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When to Cut Someone Loose

We should have known better.

We hired a friend to do some administrative tasks at Wealth and Wisdom (and a couple of our other businesses). On the surface it seemed like a great idea. Ed was more than qualified to do the work. While I'm pretty good at spreadsheets and databases he made me look like a rank amateur. To do what we wanted would have taken me a couple months because of the learning curve.

On the surface it was win - win. He needed a bit of extra cash and loved playing with databases and spreadsheets. I was too busy between my day job, Wealth and Wisdom, writing our book, etc...

Then the problems started

The biggest challenge was that it was a bigger priority to me than for Ed. It was important to our business and our book launch. We had deadlines we were trying to meet. It was money out of my pocket and revenue lost every week the schedule slipped.

Ed had different priorities. First was his day job. He was the go to guy at work and his boss always tossed him the critical projects. This took up a ton of his time. Then there was his social life. What little time he had left was spent on Call of Duty.

Unfortunately, our project was at the bottom of his list. The end result was that progress was non-existent.

Let's be clear. This is my fault.

I view this as my responsibility. I chose to give him the project even though I knew how busy he was. He assured me that he would take it seriously but I knew him well enough I should have questioned this. Also, any time you have a project (or an employee) their performance is your responsibility. It doesn't mean that they don't share the responsibility but in the end it rests on your shoulders.

What did I learn from this experience?

- I need to set up better reporting when I outsource. I did a good job defining the project. I even did a good job setting a deadline. Where I failed was that I never set up regular updates. Several weeks would go by before we would ask "what is the status."
- Don't just hire based on a skill set. You also need to look at the person and hire someone that will get the job done on time and on budget. Ed's was without question skilled. He was a good person. The problem was that he wasn't mature enough to take on the project and he wasn't willing to make it a priority.
- Projects need to be a priority to all parties. Ed had too many priorities. They were all more important than the project.
- Be careful hiring friends and family. People will tell you that the best business relationships are based on friendships. What usually gets left out is that these friendships are almost always of a business nature. In fact, they often grow out of business interactions, not the other way around.

Hiring Friends and family can be a big mistake. They often take liberties that they wouldn't with strangers. It can also be messy if you need to sever the business side of the relationship. It's also hard for you to be firm and demanding to friends and family.

In our case it was hard to push for results. Not only were we friends with him, we knew his whole family. If we weren't careful it could have done irreparable damage to a whole chain of friendships. That being said, several months had gone by without much progress. What should have taken a couple weeks was pushing several months with no end in site.

In the end we found a simpler solution and canceled the project. It help resolve the situation and made it easier to preserve our friendship. We paid him out for his time and we all moved on.

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