was permitted by the government rules.

Shri Mishra, personally, kept a watch the following week and confirmed that Loveleen came late by 15 minutes on four days and by 13 and 10 minutes on one day each. The disciplinarian in Shri Mishra came to the fore and he confronted Loveleen with this data. Loveleen was apologetic and promised to give Shri Mishra no chance to complain, in future. Charlie had to go to Delhi for a meeting and had applied for 6 days leave, thereafter, to escort his family. First few days after his return were hectic, since his wife and children were trying to settle at Lucknow in their new home. Shri Mishra realised in the following days that Loveleen regularly came late by 15 minutes, Shri Mishra summoned Loveleen for a talk on the subject. Loveleen was not at all sorry, but asked Shri Mishra in a matter-of-fact tone, whether her work had suffered due to her late-coming? She countered rather aggressively that she more than made up her late-coming by working for half an hour everyday during the lunch break of 45 minutes.

Shri Mishra was not satisfied with this 'talk-back' of Loveleen. He insisted that all employees must come punctually at the office opening time. Working during lunch break to finish pending work was welcome, but it could not condone late arrival. Shri Mishra concluded, rather strictly, that he could not let his staff set a bad precedence.

Next morning, Shri Mishra was surprised to find an application from Mrs Loveleen Kohli seeking an interview with the Secretary, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Department of Grievance Redressal. The application accused that:

1. Shri Mishra was coercing her to perform the duties of his PS.
2. She had performed these duties excellently even though she was neither trained nor experienced in this task.
3. Shri Mishra had been regularly coming late ever since he returned from leave.
4. Shri Mishra falsely accused her of regularly coming late and used abusive language towards her.
5. She had volunteered to work for half-an-hour during lunch-break, everyday, to make up for the rarest of rare occasions when she may be late by a minute or two.

The application had been routed through the OS, who had merely signed and 'Forwarded' the application to the Director, Urban Estates. Shri Mishra wrote the following comments:

'Mrs Loveleen Kohli has indeed been discharging some of the functions of my PS for last few weeks since a permanent PS has not been posted. However, she was given this assignment with her own consent.

'Mrs Kohli was noticed by me personally to be coming late by around 15 minutes everyday during a whole week. She was counselled and she promised to give me no further chance for complaint. However, she has continued to come late. Yesterday morning, she was severely warned to improve. She countered by suggesting that she would work for half-an-hour in lieu of 15 minutes delay in the morning. She was informed that she was welcome to work during the lunch-break to finish her work, but this could not condone regular late-coming. Late-coming is a matter of indiscipline and I could not accept my office to set up a bad precedence.

'I do not think Mrs Kohli is competent authority to comment on my punctuality. As a matter of fact, these remarks show the undisciplined approach of Mrs Kohli.

She may be interviewed and advised that indiscipline of late-coming is unacceptable.'

Things moved fast, possibly due to special interest taken by some employees not favourably inclined towards Shri Mishra. Loveleen had been interviewed by lunch time and Shri Mishra received a confidential communication at 3 p.m. The main points of this memo were:

1. There is no record to indicate that Mrs Kohli had consented to discharge the duties of PS to the Director, Urban Estates. There is no office order assigning these duties to her. This is highly objectionable.
2. Director, Urban Estates should have kept a witness while administering counselling/warning to a lady employee. This procedure has not been followed. This lapse is regrettable.
3. The departmental attendance register does not show that Mrs Kohli ever came late by 15 minutes. Office superintendent responsible for monitoring the signing of this register by the employees was summoned. He stated

that, under specific instructions from Director, Urban Estates, he had paid special attention to signing of the register by Mrs Kohli. The OS claims to have informed the Director, Urban Estates that Mrs Kohli came late by a minute or two on some occasions.

4. The senior officers should use tact when dealing with employees performing well. Good lady employees do need to be handled sympathetically since they have domestic problems.
5. The Director, Urban Estates should bear in mind the above suggestions for better handling of the employees in future.
6. A copy of this memo to be placed in the personal file of Shri R.P. Mishra, Director, Urban Estates.

Analyse this case study and suggest steps, Charlie should have taken to avoid the reverse action of being blamed for indiscipline of Mrs Loveleen Kohli.

*Time to solve this case study: 40 minutes.*