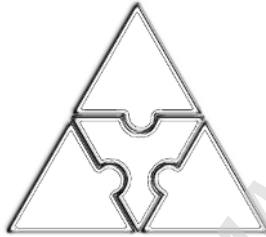


# The Fable



Seth Owen had it all figured out. He had taken business classes in college, and he assumed managing people wasn't going to be that hard. After all, he thought, his college degree and charismatic personality would make him an ideal boss; employees would love to be on his team.

As he entered the working world as an employee of a Fortune 500 company, Seth was looking forward to putting his degree to work. Although he was an average student in school, Seth was a leader outside the classroom. He had a reputation as the one person you could depend on to get things done. Not only would Seth make things happen as the “go to” guy, he could inspire people around him to help, and he always did it with a smile on his face.

Now that he was out of school, the time for “learning” was over, and the time for “doing” was here. The dress rehearsal had ended. As he headed through the doors of corporate America, Seth had no

idea his education was just beginning. Nor did he have any idea that his first year on the job would change the way he viewed business, and life, forever.

### **THE ARRIVAL**

For a small regional airport, there were quite a few people bustling around. As Seth moved through the crowd of departing passengers, he tried to look confident in his new blue suit, freshly starched shirt, cap toe shoes, and yellow tie. He had been told that yellow was a “power” color, and he needed to look powerful that day.

You see, Seth was meeting his new boss. After graduating from college, he spent months looking for a job. The recession limited the number of opportunities available to him and his college buddies, but his wait was finally over and he was going to work for Halifax, a large call center company with offices in central Texas. Despite the recession, this company was growing and had opened a new call center two years earlier just outside of Austin. Seth liked the fact it was a huge company with offices all over the United States. He knew job security was a thing of the past, but he hoped it would be a secure place to be and would provide opportunities for advancement.

Although he had been hired by the corporate recruiting office in New Jersey, Seth was being sent to work in the call center outside Austin. Today was the first time he'd be meeting his new boss, Hannah Jaxson. Seth was eager to meet her because the corporate recruiter had spoken very highly of her. He told Seth she was considered a rising star in the company, and that she was transferred from another department to take over this call center just two months ago.

Seth scanned the crowd as he wandered around the baggage claim area looking for Hannah. He had requested a picture from the corporate recruiter so he would know her when he saw her, but his flight left before he could get the photo. Although he had no idea what Hannah would look like, he had a picture in his mind. She would be tall and confident, have light brown hair, and be well dressed.

As the passengers gathered their luggage and the crowd began to thin, Seth got anxious. He wasn't concerned his new boss wasn't going to be there. He was concerned that maybe he was being tested. He thought to himself, "What if this is part of the test? What if she's standing around the corner watching me wander around lost? Should I have her paged? Should I start approaching any female standing by herself?" If this was a test, he certainly didn't want to fail.

About that time, he heard the page. "Seth Owen. Please meet your party at the baggage claim information desk. Mr. Seth Owen. Please meet your party at the baggage claim information desk."

As he turned to walk that way, he saw a woman emerge from the small crowd around the information desk. Although this woman was waving, this couldn't be her. She didn't even come close to matching the picture he had in his mind. This woman was short and had dark black hair. However, Seth had been half right. Dressed in a dark blue suit, his new boss carried herself with all the confidence in the world.

## **THE RIDE**

It didn't take long for Seth to figure out why Hannah was successful. She was easy to like and had a very charismatic personality. Any anxiety he had was

calmed before they got to the car. He had wrongly assumed she would be judging his every move. It quickly became apparent she simply wanted to talk about the job opportunity.

The ride from the airport to the office was just over an hour. Hannah used that time to talk about the assignment. She explained to Seth how she had been given responsibility for this call center just two months ago, and that her biggest challenge so far was shaping the culture. His job experience up to this point had consisted mostly of part-time jobs, so the term “culture” was relatively new to him.

“I’m not sure I know what you mean when you say you’re shaping the culture,” Seth admitted reluctantly. “Didn’t they already have a culture when you got here?”

“They did,” Hannah laughed, “but it’s a culture that seems to breed mediocrity. Most employees just show up and do the bare minimum to get by, and we have an opportunity to change it. That’s a priority for me.”

Seth didn’t want to seem ignorant to the whole idea of culture, so he didn’t press the issue and just looked out the window. Hannah must have sensed his confusion. “Have you ever worked somewhere you didn’t like?”

“Yes, I have,” Seth responded as he turned from the window. “I worked at a store in a mall. It was awful.”

“Tell me what made it so awful,” she inquired.

“First of all, my boss treated all the employees like they were inferior. He always yelled at us if we were one minute late for our shift, although he seemed to be late more than anyone.”

Hannah asked, “Do you remember the feeling you had when you worked in that environment?”

“Absolutely. It was horrible. I used to hate going to work every day, and I remember what a relief it was when I finally quit.”

“That,” she said, “is culture. You can’t touch it, and you certainly can’t explain it in clear terms. It’s how people feel when they go to work. My biggest challenge has been convincing my management team we have some work to do in that area.”

“Are they not supportive?”

“Let’s just say they have some baggage,” Hannah said with a smile. “You see, we already have a call center in Austin, about a half hour from our new office. The head of that call center and two of the managers accepted a transfer two years ago when it first opened. The leadership style of my predecessor for nearly two years pretty much ensured a continuation of the old culture.”

“Why did your predecessor leave?” Seth asked.

“Early retirement.”

Seth asked, “Do you think the employees in this department don’t like working at Halifax? Is that why you want to change the culture?”

“That’s a fair question. My observation is this office is no different than any other I’ve had the chance to develop. Most employees are disengaged. They simply show up to work, do the minimum to get by, and collect a paycheck every two weeks. I want to create a culture of employee engagement.”

Seth was familiar with Hannah’s observation. He had seen employee disengagement at every part-time job he had held up to that point in his life. In fact, there were times he considered himself one of the disengaged. So he asked the most obvious question, “How do you create this culture of employee engagement?”

As they pulled into the parking lot, Hannah looked over and said, “Seth, you have identified

the biggest challenge I face every day, and one I hope you can help me work on.”

### **THE MANAGEMENT TEAM**

Seth had never been inside a call center before, and didn't really know what to expect. As they entered the office, he was awed with the rows and rows of computer stations all surrounded by low cubicle walls. It was somewhat dark and looked very formal.

Apparently everyone knew Hannah had gone to the airport to get “the new guy.” As he glanced around the office, he saw heads popping up over the cubicle walls at each computer station. Seth was prepared to be judged by his new boss, but he hadn't anticipated the scrutiny from the sixty call center reps on duty that morning.

On the ride from the airport, Hannah had explained to Seth that the first order of business would be a meeting in the conference room with the other managers. The office had a total of four managers assigned to manage approximately 100 employees. Seth had asked about his three fellow managers during the ride, but Hannah wouldn't divulge any information. She explained she didn't want to influence his opinion in either direction.

As they entered the conference room right on time, Seth was surprised to see only one person there for the meeting. Hannah had told Seth there was only one male manager, and his name was Aaron King.

Seth had a very aggressive and confident personality, and eagerly approached Aaron before he put down his briefcase.

“You must be Aaron,” he said with a smile and an extended hand. “My name is Seth Owen.”

“Hello, Seth. I’ve been looking forward to meeting you. At home I have a wife and three daughters, so I get ganged up on a lot. The same is true for the office. I’ve been looking forward to some male influence around here!”

Seth was impressed with Aaron. He liked the fact he was on time for the meeting, and he liked his energy.

As they were sitting down, one of the other managers ran into the room. “Sorry I’m late,” she said. “I couldn’t get one of my employees out of my office.” She sat down without saying another word.

Seth stood and reached across the table, extending his hand. “Hi. I’m Seth.”

“I’m Jill Ramos,” she responded as she tried to catch her breath. “Nice to meet you.”

As Seth sat back down, Hannah asked both managers to introduce themselves in more detail. Before either could start, she inquired, “Where’s Carmen?”

“She just got on a call with someone from the staff,” Jill responded. “She said she would try to make it, but that we shouldn’t wait for her.”

Without showing too much concern, Hannah looked at Aaron and Jill and asked, “Who wants to go first?”

As if he were expecting the question, Aaron raised his hand and offered to get things started. He explained he had been a manager in the Austin office, and accepted the transfer because this new office was closer to home. Of all the people Seth met that day, he felt the most comfortable around Aaron. He would later learn that Aaron was the manager most employees in the office preferred, and certainly the one most eager to learn about the culture of employee engagement Hannah was trying to put in place.

Jill went next. She started by apologizing again for being late to the meeting. Seth wasn't sure if she was being genuine or just trying to stay out of trouble with Hannah. She explained she had been a call center representative her entire career, and that she got promoted when the new office was opened. She said she was tired of having the least amount of seniority with only two years as a manager, and that she was glad to see a new manager. Seth would later learn that Jill was the most efficient call center representative in the Austin office, and ranked at the top of nearly every area the company measured. He also learned she was struggling with most of the changes Hannah was making to enhance the culture.

After the two other managers had introduced themselves, Seth spent a few minutes sharing his background. As he wrapped up his comments, Hannah explained that she and Seth would meet for the remainder of the afternoon in her office, and that everyone else was welcome to return to work. She turned to Seth and said, "I guess you'll have to meet Carmen at a later time."

Seth didn't know Carmen, but he suspected this was her way of showing she wasn't concerned with "the new guy." Whether his gut feeling was right or not, Seth needed to make a statement of his own. He turned to Hannah and said, "I think I would like to meet her now. Can you take me to her office so I can at least introduce myself?"

Hannah smiled and replied, "I'd be happy to take you to her office." Seth had a feeling he had just earned a little respect from his new boss.

Seth noticed her nameplate as they approached her cubicle. It read "Carmen Fuentes." When they reached her doorway, Carmen spun



around in her chair. She wasn't on the telephone, so Seth extended his hand and said, "Hi, my name is Seth Owen. I understand you were on a call this morning during our meeting, so I thought I would stop by and introduce myself. Hannah and I have a meeting, but I wanted to let you know I look forward to working with you."

Not giving Carmen the opportunity to respond, Seth turned back to Hannah and said, "I'm ready when you are!" The two walked across the call center to Hannah's office, where the assessment would begin.

### **AN ASSESSMENT**

As soon as her office door closed, Hannah turned to Seth and asked, "So, what did you think?"

"They all seem to be very nice people," Seth hesitantly replied as he sat down.

Hannah looked at Seth as if she were analyzing his response. "Now that you've provided me the politically correct response, tell me what you really think."

Seth appreciated her openness, but he never had a manager ask his opinion about his fellow employees before. He wondered if this was normal, and was guarded with his response.

"I thought Aaron was pretty sincere. He seems to have an open mind. And Jill seems to be a nice person."

Hannah waited for Seth to continue, and when he didn't elaborate she said, "You're holding back. I want to know what you really think."

Seth sat quietly for a moment, choosing to carefully word his response. He wanted to share his true feelings, but he needed assurance that it was safe to do so.

“Seth,” Hannah said as she leaned forward, “I value your judgment. Some bosses would never ask for your honest opinion. However, I believe if a culture of employee engagement is truly going to exist, we must have an environment where honest views are encouraged.”

Although Seth wasn't comfortable being critical of anyone he just met, he knew anything short of complete honesty at this point might be seen as a sign of weakness to Hannah, so he shared what was on his mind. “I wasn't terribly impressed with Jill.”

“What didn't you like?”

“I'm not sure I can pinpoint it yet,” Seth replied. “After her introduction, I just got the feeling she's somewhat insecure. Maybe it's because she hasn't been in management all that long.”

“Anyone bother you?”

“Carmen,” Seth replied without hesitation.

“What bothered you?”

“Several things,” Seth replied. “First, I assume you asked her to be in the meeting.”

“I did.”

“Well, maybe I'm naïve, but I've always been taught you don't just ignore your boss when she asks you to do something. Beyond the fact it's an act of insubordination, it's just rude. Second, the fact she didn't show up at the meeting sent the message she thinks she's too important to meet her new colleague. That wasn't just a slap to me, but to all the managers. And third, she seemed threatened.”

“She is threatened,” Hannah said. “Carmen was the queen bee in the Austin office and has continued in that role in this office. She and my predecessor were good friends. In fact, she transferred to this office because she thought she would get promoted when her buddy retired. She's feared by most

everyone in the office, and she's been threatened by my style of leadership since I got here."

