

I'm Over Used and Under Appreciated

Dear Stephen,

I manage a regional sales office for a medium-sized furniture manufacturer, working out of a showroom in the Merchandise Mart. The territory and team I manage covers several midwest states. Like a lot of companies during this health and economic crisis, we had to reduce expenses by furloughing or firing some employees and then reducing the salaries of the remaining staff by 25 percent. The people we let go, or furloughed, were mostly support and showroom people. One high-priced senior sales rep on my team was also let go. I was told by upper management that it was a temporary situation, and my team that remained just had to pitch in and make up the slack from the colleagues who were let go.

So, here I am, a sales supervisor responsible for recruiting, coaching, training and managing results for a number of salespeople, some working from home and some working from the showroom. I'm also responsible for the inside

support staff, only now they are all gone, so we rotate the salespeople and myself to cover those duties to make sure someone is always here in the showroom and to make sure the phone is answered. I also now cover the territory of the senior salesperson that was terminated. I totally understand downsizing three months ago when the Mart cancelled NeoCon, the industry was in panic mode, and no one knew what would happen next. And we all have friends at major design firms who were let go as projects dried up or were put on hold by cautious (or terrified) end users. It freaked out our company owners, and they made the right decisions at the time, so we all had to pitch in, work harder, keep the company going and get through the new normal.

Now things are starting to change, and I see light at the end of the tunnel. Our dealers are telling me

projects on hold are opening up again because their clients are locked in to leases and need to furnish their space. Many companies need to make PPE changes, and they look to the dealers to help them with that. It's a strange situation because we're busy providing information, samples and specification but we're not getting many orders yet. Customers are not quite ready to give us the final go-ahead (an actual purchase order) but the good signs are all there. Business is not booming but it is busy and clearly coming back.

I'm doing three jobs at 25% less pay and no chance of a bonus in 2020. I report to the VP of sales, and I suggested to him we consider hiring some people back by Labor Day so we are ready for the



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: StephenSays@bellow.press

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter [@stephenviscusi](https://twitter.com/stephenviscusi), Like [Stephen on Facebook](#); and follow him on [LinkedIn](#).

up-surge in business. I'm getting resistance from executive management on bringing back our furloughed people — it seems like they are playing the pandemic card. I really feel like it's reached the point where the pandemic is an excuse to overwork and overuse me. What gives? And what can I do about it? Any suggestions? Time to leave?

Signed,

Feeling overused and under-appreciated

Dear Overused,

Your dilemma is one we get emails about every day starting just this month. And a big NO to the question of whether it's time to leave. Although if you worked for me, and I heard your complaint I would probably fire you. You're the manager, it is your job to keep the team together and motivated. Follow your company's goals, and if you just do not want to or can't, then, yes, I guess leave the job. With your attitude I am not sure who else would hire you. All those projects that were on hold do seem to be opening up, everyone in your position is saying the same thing. I hear this from dealers and managers at manufacturers and even designers. Yet in most cases, as you mention, the actual orders have not been cut yet. Many of the largest projects are still "wait-and-see" and that applies to your job and attitude as well.

You may be working harder, which is part of a manager's job in the middle of a crisis, but you are not being used. Your company may not reverse the pay cut they had to give you until revenue returns to what it was before COVID-19. When all these projects that have been on hold open up in the last quarter of 2020, revenue will come back and then your personal income will start to return to normal — but in that order. I know you have to work harder because many specifications are changed on these orders to accommodate PPE requirements or in some cases the clients want cheaper options than specified six months ago. I get it. As the manager you need to lead your group and explain this is how it works. You must set an example, stop complaining and have a positive attitude about serving the customer and closing orders.

I know some companies where the employees took way more than a 25% pay reduction and, of course, we all know someone who lost their job. Look at our friends in the design community. Some of those firms were absolutely decimated and have little chance of coming back soon.

My advice is to keep your team members on their toes, encourage them to stay on top of the pending projects because, like you said, most of them are not orders yet, just lots of promises without dates. I believe there will

be orders for the companies and the sales people that persevere, and we will be a lot busier after Labor Day and even busier as the year comes to a close.

Wait for the revenue to show up before you start bugging your boss to hire more people back. So, you have to answer the phone and help keep the showroom clean, big deal. You have a job. This is one time I cannot tell you to work smarter, you just have to work harder and yeah, maybe do two jobs, even three. No, it is not time to change jobs, although if you want to look there are sales jobs out there. I see sales opportunities every day on LinkedIn, and some great ones here in BoF in our help wanted ads. Also, The Viscusi Group and my fellow recruiters have more and more demand for sales reps who have strong, existing customer relationships.

But you are jumping the gun because I can tell you like your company and your job — you're just feeling sorry for yourself, and it's not an attractive quality. So get back to work and stop writing letters to me. Most importantly do not let the team or your manager get a hint you are not up to the task at hand. Lead, encourage and motivate your team because if you can't there are plenty of good people ready to jump in and take your job.

Signed,

Stephen