

"Did You Let Them Go Yet?" — Tackling the Office Toxic Without a Bomb in the Mailbox

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There's a question every leader gets asked eventually—sometimes whispered in hushed hallway tones, sometimes blurted out in a moment of caffeine-fueled honesty:

"Did you let the toxic one go yet?"

Spoiler alert: Everyone already knows who it is.

When I took on a new leadership role after 20 years in Washington, D.C., I knew things were going to be... different. I'm originally from a small town, so I wasn't unfamiliar with tight-knit communities—but this was still a shift.

Let's just say in D.C., your biggest bet might be on a policy prediction. In this town? It's on where the cow's going to poop at the annual cow.plop.fundraiser. (Yes, it's a thing. Yes, people bring lawn chairs. Yes, someone wins.)

Naturally, I wasn't trying to stir the pot in my first 90 days. I was still learning names, reading the room, and adjusting to life where "a nice dinner out" involved far less traffic and far more homemade pies.

But some things? They're universal.

One name.
Every meeting.
Every department.
Same complaints.
Same drama.
Same eye rolls.

I didn't want to act too fast—but I also couldn't keep ignoring what was painfully clear.
So, I did the responsible thing:

- ✅ I listened carefully.
- ✅ I looped in HR (always—trust me, HR is your ally, not your adversary).
- ✅ I reviewed the facts.
- ✅ I made the decision.

And then... I braced for impact.

Only the impact never came. Instead?

Relief. Applause. "It's about time."

People felt seen. Heard. Respected.

Turns out, everyone had been silently hoping someone would finally do something. That someone, apparently, was me.

We replaced the toxic energy with steady leadership.
We hired a grounded, humble, effective team member.
And we soared.

💡 **Moral of the story?**

Even when you're new, you can't ignore the rot.

Toxins don't fix themselves—and your team knows exactly who (and what) the problem is.

Will it be awkward? Maybe.

Will it be risky? Possibly.

Will it be worth it? **Absolutely.**

I've seen this play out more than once—and I even wrote about it in my book:

📘 [It's Upside Down: The Surprising Business Wisdom Hidden in Jigsaw Puzzles](#)

<https://a.co/d/eyg4LfU>

Because sometimes, the most strategic move isn't adding something new—
It's having the courage to remove what's been dragging the whole puzzle down.