

PharmX Conflict

Roman and Erica are colleagues at PharmX, a prominent pharmaceutical company based in Ontario with over 700 pharmacy locations across Canada. Roman boasts an impressive 23-year tenure with PharmX, starting as a pharmacist in one of Toronto's most challenging drug abuse areas before rising to a managerial position in the Quality Control Department at the company's headquarters.

After spending 12 years at PharmX, Roman progressed to 'Manager' in the Quality Control Department. He has been working in this role for 11 years and feels he is great at managing his team of 14 staff members. His role is busy due to demand and strict drug regulations he and his team must adhere to. He must ensure his staff are correctly formulating and dispensing the drugs because if it is incorrect, it could lead to terrible disasters, lawsuits and even the death of the end user.

Roman is excellent at formulating and dispensing drugs. He is highly lauded by his senior colleagues. As part of this profession, he is required to attend professional training on industry-related matters on various drug-related matters. He has never attended any EDI or skills-based training such as Leadership training. Due to the high demand of the company, Roman requires a lot of support. His department is only at half capacity as members of his team have left over the years and replacements have not been found.

Erica has a Master's in Chemical Engineering. She has a flawless work record and has proven herself in academic and professional excellence as a Quality Control Chemist. She fully qualified 4 years ago and has been working on Roman's team for 2.5 years. Despite her academic success, she is often reminded by Roman that she does not have "field experience" and is required to follow his instructions.

The pharmaceutical industry undergoes frequent updates in drug usage and regulations, necessitating Roman's team to stay abreast of changes to ensure public safety. It is imperative that Roman's team keep up with the updates as the lives of the public depend on them.

When the changes are announced, team managers are expected to learn the new regulations and procedures and invoke them as a part of their practice before any further drugs are dispensed. Normally, Roman would hold emergency meetings to announce the changes and discuss with his team the best practice to get the work done. In recent months he has been too busy to do this and has been emailing the new regulations to his team instead.

There have been several occasions when the new regulations were sent to the team a few days late. So far, Roman's team has been able to avoid any catastrophes, but they were close calls.

As a recent graduate, Erica is still in the habit of researching the latest updates and keeping up with new changes before PharmX announces them to the company. As Roman's team communication has not been consistent, Erica takes no chances and sends all her colleagues the regulation updates, as soon as she knows them.

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The rest of the team is grateful that in the absence of Roman's leadership, Erica can provide regulation updates in a timely manner. Roman is aware and annoyed by this and often feels Erica is 'stepping' on his toes. Equally, Erica feels the tension but will not compromise on making mistakes at her job.

Addressing the Presence of Conflict

Roman sends Erica an email saying the following:

"To: Erican.G@pharmax.com

Date: 18 July, 2023 Sent: 10.40 am

Subject: Urgent

Erica!

Please come to my office immediately. It is an urgent matter.

Thanks,

Roman."

Roleplay 1

Erica was working in the lab away from her desk and did not get the email until 2pm. When she saw the email upon her return to the office from lunch, she went straight to Roman's office.

Erica: Hi Roman. I didn't get your message until this minute. How can I help?

Roman: (Annoyed and speaking in a flippant tone) Why are you only checking your emails at this hour?

Erica: I had a busy morning in the lab and went to lunch straight after. Sorry. Did I do something wrong?

Roman: (Ignoring her question, handed her a sheet of paper with some instructions on it) Here you go. This is *slightly* more important than lunch. You may have to adjust what you were working on in the **lab!**

Erica was feeling a little distressed by Roman's conduct and tone. She reads the paper and sees that it is an updated regulation that was sent on 13 July 2023. She hands the paper back to Roman.

Erica: Ah, this is not urgent anymore. There was another update yesterday, which is why I had a busy morning in the lab.

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Roman: Pardon me! I don't know about the new changes. Why didn't you tell me or request my authority before working on them?

Erica: I assumed you knew. You should have received the email.

Roman: Well, I didn't and you are not allowed to just go and do whatever you want in this place. I have been here much longer than you but you seem to think you know everything about MY job!

Erica: That is not true. If we got the instructions in time from you, I wouldn't have to do your job!

Erica burst into tears and left the office. Later that day, Roman saw the new updates in his inbox dated July 17, 2023. His next interaction with Erica was 3 weeks later.

Roleplay 2:

Erica: That is not true. If we got the instructions in time from you, I wouldn't have to do your job!

Roman: (He could see that Erica was angry at his comment and her eyes had tears in them). You are angry and sad because of what I have said, aren't you? I didn't mean to upset you. I don't think our working relationship has been so healthy recently.

Erica: There has been a lot of tension lately and I feel like I am always doing something wrong. It's making me feel unsure about the work I am doing.

Roman: Thank you for telling me that. I think is important for us to set aside some time to talk about this. I want to try to fix it. I will let you know some of my availability for the rest of this week. If it works with your schedule, please let me know. Unless you have time now?

Issues, Positions and Acknowledgment

The meeting between Roman and Erica took place later that day. They both agreed that they wanted to have the discussion in a mutual place instead of the office. At a local park, there were tables and benches where they both took a seat. They also brought with them pen and paper so they could take notes.

Roman started the conversation.

Roman: You mentioned earlier that you felt there was tension between us. Could you tell me more about how you are feeling?

Erica: I often feel you don't appreciate the work I am doing. I feel like I am doing something wrong.

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Roman: I hear you saying that you feel I do not appreciate the work you are going. Could you tell me more about how I make you feel?

