

Can I Eat My Banana Now?

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Introduction

This story is written by David who tells the tale of a new member of staff joining his team. In this account we get a bystander's view of misfit and how the team deals with it. All of the names of those involved have been changed.

David's Story

I worked in a team of just six people: me, Janice and the manager, Rick were all IT trainers and the other three, Simone, John and Davinder were the administrators. Together we were responsible for all IT training for the UK division of a large American manufacturing company. We were very overworked. Some new systems had been introduced and we had to roll out a training programme across the company and we also had our day-to-day training and help-desk service to maintain. Luckily we were allowed to recruit a new team member and we set about putting together an attractive ad that would attract a dynamic, hard-working training professional.

We thought that it would be a good idea for the candidates to give a presentation, have a tour of the offices and shop floor and also to have an interview. It was decided that the interview panel would consist of the Training Manager (Rick), the Personnel Manager (Jane) and the Finance Director (Lydia). I had been hoping to be on the panel but I could see that it made more sense to have experienced interviewers and anyway, Janice and I had been asked to give the candidates the tour.

Even though we'd put together a smart advertisement, we didn't have many applicants for the job. Three were invited for interview and on the day, Janice and I gave them each a tour of the place. None of them seemed very dynamic but one, Claire, seemed downright odd. She didn't seem to be listening, was overly nervous and came across as "a rabbit in the headlights". Imagine my shock when I was told that the panel had decided to offer Claire the job! Janice and I told them of our concerns but they said that it was normal to be nervous and that she had more experience than the other two applicants.

In the time between the interview and Claire starting work we found time to put together an induction programme. We wanted to get Claire to have all of the relevant documents and brochures to read, to meet as many people as possible and to experience some of our training courses first hand. On the first day Rick went to meet Claire at the reception and brought her back to our office. We started to tell her about her induction programme and all of the people across the company who she would meet when she interrupted to say "can I eat my banana now?" Janice and I exchanged glances and I stifled a laugh. Rick stayed completely professional and said "yes, please do". He wasn't normally so polite! Half an hour later, after we had

finished our cups of coffee and had run out of small talk, we suggested to Claire that we could go around the offices to say hello to some people. We walked from the training office towards Marketing when we met Jane, the Personnel Manager, in the corridor. Jane, remembering Claire from the interview, stuck out her hand. Claire offered her hand in return but it had a Belgian bun in it! Jane dropped her hand. Rick looked embarrassed. I had to avoid looking at Janice because I am sure we would have laughed out loud.

In the afternoon Rick decided that Claire might need some time where she could get her head around the company. We were in the office alone and I showed her the company brochures which showed our product ranges. I asked Claire what she had done before. She said "I'm not sure if I should tell you this but I was unemployed and to carry on getting my unemployment benefit, I needed to go to a certain number of job interviews. I came along to this one thinking that I wouldn't get it. I couldn't believe it when they offered me the job." I tried to reassure Claire that it was a great company with friendly people and good opportunities to progress. She'd had training experience and we would help her to build on it.

The next few days went past and Claire managed to raise eyebrows every so often. She asked me and Janice how we coped running the same training programme over and over again. She said she'd get bored. She ignored the Operations Director in the canteen when he was making an unusually friendly introduction. She got snacks out of her handbag during meetings. Behind her back Rick, Janice and I wondered what to do. We decided that we had to give her a chance on the job – perhaps she really came into her own when she was running a course.

We let Claire run a part of one of our standard 'introduction to IT' training courses. It was the one she had seen me and Janice running; the one she said she would get bored of. We gave her our notes and a few days to prepare. Any experienced IT trainer should have been able to do it fairly easily. Claire launched into the session without any introduction and the people on the course looked confused. She didn't pick up on this and carried on regardless. She looked terrified – a bright red blush spread from her chest slowly up her neck and onto her face. Within minutes she was bright red and then she started to perspire. Rick had told me and Janice to let Claire sink or swim. He knew that we took pride in our courses and that we were likely to want to take over. I didn't know what to do: if I took over would I be saving the day or interrupting? We left her to it.

At the end of the course, Janice gave Claire some feedback. I think that it was best that it came from another woman. Claire knew that she hadn't performed well but even so I could see that she was affected by what Janice was saying. Back at the office, we told Rick what had happened and he then spoke to Claire. They agreed that she wasn't suited to the job and Rick allowed Claire to do some desk work for him for a month whilst she found herself another job. I think that it was a kind way of getting her out, but I don't think that they should have taken her on in the first place. You could see that she wasn't cut out to be a trainer no matter if her career history told a different story.

Discussion questions

It is clear that both Claire and the IT Training Team agree that Claire does not fit terribly well. Claire probably has a different perspective on the story, but it would seem that she is shocked to have landed the job.

- What made Claire a misfit in the IT training team?
- Was the recruitment and selection procedure appropriate for recruiting a trainer?
- Why?
- How did the IT training team deal with Claire's misfit?
- Could the situation have been handled differently? If so, how?