"How is your style different from hers?"

"She's been leading with negative motivation for a long time, and it's worked," Hannah replied. "She's been fighting me since the day I got here because I believe we can get farther with positive motivation. I took her stick away, and told her she could have it back when she put a carrot on the end of it. She doesn't like the new culture. In fact, her absence from the meeting is just another example of her attempt to maintain control."

"That explains why she's threatened by you, but why is she threatened by me?"

"Carmen is threatened by change," Hannah said. "She sees you as someone young and eager, and is concerned you may embrace my style of leadership."

"I can handle her," Seth responded with complete confidence. "Should I be concerned with any of the others?"

"I'll let you run with your gut feeling about the rest."

"You were analyzing my ability to quickly assess someone's character," Seth stated with a smile. "Was I close?"

"You were very close," Hannah replied. "But don't get too confident. Quite frankly, these three weren't that hard to figure out. Your hardest work assessing character hasn't even begun. Let's talk about your team."

### **THE CHALLENGE**

Hannah explained that the office was broken into four equal teams, and Seth was inheriting the "misfit" team.

“The office is driven by numbers, and the managers compete with each other for bragging rights in each area we measure,” Hannah explained. “The team you’re inheriting hasn’t performed well at all. In fact, they’re in last place in each area of measurement.”

“Great,” Seth replied with sarcasm. “I get the worst of the bunch.”

“It’s not as bad as it sounds. I plan to mix up the teams and create a new one for you to lead. I don’t want you to have the responsibility of leading the worst employees.”

Seth thought about her comment for a moment. “Just out of curiosity, how can it be that all the bad employees ended up on the same team?”

“I suppose they’ve had bad leadership so long they just ended up that way,” Hannah answered. “But don’t worry. I’ll level out the playing field when I mix up the teams.”

Seth wondered about Hannah’s comment about bad leadership. “Do you think they perform so poorly because of bad leadership, or a lack of leadership?”

“That’s an interesting question. I suppose it’s a combination of both.”

For the next few hours, Hannah explained how the office worked, and put him through the traditional orientation. Over lunch, he learned more about Halifax and the story behind this relatively new call center.

Although a call center already existed in Austin, the company leadership was excited to see rooftops popping up all over this suburb outside Austin. When the decision was made to expand operations by opening a new call center, they chose this area because they believed there would be plenty of potential employees in case others

didn't want to transfer from Austin. They were right. About half the office was staffed with call center reps who were willing to transfer, and the other half joined the company two years ago when this new call center opened.

As the day proceeded, Seth was getting more and more excited about the opportunities this job would provide. Although he couldn't soak up the information fast enough, it was time to head back to the airport for his flight home. Sometimes excitement can cause a person to make commitments he or she will later regret.

### **BRING ON THE MISFITS**

In the car on the way back to the airport, Hannah asked, "So what do you think? Are you up to the task of helping me build a culture of employee engagement in this organization?"

"I'm your guy. However, I'm going to ask you to do something for me. You mentioned earlier that you planned to mix up the teams and create a new one for me to lead so I won't have the responsibility of leading the worst employees. Do me a favor. Leave the teams just as they are. I want the challenge of turning this team around."

"Are you sure? You haven't even had the opportunity to meet these people yet."

"I'm absolutely certain," Seth replied. "I just don't believe people show up to work every day and try to make things bad. They certainly didn't start out that way. And if they've become disengaged, maybe someone or something inside the company did it to them. I've shown up to every job I've ever had with the excitement to do great work, and it always seemed to be a boss that took away that excitement. I just think most people want to do

good things, and that a good boss can encourage them to do it. I want the challenge of bringing them back to the top.”

“And if you’re wrong?”

“I don’t think I am,” Seth replied. “With your commitment to change the culture and my desire to help make it happen, I can do this. But if I’m wrong, I certainly can’t do any damage. They’re already the poorest performers you have. They can’t get any worse!”

As Seth got out of the car at the airport, Hannah looked over and said, “I’ll see you in two weeks. Be prepared for the challenge of your life.”

Seth thought back on the success he’d had leading in the past, and confidently replied, “I commit to you I’ll be ready.” He had no idea how hard it would be to keep his commitment.

## **FIRST DAY**

Seth was hoping for a warm reception his first day on the job. It certainly didn’t start out that way: No one told him he needed a code to get into the building. It was the first week of January, so he was getting rather cold waiting outside the call center for someone to answer the intercom. Just as he was about to give up and go sit in his car until someone came along, the buzzer sounded and the door unlocked.

Seth walked down a long hallway to the entrance to the call center. The first person he saw when he opened the door was Hannah. “Welcome,” she said with a huge smile and warm handshake. “I saw you on the security monitor at the front door, and realized I forgot to give you the code. Sorry about that. We’ll get it

taken care of today. Let me show you to your cubicle.”

As Seth walked through the office, it became apparent that everyone knew it was his first day on the job. The heads started popping up over the cubicle walls the second the door closed behind him.

As Seth put down his box of personal items, Hannah pulled up a chair and sat down. “Here’s your first assignment, and you have all day to complete it. I want you to spend the day meeting with each manager one-on-one. Also, schedule a meeting with your entire team to introduce yourself.”

“Anything in particular you hope I get from the one-on-one meetings?”

“Nothing specific,” she responded. “I just want you to spend some time with them. Get to know them a little, and be prepared to share your observations with me.”

“I can do that.”

As she walked to the doorway, Hannah suddenly turned around and dropped a report on Seth’s desk. “Oh,” she said. “I almost forgot. Here’s a little challenge I want you to start thinking about. Your team has an attendance problem. As you’ll see in this report, of the four teams in the office, yours is in last place. You need to fix this problem.”

“How do I fix an attendance problem?”

“I don’t know, hotshot,” Hannah smiled. “That’s for you to figure out. I’ll be in meetings all day, so let’s schedule some time this evening. There’s a small restaurant three blocks from here called La Cantina. We passed it on the way in from the airport when you were here two weeks ago. Meet me there at 6 o’clock. I’ll be eager to hear your thoughts.”

### SOME TIME WITH JILL

Seth was looking forward to spending time with each manager and his team. If there was anything Seth did well, it was build relationships. He planned to call each of his fellow managers to schedule a time to meet, but before he did, he reached over and grabbed the attendance report Hannah had left on his desk. He figured this would be a good topic for discussion in his one-on-ones with the other managers.

Seth started looking through the numbers. He suddenly realized he was being watched. All four manager cubicles were situated along the same wall, and each had a window that looked out into the call center. When he looked up, he saw the call center reps' heads disappear behind the computer stations.

Seth went back to reviewing the report. He figured the best place to start was the worst employee. He looked down at the bottom of the list to find his first target. Her name was Mattie. Seth hoped the other managers could provide some insight in how to deal with his first challenge.

Armed with a great discussion point for his one-on-ones, Seth planned to call each manager to schedule a time to meet. He figured he'd take some time to unpack and get settled in before he made the first call. Just as he reached for his box, Jill walked in.

"Welcome to your first official day in the working world."

"Thank you, Jill. I was going to call you this morning to see if I could schedule some time to meet today. Is now a good time?"

"Now is a great time," Jill replied as she walked over and sat in the chair next to Seth's desk. "I've



got a meeting with an employee in a half hour, but I'm free until then. And by the way, you don't need to schedule time with the other managers. Just stop by. It's very informal around here."

"So tell me," Seth asked, "what have I gotten myself into?"

"An overwhelming workload," Jill responded. "We have so much work to do, and now Hannah is here making a bunch of changes. Half of our employees came over from Austin and have many years of service, and half of them are relatively new to Halifax. The new ones are young and open to change, and the older ones want to keep everything the same. With Hannah, you either go along with the change, or she's probably going to make it pretty difficult for you. I guess if you don't mind giving away all your power, then you'll fit in just fine."

"Can I ask you a question about my first challenge?"

"First challenge?" Jill laughed. "You've been here 15 minutes! Hannah sure didn't give you much time to settle in. What's it about?"

"Attendance."

"You have inherited a team with horrible attendance," Jill replied. "I heard you passed up on the opportunity to get a new team. You'll wish you hadn't made that deal. Quite frankly, I'm glad you did though because it means I don't have to take on any of that team. I used to work with some of those people, and there are some bad apples in that group."

"I'm willing to take on the challenge. I'm just not sure how to start."

"If it were me," Jill responded, "I wouldn't rock the boat too much. Anything you do that's drastic will cause problems, and it's just not worth the

hassle. Tell them they need to start coming to work, and follow the procedures for discipline if they don't. That's about all you can do. Hannah would probably disagree, but she doesn't seem to be bothered by the conflict."

"The conflict doesn't bother me, either. I just want to see an improvement. What can you tell me about Mattie?"

"Aahh, Mattie," Jill responded. "We worked together in Austin. She didn't have an attendance problem back then. In fact, she had perfect attendance for years. It wasn't until we transferred to this new office and she got a new boss that it became a problem."

"Who was her new boss?"

"Carmen," Jill replied. "When Mattie's attendance became a problem, Carmen ran her off after the first year. She doesn't have much patience for that kind of stuff. The manager you're replacing agreed to take her on her team, but Mattie didn't get any better."

"How could she go from having perfect attendance on one team to being the worst on this team?"

"I don't know," Jill responded. "Probably some personal issues, and you can't get wrapped up with that stuff. If you do, you'll spend all your time in this office."

"I appreciate your thoughts. I need to schedule a meeting with my entire team. How do I do that?"

"Talk to Carmen," Jill replied. "She does all the scheduling, and can get everyone scheduled off the system for a one-hour meeting with you. On most days, you may have only half your team working at the same time. Hannah asked Carmen to schedule your entire team to work today so you could have a team meeting, so they're all here."

For the rest of their time together, Seth did what he did best. He led a conversation focused on Jill's personal life. Seth knew people liked to talk about themselves, and he gave her all the attention she needed.

Jill suddenly looked at her watch and said, "I've got to get ready for my meeting. Good luck with your team meeting." With that, Seth's first one-on-one was over. If only they all would be this easy.

### **COLD ENCOUNTER**

Seth headed to Carmen's office to schedule his team meeting as soon as Jill walked out. He didn't know what to expect after their first encounter two weeks earlier, but he was prepared for anything.

"Good morning," Seth blurted out as he entered Carmen's office.

"What can I do for you, Seth?" Carmen responded without even looking up from her computer screen. Seth wasn't surprised at all that Carmen didn't even bother welcoming him to his new job.

"I need to schedule a meeting with my team for today, and Jill said you were the manager in charge of the schedules."

Carmen continued to stare at her computer while Seth stood in her doorway feeling rather awkward. "Three o'clock this afternoon. You have them for an hour."

"Thanks," Seth replied. "While I'm here, Hannah has asked that I spend some time with each of the managers today. I was wondering if this was a good time to talk."

"Not right now. I'm preparing some information for a meeting. I'll be done by 4:30. Come by then."

Seth thanked her for scheduling the team meeting, and headed back to his office. Just as he got back to his office, Aaron walked out of the cubicle right next to his office.

“There you are,” Aaron said. “I was just looking for you. I wanted to see if you’d like to have lunch today.”

“I’ve been in Carmen’s office scheduling a team meeting. I was hoping to spend some time with you today, so lunch would be perfect. I’ll be ready to leave at noon.”

With a few hours to spare, Seth finally found the time to unpack his personal items and get settled in.

### **SOME TIME WITH AARON**

“My first piece of advice is this,” Aaron said as they sat down in the crowded diner across the street from the office. “Be nice to the waitresses. It’s the only restaurant in walking distance of the office, and you’re going to be eating here a lot.”

Seth wasn’t sure why, but he was very comfortable around Aaron. He got the feeling Aaron was genuine, and that he really enjoyed working for Halifax.

Seth started the conversation. “What do you like best about being a part of the management team?”

“Learning. Hannah has such a great track record of success. I’m not always sure her ideas are the right ones for our office, but I give them a try because she’s been so successful. But I admit it’s hard. Every time I make a decision about managing my employees, I always think back to how I was managed. But Hannah has been reminding us that these young people have had different life experiences, and it requires us to manage them a little different.”

“What do you like least about being a part of the management team?” Seth asked.