Erica: Well today was a good example. You handed me some updates that you thought were new but they were already 4 days old and a new set of updates had already come in. I was aware of the updates as I find it is too important for the work I do. I had completed the lab work in accordance with the most recent updates and I put a lot of my own time and energy into it. I came to work 2 hours early to make sure it was completed. I hoped you would appreciate that instead of telling me I wasn't allowed to do whatever I wanted. I am simply doing my job.

Roman: Thank you for telling me that. I didn't realize that new updates had come in. But I have been a manager of this department for a long time and it is customary for employees to ask permission and get sign-off to do the work. This is the way I have always run this department.

Erica: I understand that, but I am scared that I am going to make mistakes if the instructions are not received from you in time. Is it necessary to ask permission if I already know what is required of me?

Roman: That's how it has always been. It's the policy.

Erica: Could you tell me the reason you feel this is always the correct way to work? Especially as you are so busy and rarely have time to provide the team with updates.

Roman: (Sighs) I have a way of managing the work that comes into this department and how I manage my staff. It's the way I have always done it and it has worked well. It is also in our policies that the managers sign off on any changes in the lab work before it is actioned.

Erica: I can appreciate your managerial responsibilities and the policies too. But if the communication from you regarding the regulations is late, maybe we can think about an alternative way to ensure I am getting the regulation updates on time.

Roman: I think this is an option worth discussing.

Erica: Thank you. It is hard for me to say this but I hope you will appreciate it. Perhaps your management style fit the team's needs in the past. But times have moved on. Do you think your style could be impacting me and the team?

Roman: I haven't considered this but now that you mention it, over the years, my responsibilities have changed. I can understand times have moved on too. I am hearing you say that you think my managerial style needs to change in order to get past our conflict.

Erica: Yes, that is correct. Are there any other issues from your perspective that you think are affecting our relationship?

Roman: There is one thing I would like to mention. You are very proficient at what you do, and sometimes that makes me look bad as a manager. I feel like I am not doing my job well and the team is no longer responsive to my management style.

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Erica: Thank you for telling me this. I can understand how some of my actions may have made you feel that way. I am keeping abreast of the updates on the new regulations which I share with the team as soon as it is published. This is contributing to how you are feeling. But, I don't feel comfortable approaching you, which is an issue.

Roman: Thank you for sharing that with me. Are there any other issues you have at work that you would like to discuss with me?

Roman and Erica continued their conversation and decided it would be best for each of them to list their issues and discuss how they could resolve them.

Roman	Erica
Feels his position as manager, is threatened by Erica	Does not feel appreciated
Feels his team is not responsive to him as a management	Roman's management style is out dated and no longer works in current circumstances
Reconsider current HR policies	Reconsider current HR policies
Is overwhelmed with work and feels he cannot delegate to a peer in case he is seen as incapable	Wants to find a productive way to share regulations updates, without offending Roman
Does not like Erica as a personality type	Want to find a way to approach Roman when necessary
	Feels there is tension when she is doing her job
	Her talent is not being utilized by Roman and does not want him to feel threatened by her

Needs/Interests and Barriers

After the issues have been clarified, parties can move to discuss their needs and interests in resolving the conflict and what barriers could potentially get in the way.

Asking investigatory questions such as:

What are you hoping to achieve by resolving X issue?

How will it make your position at this company better by having this issue resolved?

Why is resolving the conflict important to you?

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What needs, if met, would make you feel better?

Explore matters that are getting in the way of resolving the conflict.

Options, Solutions and Agreements

Exploring options on how to achieve each party's interests by taking down the barriers is the only way we can resolve the issues causing the conflict.

We are going to work with the example of Roman, feeling his team is not responsive to his management style.

Roleplay:

Erica: You mentioned earlier that you felt your team is not responsive to you. You told me that this was important to you because you want to be an effective manager and feel respected by me and the team. You also mentioned that you were scared it may result in you losing your job. How can I contribute to resolving this feeling?

Roman: Well there are some things that you may be able to do if you agree, but I also think I could do some leadership training to learn alternative skills that will help me build on what I already have.

Erica: So are saying to me that you think additional training would help?

Roman: Yes.

Erica: What else could be helpful?

Roman: I mentioned earlier there may be some things you can do to help. Would you like to table any ideas?

Erica: I think it would be a good idea to set some boundaries with the HR policies in mind. For example, if new regulations come through, rather than sending them to the team, I could knock on your door to bring the regulations to your attention and take directions from you. How would you feel about that?

Roman: I think this is a great idea. I will make sure my office door is open so you feel you can approach me. There will be times you cannot reach me. Given your experience and qualifications, I trust that you will make the right decision in terms of alerting the rest of the team. Perhaps I can talk to HR about changing the policy to make it easier for us to work with. If HR is not happy to change some of the rules, we can talk about this point again.

Erica: Thank you for acknowledging my abilities and trusting that I can make the right decisions when needed. I like these options a lot. I agree that if HR cannot help change the policies, we could talk about it again.

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Roman: Do you think we should write these ideas down or write some sort of agreement going forward?

Erica: I think we have discussed a lot of issues and come up with some brilliant solutions. We could write them down informally so we don't forget them.

Roman: Good idea. I think it would also be a good idea to test these options and see if they work. Do you think it is a good idea to check in with each other in a couple of weeks? That way, if there is something that doesn't work for us, we can start another discussion.

Erica: I think that is a great idea.

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