

The Catspaw Chronicles

Were you ever used as a catspaw? Or, on the flip side, have you ever used others as a catspaw? While a revered manager certainly avoids using others as a catspaw, he/she may still be used as a catspaw by superiors, peers, subordinates, or even guests.

Ramiah Daniels • June 25, 2021, 13:32 IST



Over a century ago, children's author Aesop relates a fable of the monkey, the cat, and the chestnuts.

Once upon a time a Cat and a Monkey lived as pets in the same house. They were great friends and were constantly in all sorts of mischief together. What they seemed to think of more than anything else was to get something to eat, and it did not matter much to them how they got it.

One day they were sitting by the fire, watching some chestnuts roasting on the hearth. How to get them was the question.

"I would gladly get them," said the cunning Monkey, "but you are much more skillful at such things than I am. Pull them out and I'll divide them between us."

Pussy stretched out her paw very carefully, pushed aside some of the cinders, and drew back her paw very quickly. Then she tried it again, this time pulling a chestnut half out of the fire. A third time and she drew out the chestnut. This performance she went through several times, each time singeing her paw severely. As fast as she pulled the chestnuts out of the fire, the Monkey ate them up.

Now the master came in, and away scampered the rascals, Pussy Cat with a burnt paw and no chestnuts.

Therein originated the phrase "I was used as a catspaw."

How often have you been used as a catspaw in your various jobs? As a General Manager, I was given to sign termination letters and file cases against various employees who had robbed the owner on the wrong side. Sometimes I may not have agreed with the harsh step taken, but job insecurity may frankly have led me to comply – not my proudest moments for sure!

I was used as a catspaw!
We all have our values, our code of ethics, our ways of looking at life... yet moments arrive when we find ourselves being used as a catspaw.
You may relate to situations like these:

- Your client gets a kick-ass deal out of you, promising you loads of business; only for you to find out later that future business prospects from this company are very low.
- Your colleague convinces you against your better wishes to go along with their plans or ideas.
- Your subordinate entices you into approving their leave with flimsy excuses, and you do so to gain their approval.
- Your boss, or even colleague, gets you to do their work using flattery to keep you motivated...
- Your boss takes your idea and implements it without giving you due credit.
- Your superiors may be nice to you only because they need something from you, and not necessarily due to affection or care for you. If you are the front person for your company, off and on, you could be told to misrepresent a situation, even though it may be against your ethical code.
- All of the above may happen, but at a cost to you. Remember how pussy's catspaw was singed while pulling out chestnuts from the fire for the monkey?

On the flip side, once we are done with admonishing the memories of our ill-users, for using us as a catspaw in the past – let us honestly look into the same past and acknowledge wherever we may have done likewise!

Have you ever sweet-talked your team members and cajoled them into putting in extra hours or effort into achieving what you know is your own Key Result Areas, and subsequently not rewarded them for the same? I have seen managers justifying this by saying that since they were never specifically rewarded when they had slogged for their growth, why should their subordinates expect any better?

A Salesperson over-promising and under-delivering. Is it possible that in such a situation, the client may feel that he has been used as a catspaw? Remember, the client's performance rating in their own company is indirectly dependant on the services received from your contracted services. For, if delivery is not up to expectations (inflated by the salesperson at the time of making the sale), it is the booker who gets an earful from his company.

Examples abound of first-mover hotels that over-priced themselves due to their monopolistic or locational existence. However, the moment other options are available, the clients tend to move their business away to emerging hotels, as these clients may possibly be seething with indignation (like the proverbial singed cat), for being taken advantage of by the primary hotel in the past.

Even servers may use their guests as a catspaw. In a restaurant where the order taker, to fulfil his target, pushes an extensive menu selection, and succeeds in convincing the guest to order the same; the guest may eventually realise he/she has been had!

How often have we even used our boss as a catspaw to obtain our needs, regardless of the business need? Examples abound in planning for manning positions, leave planning, salary increments, budgeting, etc. While most owners are wary and discerning, every once in a while, one comes across a kindly owner accepting lower revenue budgets or higher cost budgets from the operator, only to discover that an opportunity to run a tight ship with much better profits, was missed.

And how about our treatment of the ubiquitous trainee? In my early days when I trained at Oberoi Hotels, Mumbai, in the IRD department (in-room dining), I was made to do IRD clearances twice in my shift, for the entire 23 floors (700 rooms) by a senior steward, who used to traipse off to the lockers for R&R, whilst I slogged away.

All of us know the phrase: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." If you are diligently following this ethic, chances are that you may not be amongst those who use others as a catspaw. And, in a utopian world, if everyone followed this principle, no one would ever be used as a catspaw!

However, the truth is that this catspaw adage will keep occurring. As a good manager, you need to guard yourself against using others, and conversely, be aware when you are being used. Your action thereafter needs to be based on each circumstance, keeping in mind that while you must certainly avoid using others as a catspaw, you may still be used as a catspaw by your superiors, peers, subordinates, or even your guests.

Awareness is crucial here... thereafter it is left to your emotional intelligence on how to react to the situation.

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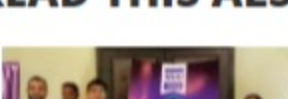
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Digbijay Mishra • ETtech • June 25, 2021, 17:58 IST

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Bikramjit Ray • ETHospitalityWorld • June 25, 2021, 15:33 IST

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Luxury in the clouds: World's highest hotel opens in Shanghai, with a 'special experience rate' of USD 450 a night

The hotel occupies the top floors of the 632-metre (more than 2,000 feet) Shanghai Tower.

AFP • June 25, 2021, 09:30 IST

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Taj City Centre Gurugram appoints Surinder Singh as the General Manager

Singh joins Taj City Centre Gurugram, after his successful tenure as General Manager at key hotels such as Taj Chandigarh; Taj Mahal, Lucknow; Taj Green Cove Resort & Spa, Kovalam; Vivanta New Delhi, Dwarka and Blue Diamond Pune - IHCL SeleQtions.

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Mother-son duo launches Myints to promote healthy frozen snacks

Chef Aneeta Myint with three decades of experience as an F&B expert in pan-Asian cuisine, knew that there were great options in healthy pan-Asian snacks that were also ultra-convenient and could be produced at a commercial scale.

Sakshi Singh • ETHospitalityWorld • June 25, 2021, 10:27 IST

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Mumbai gets first of its kind A2 Milk Cafe

G.O.D Cafe by Harrit Dairy Farm centres around to aim and spread the goodness of dairy produced with A2 milk reared from Gir Cows and stir a healthy dialogue towards consuming the purest form of milk.

Sakshi Singh • ETHospitalityWorld • June 25, 2021, 12:22 IST

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People likely to resume travel again: Thomas Cook India and SOTC Travel report

69 percent of the respondents keen to resume travel in 2021 while rest in 2022 according to the report.

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Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts announces complete vaccination for all associates

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has undertaken various initiatives in support of its associates and their families during these difficult times

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NRAI Kolkata chapter vaccination drive for industry

A team from the restaurant association's city chapter has begun a vaccination drive for those who belong to the restaurant and F&B fraternity in the city.

Bikramjit Ray • ETHospitalityWorld • June 25, 2021, 16:30 IST

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