“The hours. Before I got promoted, I looked at how management came in at 8 and left at 5. When I got promoted, I assumed I would do the same. And before Hannah arrived, I did. Although sometimes I leave at 5 if my son has a baseball game, I’m normally here much later. My wife doesn’t like how much I’m working, but I love the opportunity to learn from Hannah, and my team’s results have been improving. We are constantly in the running for first place in just about every area we measure.”

After they ordered their lunch, Seth continued his questioning. “Aaron, you seem to enjoy the fact that Hannah has become a part of the team. Do you think the other managers feel the same way?”

“I don’t like talking about the other managers. However, I will say this. I sometimes think the changes Hannah has made are more difficult for the others to accept.”

“Why do you suppose they have such a difficult time accepting the changes?” Seth asked.

“Two things. One, change often creates more work, and I’m not sure Jill wants additional work. And two, admitting that a new way of doing things may be better is like admitting your old way was wrong, and I’m not sure Carmen wants to admit her way was wrong.”

Seth knew his time with Aaron was limited, and he wanted to get his thoughts on Mattie, so he pressed on. “What can you tell me about Mattie?”

“Aahh, Mattie. What a disappointment she’s been the past two years. She hasn’t always been that way.”

Seth pushed for more. “I heard she had perfect attendance years ago, but somehow became disengaged. What do you know about her situation?”

“Mattie was on my team at the old office. She was one of my best employees, ranking toward the top of every area we measured. After we transferred out here and changed the teams, she seemed to go downhill.”

“Any idea what caused her to go downhill?” Seth asked.

“It all started when she joined Carmen’s team. Carmen manages with an iron fist. She believes management is very simple. Tell people what you expect them to do, and if they don’t do it, you beat them until they do.”

“Interesting philosophy,” Seth laughed. “I’ve worked for a few people who must have graduated from the same management program. What do you think I should do about Mattie’s attendance problem?”

“I don’t know,” Aaron replied. “It’s a tough call. It depends what tone you want to set. If you don’t do anything, you could be seen as a pushover, and everyone will assume it is business as usual. If you discipline her, you could be seen as a bully and scare everyone into action. At least they would know you mean business. Whatever you do, good luck.”

While they ate their lunch, the conversation turned from business life to personal life. Aaron didn’t seem to have any aspirations to take over the world. He simply wanted to be a good father and boss . . . in that order.

### **TEAM MEETING**

Seth hadn’t been nervous at any point since his arrival. He wasn’t nervous about meeting Hannah on his initial visit, and he wasn’t nervous about meeting his fellow managers. But now he was a little nervous. He was about to meet his team.

No one knew the power of first impressions like Seth. He felt he had mastered first impressions over the years, but he wasn't sure how he should come across to his team. If he seemed too confident, they would think he was a "know-it-all." If he seemed too laid back, they would think he wasn't strong enough to lead. He had a plan, and he was about to figure out if it would work.

Seth was in the conference room at 2:45 waiting for everyone to arrive. At 3 o'clock sharp, all twenty-five members of his team filed in like they were attending a funeral. No one spoke, and most stared at the ground. Although there were ten chairs around the conference table, only six people sat down. Everyone else stood along the walls.

Seth got it started. "Good afternoon. My name is Seth Owen, and as you know by now, I am your new manager. We don't have much time, and I want each of you to introduce yourself, so I'm not going to be saying much in this meeting. However, there are two things I want you to know. First, Hannah offered to divide this team to create four new teams in the office because, as a group, you have not performed well. I asked her not to do that."

A few people looked up from the floor as though Seth's words had suddenly piqued their interest.

"Some of you may think I'm crazy for doing that," Seth continued, "particularly since I don't know any of you yet. But I don't need to know you individually to know you all have the potential to be the best in this office. I'm committed to helping make this team the best."

Now all eyes were on Seth.

"Second, many of you in this room have been here a long time. Each of you has forgotten more about your job than I will ever learn. I have no plans to come in here and learn your jobs so I can

tell you what you're doing wrong. My plan is to use my position as a manager to remove the road-blocks that keep you from being successful. I'll make you a deal. You do your job well, and I promise you I'll do mine well."

That was it. Seth wanted his team to know two simple things. One, he had confidence in them. And two, he planned to lead them. He would let everything else fall into place from there. After they finished their introductions, Seth realized the people in that room seemed different than the people who walked in an hour earlier. This was a good thing, but sometimes good things don't last.

### **SOME TIME WITH CARMEN**

Seth was so wrapped up in the moment he didn't realize an hour had gone by. Everyone in the room knew it when Carmen came barging in.

"Your hour is up," she said coldly. "Customer hold time is going through the roof because we're short twenty-five people. Everyone back to work."

Seth noticed how the energy was suddenly sucked out of the room when Carmen walked in. The light mood he had created during their introductions was gone in a second. In fact, Seth noticed a change in facial expressions the moment Carmen entered the room.

Not wanting to impact customer hold times, Seth quickly thanked his team and told them he would be following up with one-on-one meetings with each of them. He used the next half hour to make notes regarding each of his team members, then headed to Carmen's office for his 4:30 meeting.

If Seth felt a certain comfort level around Aaron, it was just the opposite with Carmen. Beyond what he had been told about her management style, he



just had bad vibes. The fact that she had walked into the conference room and ordered his employees back to work sent a message to Seth about what she thought of him. If he was going to stand a chance, it would require him to stand toe-to-toe with her from the beginning.

“Let’s make a deal,” Seth said as he walked into Carmen’s cubicle without knocking. “You don’t bark out orders to my team, and I won’t bark out orders to yours.”

“Excuse me,” Carmen responded as she put down her pen and spun around in her chair to face Seth.

Seth pulled up a chair next to Carmen’s desk and said, “You walked into the conference room and instructed my employees to get back to work. I may be new, but I’m pretty certain it’s my job to provide them instructions.”

“You didn’t get them back to work on time, and . . .”

Seth put up his hand and interrupted Carmen before she could finish her comment.

“I understand I should have been watching the clock and gotten them back to work on time,” Seth admitted. “I promise you I will improve on that the next time I have a team meeting. However, if there is something you need my employees to do in the future, I would appreciate you bringing it to my attention. I will handle it the way I believe is the most appropriate.”

“I’ll try to remember that,” Carmen responded sarcastically. “But what this team needs is discipline. They’ve been allowed to get away with anything. They’ve run the last two managers off, and they need a firm hand to get them in line.”

“I appreciate you sharing your observation. You very well may be right about the discipline,

and I'll determine that as I get to know them. In the meantime, I plan to build a culture within my team, and part of that culture involves me defending them when someone else tries to give them direction."

"Is there anything specific you want to discuss. I'm leaving at 5."

"Yes, there is," Seth replied. "I've been given the task of improving the attendance of my team, and I'm trying to figure out how I should begin."

"That's easy. Find the worst one and send him packing."

"I have found the worst one," Seth replied, "but it's not a 'him,' it's a 'her.'"

"Who is it?"

"Mattie," Seth replied.

"Aahh, Mattie. She used to be on my team, and she put in for a transfer because she couldn't stand the heat. If you're smart, you'll make an example of her early, and hope it actually makes a difference to the others. You would send a strong message that you won't tolerate lousy performance by firing her now."

"You don't think I should give her a chance to improve?" Seth asked.

"She's had two years to improve. If she hasn't improved by now, she never will. There is nothing that will motivate her. If you want a termination to stick, you'll have to build a case to terminate her."

Seth knew from his conversations with Jill and Aaron that Mattie became disengaged when she joined Carmen's team, so he thought he'd see what she'd be willing to admit.

"I heard Mattie was a pretty good performer when she worked for Aaron, and that she changed when she joined your team. Do you have any idea what caused the change?"

Carmen was not happy with the inference that she had something to do with Mattie's poor performance. "First of all, Aaron is a pushover. He's afraid to tell people when they aren't doing their job. He's more interested in having his team like him, and spends way too much time coddling his employees. In fact, if he spent more time doing his job instead of holding their hands, he'd probably be a better manager."

Despite Carmen's rant about Aaron, Seth calmly replied, "I wasn't asking about Aaron. I was asking if you knew why Mattie's performance changed when she joined your team."

"Because I wasn't willing to pamper her," Carmen shouted.

Seth looked out the cubicle window to the computer stations and noticed everyone close to her office peering over their cubicle walls. Their heads quickly disappeared when they saw Seth look their way, and he knew it was probably time to wrap up this discussion.

Seth had spent time with Jill and Aaron getting to know them personally, but he had no interest in doing that with Carmen. She was cold and calculating, and he didn't want to waste his time. Instead, he decided to change the subject.

"What's it been like since Hannah joined the team?" Seth asked.

"Quite frankly, she's making too many changes. We were successful before she got here, and she seems to be making changes just to make herself look good. She knows everyone from the corporate office is watching her every move, and they expect her to do things differently. If I had been promoted into that job, we would not be making most of these changes."

Throughout the rest of their time together, Carmen made it very clear she didn't care much

for Hannah. Now that Seth knew Carmen believed she should have been promoted to Hannah's position, he was beginning to understand Carmen's motives and anger.

In the middle of their conversation, Carmen stood up and began collecting her things. "It's 5 o'clock, and I have to go," she said. "We'll have to finish this conversation another time." She walked out of her office and left Seth sitting alone.

### **WORK WHENEVER YOU WANT**

Seth thought it was strange that someone in management would knock people over trying to get out of the building at 5 o'clock. On his way back to his office, he noticed all the other managers had left, too. Seth looked across the call center and noticed Hannah's light was still on, so he walked to her office. She was gathering her things to leave for the day as Seth walked into her office, so he asked, "What hours am I supposed to work?"

Without looking up she said, "I don't care what hours you work. I'm more interested in your performance than I am in how many hours you work. Work whenever you want."

Seth stood in her doorway in utter disbelief. After a moment of silence he said, "I just assumed I would have to do the typical 8 to 5 routine."

"Seth, I'm going to give you certain tasks, and will expect those tasks to be completed and for you to exceed my expectations. As long as you do that, I don't care if you work four hours a day. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an errand to run before our meeting. I'll see you at La Cantina at 6 o'clock."

Hannah headed for the door, and Seth headed back to his office. He had some time to kill before he left for La Cantina, so he used the time making

additional notes from his team meeting. When he was done, he headed out the door to meet Hannah.

### **INTRODUCTION TO LA CANTINA**

Hannah was not exaggerating when she said the restaurant was small. She was already sitting in the corner when Seth arrived.

“I hope you like margaritas,” she said as the waiter placed two margaritas on the table. “They’re the best in town.”

As Seth sat down, Hannah got straight to the point. “So tell me about your first day.”

“Where would you like me to start?”

“Start with your one-on-ones,” Hannah said. “What did you think of your fellow managers?”

“I think they each have very different views of managing their teams. They all seem to be confident in their approach, but their methods are certainly different.”

“Did you see a method you preferred?” Hannah asked.

“Well, I certainly don’t prefer Carmen’s approach, and Jill isn’t setting the world on fire. If I had to pick someone to follow, it would be Aaron.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Hannah responded. “When I was first moved into this position, I noticed the managers here seemed to spend more time managing their teams than leading them. I explained that most employees are sick of being managed, and are starving for leadership. Aaron was the only manager to really make an effort to change. His team has responded well to his approach. In fact, he has the most engaged team in the office.”

“How did he do it?”

“Up to this point, it’s been based mostly on his personality,” Hannah answered. “He is outgoing and cares about his employees, and they’ve reacted well to his approach. Perhaps the most exciting thing is that creating engaged employees is about much more than personality. It certainly helps to have a little charisma, but the methods needed to create a culture of employee engagement can be learned.”

“I want to learn how to do it,” Seth responded eagerly. “After an hour with my team today, I saw a spark of hope. I just don’t know how to start the process.” Seth was eager to learn, and Hannah was eager to teach.

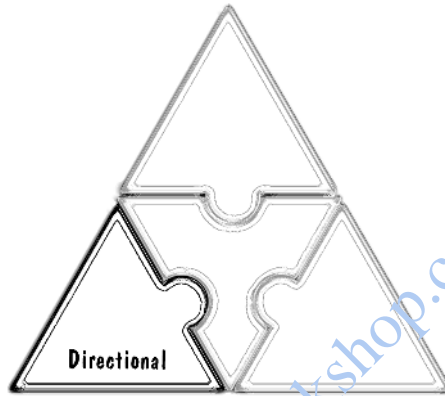
### **A GLIMPSE AT THE FUTURE**

Seth was like a ball of clay, ready to be molded. Hannah knew it and reached across the table and removed a pen from Seth’s shirt pocket. She pulled the napkin out from underneath her drink.

