

## My 'Office Space' Revolt

by Kate Matheny, CEO of SpareBox Storage

In the '90s, I got my first management job in the public accounting department at Deloitte. As a woman leading a team in a male-dominated industry, I was intimidated. I knew it would be easier to stick with the status quo—implementing a monotonous, bureaucratic office culture for my team. But I also knew this kind of management was ineffective and resulted in unmotivated, disgruntled employees.

So I decided to take a risk and do things differently. I built a collaborative environment that highlighted my team members' unique skills and diverse perspectives. I thought it was effective, but I wasn't sure how my team actually *felt* about it—until years later, when I left for another industry job. At my goodbye party, my team gave me a Swingline red stapler.

If you've ever seen the movie *Office Space*, you know this stapler. The film is a cult classic, beloved for its satirical take on all that's wrong with corporate office culture. A condescending, suspenders-wearing boss terrorizes his employees with mind-numbing, inexplicable tasks. A fearful, neurotic character named Milton Waddams treasures his bright red stapler, because it's the one colorful spot of joy in that office's gray monotony. When his stapler is taken away, things go awry.

When my team gave me that same red stapler from the movie, I appreciated the symbolism immediately. They were saying, *You did something different here.*

When I became CEO of SpareBox Storage, I brought my red stapler with me. The gift now sits on my desk, a constant reminder of the leader I want to be. I know that in a corporate setting, people often feel pressure to fit in. I once did too; I was afraid to draw attention to myself. But I learned that by subverting expectations and celebrating individuality, I allowed my unique abilities to shine through. Leadership isn't about buzzwords and formulas. It's about thinking creatively, collaborating constantly, and valuing every voice.

My first team gifted me the red stapler, but their greater gift was helping me live out the lesson it represents: Dare to challenge the status quo for your team. It will always be worth it.



### → "IF THEY TAKE MY STAPLER..."

The author holding her beloved stapler—the same color and brand from *Office Space*.

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