FOR SHOPS UNDER FIFTEEN PEOPLE

The Three Questions

Before the thing goes out — the campaign, the hire, the new location — three questions and three names. If you can answer them in four minutes, you don't need a process.

By **Erin Glover, SHRM-SCP** — an HR director with thirteen years in-house, now advising owner-run businesses. Written for teams small enough that everyone already knows everyone. Print it, or answer it out loud in a meeting. **If the answer is everyone, the answer is no one.**

ASK THESE BEFORE IT SHIPS

i Who owns this one?

Not who is working on it — who is **accountable** for it being right. One name, and that person knows it's them. If two people say the name of the other, you have found your problem before your customers did.

The most common wrong answers: "the team," "we all are," and "well, ultimately me," said by someone who has not looked at it in three weeks.

ONE NAME

ii Who's going to tell us it's wrong?

Name the person whose job in this is to push back. Not to approve — to object. Somebody who sees it differently than the people who made it, and who won't lose anything by saying so.

If nobody has that job, it does not get done. Everyone assumes that if something were glaringly wrong, someone else would have caught it. That assumption is how the costume gets to the shelf.

ONE NAME

iii When do we ask them?

Pick the date now, and pick it early enough that the answer can still change something. A challenger brought in the day before launch is not a challenger. That is a witness.

My rule: while it is still cheap to change your mind. Before the deposit, before the print run, before the offer goes out.

DATE — AND IT IS ON THE CALENDAR

If you own it with somebody

Two owners fail the same way a hundred approvers do. Each one assumes the other looked at it. Neither is being careless — each is making the most reasonable assumption available to them, which is exactly why neither of you feels the gap.

Split it out loud, by category, once:

- Anything a customer sees — one of you.
- Anything that costs money over a set number — the other.
- Anything involving a person's job — one of you, and say which.

Then the rule that makes it work: **the one who owns it decides, and the other one doesn't re-open it later.** Silence from your partner is not approval — it usually means they thought it was yours.

Where to find a challenger who isn't on your payroll

Small teams run out of outside perspective fast. When nobody in the room will see it differently, go get somebody who will:

- An owner in a different industry, same size — trade the favor both ways.
- A long-time customer who tells you the truth. You know which one.
- An employee two levels from the decision, asked in private and thanked in public.
- The person who has to explain it at the counter when it goes sideways.

Ask them one question: **"What's the version of this that ends up on the news?"** Then write down what they say, and write down what you did about it.

An approval process without one accountable name isn't an approval process.
Those are signatures with no owner.

WHEN ONE PAGE ISN'T ENOUGH

Three ways to stop working through this alone.

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