“While you were gone the past two weeks, I had an end-of-year meeting with the management team,” Hannah said. “I introduced a concept to the team and explained we would spend time this year going deeper with the concept. I’m going to share it with you so you’ll be caught up before our first quarterly meeting this month.”

Hannah started by drawing a triangle on the napkin. Then she wrote *Engaged Leadership* across the top. “Over the years, I’ve determined that if we’re going to have engaged employees, we must have engaged leadership. Too often we find ourselves blaming the employees for being disengaged, when the real problem is disengaged leadership. We simply don’t provide the three aspects of leadership that lead to engagement.”

She then drew four puzzle pieces inside the triangle. In the first puzzle piece she wrote the word *Directional*.



Before Hannah could speak, Seth blurted out, “That must be about having a vision for the future, and knowing what direction we’re taking.”

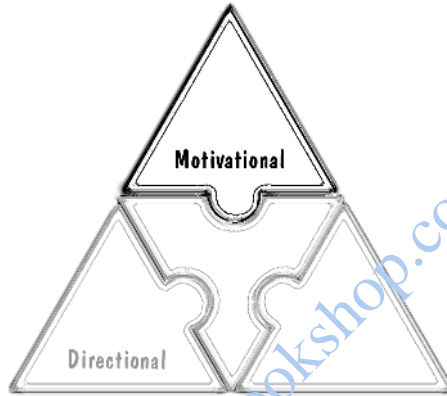
“That’s certainly one aspect of it. But it goes deeper than that. While managers have a responsibility for setting the vision of their organization, they have an obligation to build a consensus for that vision. It’s not just a matter of coming up with the vision and hoping people will see it. It’s a matter of getting buy-in. It’s what I refer to as *Directional Leadership*.”

“How will you ever get everyone in the organization to agree with the vision?”

“We don’t have to get everyone to agree *with* the vision,” Hannah replied. “We just have to get everyone to agree *to* the vision. There are many aspects of Directional Leadership, and I plan to share these responsibilities with you and the other managers in our manager meetings. It will become clearer as we build the model.”

“What’s the second aspect of Engaged Leadership?”

In the second puzzle piece, Hannah wrote the word *Motivational*.



“As you build consensus for the vision using Directional Leadership, you have a responsibility to inspire employees to want to pursue that vision,” Hannah explained. “It’s not enough to build consensus for the vision if you don’t inspire people to want to pursue it. It’s what I refer to as *Motivational Leadership*,” Hannah explained.

“Don’t employees have a responsibility to show up with their own inspiration? After all, they are paid to do their job.”

“True,” Hannah replied, “but as we’ve discussed, most employees are disengaged. They show up and do the minimum to get by so they can collect a paycheck. The first step toward engaging employees is to let them feel they are part of a bigger picture, and we do that in Directional Leadership. But if we truly want to build an organization with engaged employees, we must make sincere efforts to recognize and inspire them.”



“Fair enough. What’s the third aspect of Engaged Leadership?”

In the third puzzle piece, Hannah wrote the word *Organizational*.



Seth sat quietly this time and waited for Hannah’s explanation.

“This third aspect is about developing the team to realize the vision. It doesn’t matter if you’ve walked hand-in-hand with your team to build consensus for the future and put in place wonderful ways to inspire those team members if you haven’t developed the team to realize the vision. It’s the third aspect of Engaged Leadership, and it’s what I refer to as *Organizational Leadership*.”

Hannah then put the cap back on the pen and leaned across the table to place it back in Seth’s shirt pocket. She didn’t say a word.

“I give up,” Seth said smiling. “What’s the center piece of the puzzle?”

“That can wait for one of our quarterly meetings. The first one is tomorrow.”

After Hannah paid the bill and they were getting ready to leave, she said, “You know, you

remind me of myself when I started working at Halifax. All the energy in the world and innocent enough to think you can do it. Over time, that will change. I encourage you to not let it change you. I've seen it change many people, and I believe it's because they got so caught up in the day-to-day aspect of being a manager that they didn't spend any time being a leader. You're going to have a responsibility to do both, but I hope you never lose the spark. I can teach you everything you need to know, but I can't teach you how to have a spark. Don't ever let that go."

As Seth tossed and turned that night, he kept thinking about her comment, and promised himself he would never lose the spark. He hoped he could keep his promise.

### **THE FIRST-QUARTER MEETING**

Seth was single, and he liked it that way. He didn't want a marriage and kids to get in the way of his professional career. He had seen too many friends get married early, and some were already divorced. He wanted to wait for his career to get off the ground. There would be plenty of time for marriage later in life.

Aside from the professional reasons Seth wasn't getting married anytime soon, he really liked the flexibility that came with being single. Seth was not a morning person, so he was more than thrilled with Hannah's position on work hours. Since he wouldn't be very productive the first couple hours of the day, he decided it would make more sense if he went in to work a little later.

But today was management meeting day. In return for her flexibility, Hannah required all managers to be in the conference room at 8 AM sharp on

meeting days. Seth wanted to make a good impression, so he got there early. As he walked into the conference room at 7:45, everyone but Hannah was already there. So much for making a good impression.

“Am I late?” Seth asked.

“Not at all,” Aaron replied. “We just aren’t late to this management meeting. Hannah made it clear on her first day that anyone who walked into this meeting late would have to wash her car in the company parking lot.”

“Has anyone ever been late?” Seth asked.

Everyone turned to Jill and smiled.

“I’m late to everything,” Jill replied. “But after that public humiliation the first month, I’m the first one here every meeting.”

Aaron continued to tease Jill about the car wash as Hannah walked in and closed the door behind her.

“Great,” she said. “Everyone is here. Let’s get started.”

Carmen stood up to pass out the monthly reports when Hannah put up her hand. “Carmen, we won’t need the monthly reports today. We’re going to do something a little different.”

Hannah’s words got everyone’s attention. “As you know, every January the corporate office sends out adjustments to the annual strategic plan. The good news is there aren’t any major changes to the plan. However, there are some adjustments that will affect you and your teams. We’ll spend the first part of the morning reviewing those changes.”

As Hannah sat down, Carmen rolled her eyes. “Great, more work from the Ivory Tower. They must have gotten word we don’t have enough work to do already.”

Hannah ignored Carmen's remark and passed out a document that appeared to be nearly an inch thick. "I just got off an early morning conference call with my peers from the other call centers, and there appears to be only two changes that will have a direct impact on the management team. First, by the end of the month we will be required to perform an Employee Engagement Survey."

Jill jumped in immediately. "I think you mean an Employee Satisfaction Survey. I organized a survey for the office when I first got promoted, and I'm sure I've got a copy of it in my office. I'll go find it so we can get it out as soon as possible."

As she stood up, Hannah interrupted her. "There's no need for that. The company is using an outside firm to conduct the survey. And yes, I meant an Employee Engagement Survey."

Carmen spoke up. "First of all, what in the world is an Employee Engagement Survey? And why are they wasting the company's money on that? I'm sure whatever it is we can do internally for a lot less money."

"I'll answer your second question first," Hannah replied. "They want honest feedback on the survey, and we have a better chance of getting it if our employees don't fear retribution from an internal survey. And besides, the results of the survey tie directly to the second change, which I'll explain in a minute."

Carmen responded in an exasperated tone of voice, "Great. More good news I'm sure."

"Now," Hannah continued, "I'll answer your first question. An Employee Engagement Survey is designed to measure an employee's engagement, not his or her satisfaction. I'm sure we have plenty of employees who are perfectly satisfied being disengaged, so an Employee Satisfaction Survey

won't reveal anything about how well we are leading our employees toward engagement."

"Why are they concerned with this employee engagement thing?" Jill asked. "Last year we were told we needed to retain employees, now we're being told we need to engage them. Why are we changing?"

"First of all, disengaged employees are costing companies billions of dollars a year," Hannah stated, "and they want to see how well we've created a culture of employee engagement. And second, if our goal is employee retention instead of engagement, then we'll probably spend an enormous amount of time retaining disengaged employees."

"Who is 'they'?" Carmen asked.

"The corporate office," Hannah replied.

"Is this really coming from the corporate office, or is this just something you're making us do?" Carmen asked.

"Every call center in the company is required to conduct an Employee Engagement Survey," Hannah answered. "To be honest, I'm as surprised as you are about the whole thing. But I've been telling you about the importance of employee engagement since I got this job, and now the company is ensuring that we're all doing our part."

"What an enormous waste of time!" Carmen grumbled. "My team results are just fine. What difference does it make what this Employee Engagement Survey says about me?"

"It will mean a lot to you when I explain the second change," Hannah said. "The survey will be conducted this month, and a follow-up survey will be done in December. Our end-of-year bonus this year will depend on how much improvement is

made when they conduct the survey again in December.”

When the managers in the room heard that part of their compensation would be tied to their ability to engage employees, the room was hushed. No one said a word, until Jill broke the silence.

“I think it’s a great idea. I’m not afraid of what my employees have to say about the way I manage them.”

“Of course you don’t,” Carmen responded. “You let your employees do whatever they want. Half of them are your old friends. I’m sure you’ll get glowing remarks from your team.”

Aaron finally spoke up. “Carmen, you’re just afraid the survey will reveal the cruel and unusual punishment techniques you use. Do you still have the torture chamber in your office?”

Carmen didn’t find the humor in his comment. “Shut up, Aaron. Just because I’m the only manager in the office who will tell these people like it is doesn’t mean my techniques are cruel and unusual.”

“I’m just kidding, Carmen! I agree with Jill. I think it’s a great idea, and I’m looking forward to it. Besides, if we’re doing the right things to build a culture of employee engagement, then we shouldn’t fear what our employees have to say on this survey. And if our employees truly are engaged, then we’ll make our bonuses at the end of the year.”

Seth had been quiet the entire meeting. While some of the others spoke, he was flipping through the rest of the strategic plan Hannah had passed out at the beginning of the meeting. Hannah looked over at him and asked, “Seth, what do you think?”

“Well, I’m certainly not afraid of what they’ll say on the survey this month since it won’t be my

leadership ability they're assessing. I'm more concerned with what they say on the one in December. After looking through this document, it seems the entire year could be spent just managing the tasks associated with the strategic plan. The challenge will be finding time to develop our employees."

"Now you know why some of us are concerned about all this engagement stuff," Carmen replied.

"Us?" Aaron asked with a smile on his face. "By my count, you are the only one who's voiced any concern." Aaron seemed to get a great deal of joy from his jabs at Carmen.

Carmen didn't bother replying to Aaron's comment. Hannah looked up and said, "We won't have much control over what the survey says about us this month, so there's no need to worry about it. However, we can control what the survey says about us at the end of the year if we focus on building a culture of employee engagement. I've done it in every organization I've been a part of, and I know I can do it with this one. If you're willing to learn, I'm willing to coach each of you through the process."

"I'm in," Jill and Aaron said in unison. Hannah looked at Seth, who nodded in agreement. Carmen looked up and said, "Sure, whatever, but I'm going to need more coffee for this."

## **54 PERCENT**

As the management team returned from a short break, Seth noticed Hannah had set up two flip-charts at the front of the room. On one she had written *54 Percent*. As everyone took their seats, Hannah walked over and underlined it before sitting down.

"At our end-of-year meeting a couple weeks ago, I shared with you a leadership model I refer to as

Engaged Leadership,” she started. “I spent some time with Seth yesterday explaining the model to him, so you all have the same information. Now, if we’re going to have any success at all creating a culture of employee engagement, it’s important for us to know how Engaged Leadership works. But before we look at the first aspect of the model, I want to discuss what I’ve written on the flipchart.”

“That’s the percentage of bonus Carmen will receive at the end of the year,” Aaron laughed.

Carmen shot daggers with her eyes toward Aaron and was about to respond when Hannah jumped in, “It could be if we don’t understand the real meaning of it.” She finally got Carmen’s attention. In fact, she got everyone’s attention.

“The Gallup Organization did research on employee disengagement years ago and found 54 percent of employees are disengaged,” Hannah explained. “The good news is the study showed 29 percent are engaged, and the bad news is the remaining 17 percent are actively disengaged.”

“I seem to be spending more and more of my time with the actively disengaged,” Jill said.

“You’re not alone,” Hannah replied. “Most managers do, and I’d be willing to bet most of the managers in the other call centers will be spending their time with the actively disengaged. We’ll certainly deal with our actively disengaged employees, and we’ll be learning how to do that. We’ll also learn how to deal with our 29 percent at the top of the organization.”

“I don’t worry about those people,” Carmen interrupted. “They are the only ones I can depend on. I just give them a task and get out of the way. The last thing they want is to hear from me.”

“That’s a mistake many leaders make,” Hannah said. “Unfortunately, when we leave the top



29 percent alone, they tend to be the first to leave. We'll be discussing how to make sure they don't want to leave. In the meantime, I believe our best chance of building employee engagement is by focusing on the 54 percent in the middle."

"If they're disengaged, why should we spend our time with them?" Jill asked. "Maybe we should just focus on the ones producing the work."

"Two reasons, Jill," Hannah replied. "One, the 54 percent in the middle will be assessing you on the Employee Engagement Survey, and will have a negative effect on your bonus if you don't find a way to engage them. And two, . . ."

Jill interrupted Hannah before she could finish. "I don't even need to hear the second reason. Reason number one is good enough for me."

"Then for the benefit of everyone else," Hannah continued, "I'll give the second reason. Employees want to be engaged, and we have a responsibility to them and the company to engage them."

"Fair enough," Aaron said. "How do we get started?"

"This year is going to be a learning year for each of us," Hannah answered. "In addition to our regularly scheduled monthly meetings, we will have a quarterly meeting for the sole purpose of learning Engaged Leadership. This is our first quarterly meeting. We will reschedule our monthly meeting for tomorrow."

"Hannah," Carmen responded, "we already have way too many meetings to attend. Can't we just talk about this stuff at our monthly meetings?"

"No, we can't," Hannah replied. "Our monthly meetings are about updating each other on the state of the business, and I intend for those to continue that way. Learning about Engaged

Leadership may be the most important thing we do all year, and we'll dedicate one morning a quarter to do nothing but learn and share how we applied the concepts in the workplace. I promise you we'll end these meetings by noon."

"I think it's a great idea," Aaron said. "If Hannah has implemented this approach in other offices and it worked, then I'm willing to dedicate one morning a quarter to learning it, particularly if part of my compensation is tied to building a culture of employee engagement. And who knows, maybe we can create a little competition with our old office."

With the exception of Carmen, everyone around the table nodded in agreement.

"As you will recall, there are three aspects of Engaged Leadership," Hannah started. "Now, you can't tackle all of Engaged Leadership at one time, so here's my plan. There are twelve lessons I plan to share with you. This quarter we'll learn the four lessons needed to be good Directional leaders. We'll have the entire quarter to apply what we've learned. In the second quarter, we'll learn the four lessons needed to be good Motivational leaders. Again, we'll have the entire quarter to apply what we've learned. Then in the third quarter, we'll learn the four lessons needed to be good Organizational Leaders. At that point, you will have the complete picture, and will have the next six months to continue making progress toward building a culture of employee engagement."

"What about the fourth quarter?" Aaron asked.

"We'll see how we progress," Hannah said. "Any questions?"

Seth could tell Carmen had something to say, but she managed to stay quiet. It wouldn't last long.

### LET THE LEARNING BEGIN

Hannah walked to the second flipchart. She drew a large triangle, and wrote *Engaged Leadership* at the top. Seth knew where Hannah was going with the model when she drew four puzzle pieces inside the triangle. In the first puzzle piece, she wrote the word *Directional*.



As she sat back down, Hannah said, “As a review, the first aspect is Directional Leadership. For the most part, the direction for this organization has been set by the corporate office. While we may not all agree with every aspect of the vision, we have a responsibility to carry it out.”

“I read through some of the changes to the strategic plan during the break,” Jill said, “and some of our long-term employees are going to struggle with a few of them. This push to improve how fast we handle calls instead of how well we handle them is not going to go over well with our more senior employees.”

“That’s expected,” Hannah replied. “Our responsibility as leaders is to build a consensus

for the vision. We can't just hope our employees will see it and agree to it. We have to get buy-in."

"That will be easier said than done with a few employees," Aaron said.

"I agree," Hannah replied. "There will be some who will never agree to the vision. In fact, there are some employees who have never agreed to the vision, and have done everything they can to disrupt the organization. Those are our 17 percent of actively disengaged employees."

Seth spoke up. "According to everything I've heard so far, a lot more than 17 percent of my employees are actively disengaged."

"That certainly may be the case since your team didn't get much leadership in the past," Hannah replied. "But regardless of where our employees fall today, we have a responsibility to provide Directional Leadership. I'm going to share with you the four lessons related to Directional Leadership."

She walked back to the flipchart and wrote:



She sat back down and said, "This group is critical to our success as an organization. Beyond

the fact they normally carry a significant amount of the workload, the top 29 percent have significant influence over the 54 percent in the middle. You see, if we as leaders don't do a good job engaging the 54 percent in the middle, they will look for direction from their peers. They are going to get direction from one of two places. The top 29 percent, or the bottom 17 percent who are actively trying to tear down the organization. Which would you prefer for your team?"

"What if we don't have buy-in from the top 29 percent?" Aaron asked.

"First of all, you can't assume you'll have buy-in. Your first job is to convince them the vision is right. The one thing I know for certain is that if you can't sell the vision to the top 29 percent, then you don't have a chance of selling it to the disengaged employees in the middle."

There was complete silence in the room for a few moments while the lesson began to sink in to everyone around the table. Carmen was the first to break the silence.

"Are you telling me I have to spend my time recruiting supporters to get these people in the middle to do what they're paid to do? Isn't my job to use my influence as their manager to get them to work?"

Aaron jumped in. "Let's face it, Carmen. Your influence is to tell them what to do, and they do it because they know you'll punish them if they don't. I don't mean to be critical, but we all know that's how you influence your employees."

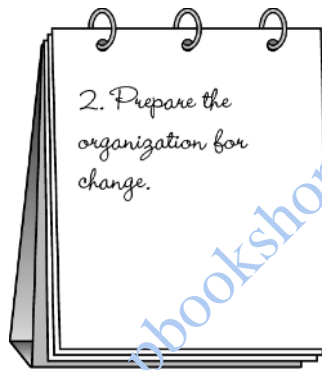
"That's what a manager is supposed to do, Aaron," Carmen replied.

Hannah responded, "Some managers believe that's the way to manage. But what I'm talking about is leadership. This approach is going to

require a change in thinking for some of the people around this table.”

After another moment of silence, Jill pressed on. “Okay, so we use the influence of our top 29 percent to build consensus with the 54 percent in the middle. What’s the next point?”

Hannah returned to the flipchart and wrote:



She sat back down and said, “It’s no surprise that people don’t like change. Just look around this table and you’ll see some of your peers who aren’t comfortable with what I’ve said so far, and I’ve only shared one point with you. Remember, your disengaged employees are not bad people. Many of them are doing their jobs. They simply dislike change as much as anyone. Any change will probably put them out of their comfort zone.”

“We’re all going through change,” Carmen groaned.

“Yes, we are,” Hannah replied, “but if we just cram the changes down their throat, we’ll never build consensus.”

Seth asked, “So how do we prepare them for change?”

“For starters, we walk out of this room on the same page,” Hannah replied. “Whether you agree with the changes is not the issue. We must be united as a team.”

“Okay,” Jill said, “we start preparing our teams for change by being united as a management team. What’s the next point?”

Jill was doing a good job of moving the discussion forward, but Seth had something else in mind.

“We’ve been going for a while now. Can we take a break?”

Everyone in the room nodded enthusiastically.

“Ten minutes,” Hannah declared. “If you’re not all back, I’m starting without you.”

### **BACK TO WORK**

Once the managers were all back in their seats, Hannah returned to the flipchart and wrote:



“This may seem simple,” she said, “but all too often we assume our employees know what we want. We can’t begin to build a consensus

for the vision if we don't communicate our expectations."

"I think we all learned that in Management 101," Carmen said sarcastically. "If someone's not communicating expectations, then they probably shouldn't be in management."

"Some of you are very good at communicating expectations," Hannah replied, "but there is something even more important than communicating the expectation. Can anyone tell me what it is?"

Jill was the first to respond. "I'll take a guess. We have to know how we're going to discipline them if they don't meet the expectation."

"You're close, Jill," Hannah replied. "We have to communicate a consequence. Keep in mind that consequences are not always bad, so it's not always about discipline."

"I think employees know if they don't do what they're told, there's going to be a negative consequence," Carmen responded.

"Perhaps that was taught in your Management 101 class," Hannah replied calmly, "but leaders are taught the power of positive consequences in Leadership 101."

Seth got the impression Hannah was getting annoyed with Carmen's insistence on challenging everything she said. Carmen's silence indicated she might have gotten the same impression.

"Different situations require different consequences," Hannah continued, "and I'll leave that up to you to decide. Just know that a consequence is one of the most important tools we have to change behavior. If we're going to build a consensus, we must ensure employees know what is expected of them, and communicate clear consequences. Any questions?"



No one raised a hand, so Hannah got up and walked back to the flipchart. This time she wrote:



After she sat back down, she said, "We seem to do a good job of informing our employees of changes to our strategic plan, but I'm not sure we do a very good job keeping it in front of them. We must find ways to constantly communicate our progress."

"We had those cards with the vision statement printed and laminated when the strategic plan first came out," Jill said. "We can get those done again."

"Those cards are fine," Hannah said, "but I'm talking about more than just reminding them what the vision statement is. I'm talking about letting them know how we're doing in pursuit of the vision. There are many creative ways to do it. We just need to find some ways to constantly communicate our progress. An uninformed employee is a disengaged employee."

Hannah let her words soak in for a moment. "You now have the four lessons of Directional Leadership. Are there any questions?"

Jill chimed in. "The four lessons are good, but they're somewhat broad. Can you give us some specific examples of how we go about doing each of them?"

“That’s a fair observation,” Hannah responded. “Part of being a leader is determining what works best for you. If I provide you all the answers, you won’t think like a leader. So here’s what I want you to do. Over the next quarter, as you work to build a consensus for the vision, I want you to find ways to recruit support from your top 29 percent, and prepare your team for change. I want you to be extremely clear about what you want from your team members, and constantly communicate their progress. At our next quarterly meeting, I’m going to ask you to share what you did in each of these areas.”

Hannah looked up at the clock and noticed it was 12 o’clock. “I promised you we would end these meetings by noon, and I’ll keep my promise. But I’ll leave you with this thought. Your success with Engaged Leadership will depend less on what you know, and more on what you do. I encourage you to take what we’ve discussed today about Directional Leadership and put it to work. It will be the key to building a culture of employee engagement.”

With that, everyone grabbed their things and left the conference room. On his way back to his office, Seth figured if this leadership thing didn’t get any harder than this, turning his team around would be simple. Time would tell.

### **REALITY SETS IN**

Seth couldn’t believe a month had passed since the first-quarter meeting. Although he intended to create a plan to develop his team, he didn’t realize it would take every bit of four weeks just to get settled into his new job. There were procedures to learn, reports to complete, and meetings to attend.

Seth soon realized it took an entire eight-hour day just to manage his daily management tasks.

Despite the workload and the two weeks he was out of the office for training, Seth was determined to schedule one-on-ones with all his team members. While the other managers had the luxury of recruiting support from their top 29 percent when they walked out of the last quarterly meeting, Seth had to spend time with his team members just to determine his top 29 percent. It took him nearly two weeks to get to them all.

“Congratulations,” Hannah said as she walked into his office. “The January report just came out, and it shows your team absence percentage improved. You’re still in last place, but your overall numbers improved.”

“You’re kidding.”

“No, I’m not,” Hannah replied. “I’m anxious to hear what you’ve been doing. We haven’t even gotten to Motivational Leadership, and it seems you’re already motivating your team.”

“To be honest, I think at this point it’s just pure luck. I’ve been so busy getting into my management routine that I haven’t had a chance to spend much time with my team members. I finished my one-on-one meetings, and have identified who I think make up my top 29 percent. Now that I’m getting into somewhat of a routine, I’ve committed myself to spending more time working with them.”

“Like I said, your team’s improvement wasn’t drastic, but it was something,” Hannah remarked. “If you haven’t been spending much time with your team, the improvement can probably be attributed to the honeymoon period. Most employees try to impress their new boss because they don’t know what to expect if they don’t do well. They work a little harder until they know what they can get

away with. But I have to say, I've noticed you walk around and greet each employee every morning when you get into the office. They've been starved for that attention, and I'll bet some of the improvement is directly related to your efforts. Keep up the good work."

After Hannah left, Seth felt a little guilty that he hadn't done more to impact the improvement of his team. He knew the honeymoon period would be over soon, and that his team would give up on him if he didn't start making some things happen.

### **GOING FOR THE TOP 29 PERCENT**

One of the most pressing issues Seth needed to address was a change in the strategic plan. A key efficiency measurement for each team was Representative Occupancy. Seth discovered this was a fancy term used to describe the amount of time a call center rep actually handled customer calls, as opposed to nonproductive time like meetings and training. Because personnel accounted for nearly two-thirds of the call center's expenses, Hannah wanted to make sure the employees were as productive as possible.

Along with new technology came the opportunity to ensure less idle time for the call center reps. The same procedure for measuring efficiency had been followed for years, and since it was changing, Seth needed to cover the new procedure with his team.

At lunch the day before, Jill informed the other managers she had shared the changes with her team, and she thought she was going to have a mutiny on her hands. Based on the response from Jill's team, Seth anticipated some of his employees would have a problem with the new plan.

He figured this would be a good opportunity to build consensus by recruiting support from his top 29 percent.

He searched through the paperwork on his desk and found the list he had made of employees he considered to be in his top 29 percent. He had circled the names of the six that seemed to be the most engaged in his one-on-one meetings. Fortunately, they were all scheduled to work that day.

Carmen, on the other hand, took the day off. Jill was her backup for the day coordinating the schedules. Although he wasn't intimidated by Carmen, he just didn't like being around her. He was glad it was Jill he had to deal with to get his employees scheduled off for a meeting.

"Jill, I need your help. I have six people I need to meet with this afternoon. Can you schedule a half-hour meeting around 2 o'clock?"

Jill stared at her computer for a moment. "Let's see . . . 2 o'clock doesn't look good because we have some employees scheduled for a late lunch and that will throw off our service levels. How about 3 o'clock?"

"Perfect. Thanks for your help."

Seth didn't mind the extra hour because he knew he'd need it to prepare for the meeting. As he was getting settled into the conference room, his six employees walked in. Seth asked them to take a seat on either side of the table. Although this smaller group was much more outgoing than his entire team on his first day on the job, Seth could sense some confusion from this group. No one knew why he or she was there.

"I've asked to meet with you because I need your help," he started. "After meeting with the entire team in the one-on-one meetings, I consider you to be the best and brightest on the team."

A look of relief could be seen on every face in the room.

“Not only are you the top performers, but you seem to be a group I can confide in. A change has been made in the strategic plan of the organization, and I wanted to run it past you before I shared it with the entire team. The change affects how we measure Representative Occupancy.”

After providing a detailed explanation of the change, Seth asked, “Can any of you think of a reason why this would not be good for the team?”

A few team members expressed some concern, and Seth provided reasonable responses to each comment. “Can I count on you for your support of the change?” All the heads around the table nodded in support.

“Good. I anticipate we may have some on our team who won’t agree with the change. Any help you can provide supporting the change will be greatly appreciated.”

With that, Seth thanked them for their time, and sent them back to work. He felt good about the meeting, and was glad he finally had at least one experience to share at the next quarterly meeting. He headed back to his office and found a note in his chair that read, “Meet me at La Cantina at 6:00—H.”

### **PRIVATE COACHING**

Seth felt he was fitting in pretty well with the management team, even though he’d been there just over a month. He still had a lot to learn, but he knew he was making progress. He remembered how excited he was when Hannah told him he could work whenever he wanted. He created in his mind a perfect scenario in which he got to sleep

in, get to the office around 9, and stay until the work was done. At this point, he was at the office every morning by 7:30, and the work never got finished.

If there was anything that surprised him, it was the number of managerial tasks that had to be done every day. He didn't think any of it was particularly difficult, just time consuming. When the other managers would complain they didn't have time to spend with their employees, he thought it was just an excuse to avoid dealing with all the people issues. He found the biggest thrill he got from the job was spending time with his employees. He also found the biggest challenge was finding the time to do that.

He appreciated the effort Hannah was making to teach her managers how to build a culture of employee engagement. Seth and some of his old college friends had recently gotten together for a long weekend, and they spent time comparing their job experiences. Seth told them about Hannah, and how she was dedicating time each quarter to develop their leadership skills. None of them had a similar story to tell, but they all had a peer like Carmen.

Although Seth looked forward to the ongoing development he would get in the quarterly meetings and the training he would attend at least once a quarter, he particularly liked the one-on-one time with Hannah at La Cantina. They had only met a few times, but it was like having a personal coach to help him along. He wondered if he was the only manager getting the extra attention, or if everyone enjoyed these private sessions. He got his answer when he arrived at La Cantina.

As he opened the door to the restaurant, Aaron walked out.

“What are you doing here?” Seth asked.

“I just got through spending some time with Hannah. She mentioned you were meeting her at 6. I would stay, but I’ve got to take my oldest daughter to cheerleading practice. Have a good meeting, and I’ll see you in the morning.”

Seth walked in and saw Hannah sitting at the same table as before. He figured that must be her office away from the office.

“Where’s my margarita?” Seth joked as he sat down.

“No margarita for me today. I have a conference call with my boss at 6:30. He’s on a plane right now and can’t get to a phone until then. My husband’s meeting me here at 7, so you’ll get to meet him if you’re still here.”

“You may have a conference call with your boss at 6:30, but I don’t,” he laughed. “Where’s the waitress?”

After Seth ordered his margarita, Hannah said, “I want to talk to you about your team’s attendance problem. Even though your results have improved, you indicated you haven’t done much with your team since you’ve been settling into your new job. Have you given much thought to a specific plan?”

Seth had given a lot of thought to how he should deal with his attendance problem, and could certainly use some advice. “I had hoped to already have a plan in place considering you asked me about it over a month ago. I feel I’ve let you down since I haven’t taken steps to fix the problem.”

“You’ve been busy, I know. Tell me what you would have done if you didn’t have to spend a month getting acclimated to your new job.”

“Well, I asked the other managers what they thought, and there wasn’t any consensus at all. Carmen thought I should fire the worst performer



and send a message to the others, and Jill thought I shouldn't rock the boat."

"What did Aaron think?"

"Aaron wasn't much help either," Seth laughed. "He just pointed out the pros and cons of any action I took, and wished me luck."

"What do you think is the right answer?"

"I think the easiest thing to do would be to fire the worst performer," Seth answered. "The problem would be gone, and everyone else on the team would know I'm prepared to take action if they don't perform well."

"Have you met with this person to share your concern about her poor attendance?"

"I have," Seth answered. "I told her she needed to improve. I was extremely clear about what I wanted."

"Did you tell her that if she doesn't, the consequence will be termination?"

"No, I didn't," Seth responded. "I think she walked away knowing I was serious."

"Did you not listen to anything I said at our first quarterly meeting? Did you have your conversation with her before or after the quarterly meeting where we talked about expectations and consequences?"

"After," Seth responded as he stared at the table.

"Then you had the information you needed. The lessons I'm teaching you have no value whatsoever if you don't put them to use. Now, if you want her to be an engaged member of your team, you must provide expectations and consequences. When you do, you give her the power to determine her own fate."

"Do you think the consequence should be termination?" Seth asked.

“I think the consequence has to motivate the behavior you want. If she doesn’t need or want this job, then termination will not motivate her to come to work.”

“So what consequence should I use?” Seth asked.

“You ask too many questions!” Hannah laughed. “That’s a question you’re going to have to answer on your own.”

Besides getting settled into a new job, Seth was getting settled into a new apartment. He didn’t know many people in town, although he had made a few friends at the church he started attending around the corner from his apartment. Other than some guidance from them, Seth was learning his way around on his own. Hannah knew that and spent some time talking about the area. Seth thought maybe she was tired of talking business after a full day and was looking for some lighter conversation.

Hannah looked down at her watch and realized it was almost 6:30. “I have to call my boss,” she said. “You can hang out if you want. You’ve hardly touched your margarita, and I’d love for you to meet my husband.”

“No, I need to get home. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Seth spent most of that night thinking about his attendance issue, and how disappointed he was in himself for letting Hannah down. What he thought should be easy had turned out to be the most difficult, and important, part of his job.

### **MAKE WAY FOR CHANGE**

When Seth initially selected his top 29 percent and scheduled the meeting to recruit support for the

change in the Representative Occupancy procedure, he did it so he could show he had made some progress. Quite frankly, he didn't give much thought to the outcome of the meeting.

Seth was out of the office for a few days training, but when he returned he scheduled a meeting with his entire team to announce the change to Representative Occupancy. He wasn't looking forward to the meeting because he knew he would be fighting an uphill battle. In a meeting with Jill the day before, she explained that two of Seth's team members had been instrumental in writing the current procedure, and they would likely defend the status quo.

After Seth explained the change to the group, a few of his team members started squirming in their chairs. The two people Jill warned him would be against the change jumped up and started complaining, and he could see the beginnings of a mutiny. And then something pretty amazing happened. Miles Freeman, one of his top 29 percent, took over.

"Before you go any further," Miles said, "I want to say I think this is a good change." He continued by laying out exactly what he liked about the change, and by the time he was done, most of the other top 29 percent had supported the idea as well. Before long, many of the disengaged employees were agreeing with the change.

Seth realized he didn't need to say a word. He was certain the bottom 17 percent still disagreed, but they were silenced by the agreement in the room. His effort at recruiting support from the top 29 percent had paid off.

After a few moments of silence, Seth pointed to the two employees who had complained about the change. "Please stand up," he instructed. Each had a panicked look on his face.

“Seriously,” Seth repeated, “please stand up.”

They looked at each other and slowly got out of their chairs. The room was silent as everyone awaited the worst.

“I’ve asked them to stand because I want you all to get a good look at them. These are the men who were instrumental in writing the current procedure. It has worked well for the past two years and was the foundation of the new procedure. As we begin to make the transition, I want to recognize and thank them for their contributions. They were leaders then, and I anticipate they’ll be contributing to new ways of doing things in the future. I think they deserve a round of applause.”

Seth wasn’t sure if the smiles on their faces were relief from not getting scolded or true appreciation for being recognized, but they both seemed to enjoy the moment as they accepted a round of applause from their peers.

After the meeting was over and everyone had returned to work, Seth walked to Hannah’s office to share his experience. He stuck his head in the door and noticed she was on the telephone. She looked up and noticed it was Seth, and motioned for him to wait. When she hung up, he walked in and sat down.

“What’s up?”

“I just had an interesting experience,” Seth said with a smile, “and I thought I would share it with you.” He explained in detail what had happened in his team meeting, and waited for her response.

“Three spectacular things happened in that meeting,” Hannah said. “One, you proved that recruiting your top 29 percent can work. Two, you helped the rest of the team deal with change by recognizing and celebrating the old way of doing

things. And three, you showed them they don't just work for a manager, they work for a leader."

Seth needed that reinforcement. He felt he had let Hannah down when he hadn't communicated a consequence to Mattie for her poor attendance, and he needed a way to prove he had been paying attention to what she was teaching. This type of reinforcement was what he needed, and it didn't cost the company a dime.

### **EARLY MORNING SURPRISE**

Throughout most of the month of February, Seth was showing up to the office at 7:30 not because he was anxious to get to work. He got there early just so he would have enough time in the day to get all his work done and spend time working with his team.

A college buddy had gotten married over the weekend, and Seth was a groomsman. After a long weekend with friends, he knew his confidence had been renewed when he walked into the office at 6 AM Monday. He was determined to make this the day he dealt with Mattie, and he wanted to get an early start. He also had something else on his mind.

It was March now, and the February reports were available. Seth's improvements had been marginal in January, leaving him in fourth place. He had gotten into a routine in February, which freed up more time to spend with his team. He had shown some leadership throughout the month, and he felt his team was responding. While it was nice to have the feeling, he needed proof to show Hannah and the other managers. He hoped the proof he needed was in the monthly report.

Part of the training he received in January was report production, so he knew how to access

the reports. After he sat down, he pulled out his training notes so he could get it right the first time. Just as he began to log in to his computer, Hannah walked into his office.

“What in the world are you doing here at 6 in the morning?” Hannah laughed. “I thought you were in a wedding over the weekend. I didn’t expect to see you before noon!”

“It was a long weekend,” Seth chuckled, “but I was anxious to see my February attendance report. I couldn’t sleep, so I figured I’d come on into the office.”

“Do you want to log in and pull your own report,” Hannah asked, “or would you like to take a look at my copy? I haven’t printed all the reports, but I have the attendance report for the entire office right here in my hand.” She set her copy of the report on Seth’s desk.

“It looks like someone else was anxious to see the monthly report,” Seth laughed as he reached across the desk.

He recognized the report from last month and knew the last page ranked all four managers. He flipped straight to the last page, and found what he’d hoped to find. Seth Owen, a young man with only two months in the real working world, had led his team to third place. After two years of being the worst, they now were out of the basement.

### **A TIME TO CELEBRATE**

Seth was a competitive person, and had grown accustomed to winning just about any competition he entered. At any other time in his life, finishing third in a four-person race would have been devastating. But on this day and in this race, finishing third was like winning a gold medal in the Olympics.

Seth jumped up from his desk and started dancing in the middle of his cubicle. It was a good thing there weren't any employees around yet. If he was trying to show Hannah he couldn't dance, it was working. Seth wasn't sure if she was laughing at his reaction to the news, or if she was genuinely happy for him. He hoped it was both.

He started to give Hannah a hug, and then backed off. He had been through sexual harassment training in January and didn't want to cross a line. Hannah figured that's why he backed off, and extended her arms anyway. "You big dummy," she said with a smile, "give me a hug!"

Seth threw his arms around her to celebrate the moment, but also as a way of thanking her for the support and encouragement she had given him the past two months. His team was responding to his leadership, and for the first time, he felt he was a part of developing a culture of employee engagement. He knew Hannah deserved much of the credit.

Seth looked down at his watch and realized he had some time before his employees showed up for work. He checked the schedule to see how many of his employees were working in the morning. Fifteen. That was enough. He looked at Hannah and said, "I've got to run an errand. I'll be back."

### **DOUGHNUTS ANYONE?**

The noise in the call center was normally very consistent. Anyone who walked through the office during normal business hours would hear tapping on computer keyboards and call center reps talking to their customers.

Hannah was in Carmen's office when she heard the laughter. It was 8:30 now, so the call center

was packed full of employees. The laughter from the reps was noticeably uncommon, so she got up to see what the commotion was all about.

Several of the employees were standing so they could look across the office. Hannah looked in their direction and found the source of their laughter. There he was. Seth was standing in the middle of the office in a tuxedo. He had a white cloth draped over his arm, and a silver tray full of doughnuts. He was walking through the office serving doughnuts to his team members. Not all the reps. Just his. This was his way of celebrating their success.

Hannah walked over to get a closer view, and noticed Seth was handing each of his employees a card as he served them breakfast at their desks. He met Hannah as she walked over to him. He lowered the tray and asked, "A doughnut for the boss?"

Hannah took a doughnut from the tray and moved closer to one of Seth's reps. She looked down to read the card he was passing out. It read, "Enjoy your doughnut. This is my way of saying thanks for everything you do. You make me proud to be your leader!"

Carmen had followed Hannah out of her office and was standing behind her with her arms crossed. She had a typical scowl on her face. "I'm sure this is screwing up our customer hold time. Everyone in the office is wasting time watching this spectacle."

Seth walked over to Carmen and held out the tray. "Can I interest you in a doughnut?"

She unfolded her arms, turned around and stormed back to her office. Seth's intention was to recognize his employees and celebrate their success, but in the process he'd managed to anger one of his peers. Carmen appeared to be mad that



his stunt had disrupted the office, but he suspected there was more to it. By recognizing his team, he had just raised the bar for his fellow managers.

At that point, Seth didn't care why Carmen was mad. His employees weren't starving for doughnuts. They were starving for attention, and Seth had given them what they needed. At the same time, he communicated to his team that celebration was going to be a part of the culture he developed.

### **MATTIE**

Word about Seth's doughnut episode spread quickly through the office. Seth had changed out of his tuxedo that morning, but he had doughnuts and cards in his office for the other employees when they came in for their shift.

"Only you would go out and rent a tuxedo to serve your team doughnuts for breakfast," Aaron joked as he walked into Seth's office that afternoon.

"Actually, I didn't rent the tuxedo to serve doughnuts," Seth laughed as he put down his pen and turned toward Aaron. "I was in a wedding on Saturday, and had it in my car to return today. I just figured I'd get one last use out of it before it went back."

"Outstanding! Now I'm going to be spending my days trying to figure out how to beat that. Every single person on my team has been asking when they're going to be served breakfast at their desk."

Mattie walked to Seth's door as Aaron was leaving. Her shift was about to start, so she had missed the morning doughnuts.

"I know it's after lunch," she laughed, "but where's my doughnut? I'm going to save it for this afternoon."

Since Seth had arrived in January, Mattie hadn't said much to him. Other than his one-on-one meeting and the conversation they had about her attendance problem, he felt she was avoiding him. For her to walk in with a smile on her face and ask for her doughnut indicated she was as starved as the others for a little attention.

Seth motioned for her to take a seat and help herself to a doughnut. He handed her one of the cards, and told her he would be right back. Seth went to Carmen's office and asked her to schedule Mattie for a 15-minute meeting with him at the beginning of her shift. To Seth's surprise, Carmen agreed without causing a scene.

Seth had some time to review the January and February attendance reports before lunch, and he noticed Mattie had not missed a day of work in either of those months. He knew it was going to make the conversation he was about to have a lot easier.

"I thought you were going to save that doughnut for this afternoon," Seth joked as he walked back in his office and saw her putting the last piece in her mouth.

"Actually," she responded as she took a second doughnut from the tray, "I'm going to save *this* one for this afternoon!"

"Mattie, last year you had the worst attendance record of anyone on our team. I asked some of the other managers when I first got here what I should do, and some thought I should terminate you. The past two months you've had perfect attendance. Why the sudden turnaround?"

"I don't know," she said. "It just feels different since you got here. You tell us what's going on, and you treat us different than our last boss. She was nice, but she didn't walk around and say good morning. She didn't tell us what our results

were every month. She certainly didn't serve us doughnuts at our desk. It wasn't a very fun place to come to work."

"Are you saying it has to be fun for you to come to work?"

"No," Mattie responded, "I'm not saying it has to be fun. I'm just saying it makes it a nicer place to be. And when you feel you're doing a good job and no one notices, it makes you think the work you do isn't very meaningful. It's just all different now."

"Well, let me first say I'm proud of your attendance record the first two months of this year. But let me also say this. As I mentioned in our last meeting, I expect you to be here when you're scheduled. It's not always going to be fun. There are going to be times you won't want to come to work. But I expect you to be here. In fact, if you have perfect attendance for the next four months, I'll treat you and your husband to dinner at the restaurant of your choice."

"Any restaurant?"

"Let me take that back," Seth smiled. "I'll treat you and your husband to dinner at any reasonably priced restaurant!"

"Fair enough."

Carmen walked to Seth's door and noticed Mattie was still in the meeting. "The fifteen minutes you asked for with Mattie are almost up. Do you need more time?"

"No," Seth answered, "we're done. She'll be right out."

Seth thanked Mattie again for her efforts, and told her he had confidence she would make it the next four months without missing a day. As she left, Seth realized he made progress with her by setting the expectation and communicating a positive consequence. He hoped she would respond so the next consequence wouldn't be negative.

Seth realized he also had made progress with Carmen. She didn't seem to be the same person who had charged into the conference room and ordered his employees back to work just two months earlier.

### **THE RESULTS ARE IN**

The first thing Seth did that morning as he settled into his office around 8 o'clock was check e-mail. The first message he got was from Hannah. It read, "All managers in the conference room at 9 AM." They had just had their monthly management meeting, so Seth was curious why they needed to meet again.

It had been a couple weeks since Seth caused the stir with the doughnuts, but he was still getting harassed by his fellow managers in the conference room while they waited for Hannah. At 9 sharp, she arrived.

"Thanks for meeting on such short notice. As you all know, the company conducted an Employee Engagement Survey at the end of January. They got the feedback a few weeks ago, and just sent it out this morning."

"Do we still have jobs?" Jill joked as she looked at the other managers.

"Everyone but you," Hannah responded, "but I commit to you we'll do everything we can to help you find a new job."

Jill was stunned. The room fell silent.

"I'm just kidding!" Hannah laughed. "We actually did better than I thought we'd do."

"That wasn't even remotely funny," Jill shot back at Hannah with a glare.

Aaron replied, "I don't know. I got some humor out of it."

Jill threw her pen at Aaron, and Hannah began passing out the survey results.

“As you’ll see,” Hannah started, “there aren’t any real surprises. As I said, we did pretty well in a few areas. We should be proud of that, and should work to ensure we continue doing those things well. If we’re going to improve employee engagement and have it reflected on the December survey, we need to focus our efforts on improving those strength areas.”

“What stood out?” Seth asked.

“A few things. First, employees don’t feel they know what’s going on. That is all about Directional Leadership and the issues we talked about at our first-quarter meeting. I assume you are all making progress on the four lessons we discussed, and I’m looking forward to hearing what you’ve done when we gather for our second-quarter meeting in a couple weeks.”

“What else?” Jill asked.

“Recognition. Like all employees, they feel they work way too much and never get recognized for their efforts. We’ll be talking about some of those solutions in Motivational Leadership in a couple weeks, and as long as we implement those ideas, we’ll fix that area as well.”

“What else?” Jill asked.

“Man, you’re impatient!” Aaron remarked.

“The last big theme was the quality of the team,” Hannah answered.

“What does that mean?” Carmen scowled.

“It’s pretty common,” Hannah replied. “The survey shows that employees think they are pulling their weight, but that the people around them are not.”

“So what do we do?” Carmen asked, “Do we let them do all the hiring and firing now?”

“No, Carmen,” Hannah replied calmly. “It just means we need to take a look at our team and

make sure we have the right people in place to realize our vision. In fact, we'll be talking about those issues in Organizational Leadership in our third-quarter meeting."

"Where do we go from here?" Aaron asked.

"The first thing you need to do is schedule a meeting to share the results of the survey with your teams," Hannah answered. "Thank them for their input, and let them know you'll be working on the areas of concern."

"Any questions?" The room was silent as everyone read through the results.

"I've got a full day," Hannah said. "So I'm going back to my office. I should be here all day, so if anyone needs me, you know where to find me."

After Hannah left the conference room, Jill and Carmen followed her out. As Seth stood up to leave, Aaron motioned for him to sit back down. He walked over and closed the door, turned back to Seth and said, "I have an idea."

### **GREAT MINDS COME TOGETHER**

"There is no way in the world I'm scheduling 50 people off at the same time," Carmen fumed as she glared at Aaron and Seth. "Customer hold time would go through the roof."

"Come on, Carmen," Aaron said. "It's just one hour. All we have to do is have the overflow calls routed to the Austin office for that one hour. It's as simple as that."

As Aaron was pleading his case, Hannah walked in.

"Did I not get my invitation to the meeting?" she laughed.

"I'm glad you're here," Aaron said. "Can you please talk some sense into Carmen?"

"What's the problem?" Hannah asked.

Seth jumped in. "Aaron and I want to have a joint team meeting to share the results of the survey. We anticipate it will take an hour. Since one of the issues is that our employees don't feel they know what's going on, we want to spend the next half hour talking about the vision of the organization and how they contribute to it. Ultimately, we'd be making the strategic plan available to everyone. It would be like a Town Hall Meeting."

"I think it's a great idea," Hannah responded. She turned to Carmen and asked, "What's the problem?"

"As I just explained to Aaron and Seth, our customer hold time would go through the roof."

"Our customer hold time wouldn't have to go through the roof," Hannah responded. "It will take some creativity with scheduling, and may require us to route the overflow calls to the Austin office for that one hour, but we can do it."

Aaron and Seth looked at Carmen with a look that said, "I told you so!"

Hannah continued. "It's been done before. Heck, we've closed the entire office for a Christmas party. We can certainly do it for this."

As difficult as she could be sometimes, even Carmen was smart enough to pick her battles. This was not one worth fighting.

### **THE SECOND-QUARTER MEETING**

Seth had been looking forward to this meeting since January. He knew Hannah was going to introduce the four lessons related to Motivational Leadership, and he was anxious to hear what she had to say. If there was anything Seth did well, it was inspire his employees.

Everyone was seated at 8 AM ready to go when Hannah walked in.

“Let’s get started,” she said. “I promised you these meetings would be over by noon, and I’m hoping you have a lot to share before we start discussing Motivational Leadership. Who would like to start?”

Before Seth had the opportunity to speak up, Aaron jumped right in.

“I have something to share regarding preparing the organization for change. After our last meeting, I thought about how everyone hates to change. Although we may not like change, we all like to improve. And since the only reason the corporate office changed the strategic plan was to improve, I presented the changes as improvements. It may be small, but I figured I’d give it a shot.”

Carmen rolled her eyes. She seemed to always roll her eyes if it wasn’t something she thought of first.

Hannah responded, “I like it. It’s small, but simple. Who else has an example of something they tried?”

After a long pause, Seth figured no one else was going to offer an example, so he decided to share his experience.

“My example has to do with recruiting support from the top 29 percent. I started by identifying my top 29 percent. I wanted to make them feel special, so I called them in for a meeting. I told them about the procedure change for Representative Occupancy, and asked for their input. After I dealt with their issues, I got their commitment.”

“I like it,” Hannah replied. “Did it make a difference?”

Hannah knew it had made a difference because Seth had shared his experience in her office after it happened. He figured she wanted him to share it with everyone else.

“Yes, it made a difference,” Seth answered with a smile. “When I had my meeting with the entire



team, my top 29 percent stood up and defended the change to the rest of the team. The whole experience was good.”

“I certainly can’t say the same,” Jill said. “My team fought the change. In fact, they weren’t on board when we left the meeting, but I reminded them they didn’t have a choice.”

“Did you recruit support from your top 29 percent?” Hannah asked.

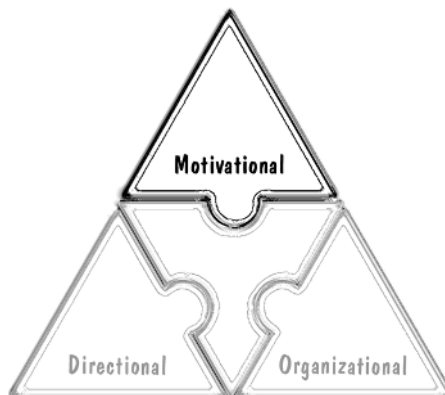
“No, I didn’t. You can rest assured I’ll do it next time.”

“Who else used lessons from Directional Leadership?”

No one offered a story, and Hannah didn’t want to push.

“Some of you may think of a story as we go along, so feel free to share it.” Hannah continued. “In the meantime, I want to make sure we have plenty of time to review Motivational Leadership, so let’s move on.”

Hannah had placed the two flipcharts at the front of the room prior to the meeting. One had her drawing of the puzzle pieces, and the other had the first four lessons of Engaged Leadership. In the second puzzle piece, she wrote the word *Motivational*.



“We’ve been spending time throughout the first quarter exploring ways to build consensus toward the vision of the organization as Directional leaders. We can have the greatest vision for our company and communicate it better than anyone, but if we don’t inspire people to want to pursue it, it won’t matter. We have a responsibility to build a culture that motivates our employees to pursue the vision.”

Hannah approached the flipchart that showed the first four lessons and added the fifth when she wrote:



She sat back down. “This may sound simple, but it’s not. From the time we were children, we’ve been led with negative motivation. As a little girl, my mother would tell me if I didn’t do my homework, I couldn’t go outside. She’d tell me if I didn’t do the dishes, I couldn’t talk on the phone. She would tell me if I missed my curfew, I’d be grounded.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Carmen asked dryly. “That’s the way I was raised, and it’s the way I’m raising my kids. Does that make me a bad parent?”

“No, it doesn’t make you a bad parent. It’s just that when we lead that way, we’re giving someone something to run from.”

“If it works, then what’s the problem?” Carmen asked as she looked around the room for support.

Hannah sat in silence for a moment. Seth couldn’t tell if she was annoyed by Carmen’s questions and was trying to maintain composure, or if she was thinking of a response.

“What I’m trying to say is that we should be giving our employees something to run toward,” Hannah continued. “And it’s not hard to do. For example, instead of my mother telling me I couldn’t go outside if I didn’t get my homework done, she could have turned it around and told me I could go outside if I did my homework. Instead of telling me I couldn’t talk on the phone if I didn’t do the dishes, she could have told me I could talk on the phone if I did the dishes.”

Aaron spoke up. “It almost sounds too simple, but it makes sense. It’s like what Seth did with Mattie. He could have told her he would write her up the next time she was absent. Instead, he told her he’d treat her and her husband to dinner if she had four more months of perfect attendance.”

“Exactly!”

Carmen didn’t say a word.

Jill asked, “What’s next?”

Hannah walked back to the flipchart and wrote:



“This one doesn’t need much explanation at all,” she said. “We simply don’t celebrate enough.”

“I’m going to have to disagree with you on that one,” Carmen said. “We have quite a few celebrations around here.”

Seth nearly fell out of his chair. Aaron looked at him with complete disbelief, and they both broke out laughing.

“You have got to be kidding me, Carmen,” Aaron continued laughing. “When is the last time you’ve celebrated a small success with your team? Heck, when’s the last time you celebrated a big success with your team?”

“We celebrate birthdays in the break room every month, and seem to celebrate just about every holiday. We are always spending money to celebrate something.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about,” Hannah responded. “I’m talking about celebrating an accomplishment, not a date on the calendar.”

“I assume you’re talking about something like what Seth did with the doughnut fiasco,” Carmen replied.

“Why was that a fiasco?” Seth asked.

“Because she didn’t think of it first,” Aaron replied, “and because it will require her to do the same.”

“Who cares if Seth raised the bar on celebration?” Hannah asked. “Our employees told us in the Employee Engagement Survey that they don’t get enough recognition. In one simple act of celebrating a small success, Seth got huge kudos from his team. They are still talking about it, and it happened weeks ago. That little ‘fiasco’ will pay dividends for some time.”

The room was silent for a moment before Hannah continued.

"I'm not sure if Seth raised the bar or established the bar, but I encourage each of you to follow his lead and find ways to celebrate your small successes."

"Any questions?" After a moment of silence, Hannah said, "Good. Let's take a half-hour break. Go check your e-mail and voicemail, or do whatever it is you do when you take a break, just be back in thirty minutes. If you're not, you get to teach the next points. How about that for expectations and consequences!"

### **BACK FROM THE BREAK**

As everyone filed back in the room five minutes early, Hannah was in her seat. As Seth sat down, he noticed Hannah had already written the next lesson on the flipchart. It read:



She looked around the room and said, "Life seems to be moving at a faster pace than ever before. We have so many things happening, and we're expecting more from our employees than ever before."

Jill interrupted. "I think that goes for everyone around this table, too. If I don't work at least ten hours a day, I can't keep up."

"I agree," Aaron said. "If I leave early to go watch one of my daughter's games, I have to take work home and do it after I put the kids to bed."

"I understand," Hannah said. "We are all in the same boat. But you made an interesting point. As a manager, you have the luxury of being able to leave early and take work home with you. Our employees don't have that luxury."

"So what are we going to do now?" Carmen responded. "Are we going to start letting everyone come in late and leave early? This place would be a zoo."

"No, Carmen. I'm not suggesting our employees can have the same flexibility we enjoy as managers. We have a responsibility to have a certain number of reps on the phones at the times the company requires in order to provide adequate coverage for our customers."

"Then we don't have the ability to offer the same flexibility we enjoy as managers," Jill said. "That's fine with me. If they want it, they can get promoted and put in ten-hour or twelve-hour days like we do."

"So we shouldn't offer them any flexibility to encourage life balance since they're not in a management position?" Hannah asked.

"I don't think that's what she said," Carmen blurted out. "They've chosen to be in a job that requires them to work a certain shift. They knew that when they accepted the job."

"So people who work in a job that requires them to work a certain shift shouldn't expect any flexibility that might help balance their life?" Hannah asked.

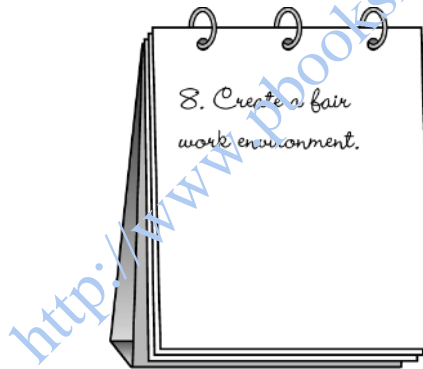
"I have to jump in here," Seth interrupted. "I don't think we have to allow our employees to come and go as they please to be flexible. I think we just have to be willing to work with them when they need it."

“Exactly,” Hannah said. “And it may require a shift in thinking for some of you. If you have an employee who wants to come in a little later, for whatever reason, and they’ve cleared it with you so we can cover their shifts, we should be willing to do it.”

“No one ever did that for me,” Jill frowned.

“And that’s what I meant when I said it may require a shift in thinking for some of you,” Hannah said. “Don’t make decisions on flexibility based on what someone did with you. Make decisions on flexibility based on what you would have liked someone to do with you.”

“Any questions?” After a moment of silence, Hannah walked back to the flipchart and wrote:



She sat back down and said, “This is the last lesson for today, and it’s about our ability to create a fair work environment.”

“There are laws that protect employees,” Carmen sighed, “and we follow them all.”

“I’m aware of the laws in place to protect our employees, and I fully expect us to follow each and every one of them. But I’m not talking about it from a legal sense. I’m talking about it from a leadership sense.”

“What’s the difference?” Jill asked.

“There are plenty of things we can do to be fair to employees that aren’t required by law, and these are the things that engage the disengaged employee. Our employees are constantly comparing themselves to others. They compare how much money they make. They compare the rewards they get. They compare everything.”

“As long as we treat everyone equally,” Carmen replied, “then we should be just fine.”

“I’m not talking about equal treatment,” Hannah responded. “I’m talking about fair treatment. If our goal is employee engagement, then we must make employees feel they work in a fair environment. We simply can’t expect an employee to feel engaged in the workforce when they feel they haven’t been treated fairly.”

“Fair treatment is pretty broad. Any suggestions?” Seth asked.

“There’s one thing in particular I think you should do. Be consistent in the consequences you give. Your employees may look for fairness in pay and rewards, but they also want to know we’re consistent and fair in enforcing the rules.”

Carmen looked up and said, “It’s noon.”

“Yes, it is,” Hannah said. “You’ve got the entire quarter to set this office on fire with Motivational Leadership. Go out there and make something big happen!”

### **THE POWER OF POSITIVE MOTIVATION**

Seth made a point to get out of his office to visit with employees every day. Carmen warned him that he had set a precedent by serving his team breakfast at their desks, and that his employees would now expect him to spend money recognizing



them. Seth discovered she was half right. It wasn't about the money he spent. It was about the attention.

He asked Jill one day why she didn't spend time in the call center with her employees. She explained she simply didn't have the time to "wander around" during the day, but then neither did Seth. He didn't have the time. He made the time.

A couple weeks after the second-quarter meeting, Seth was out making his morning rounds. He had just reviewed the March reports, and was somewhat disappointed. He held onto third place in attendance, and improved from fourth to third in a key quality measurement. A month ago he would have been thrilled with that progress, but Seth's competitiveness left him wanting more.

If Seth was raising the bar for his fellow managers, Aaron was proving he had no trouble getting over it. He was creating his own ways of recognizing his team, and had taken on Seth's habit of walking around visiting with employees every morning. He noticed Aaron didn't make it out that morning, and saw him sitting in his cubicle.

"Not up for your morning jog?" Seth laughed as he walked into Aaron's cubicle.

"Not today," Aaron said without looking up. "I have four reports due to Hannah by noon. But first, I've got to cover a performance review with an employee who will complete six months with the company next week."

Seth hadn't done a performance review at this point, so he thought it would be as good a time as any to learn. "Do you mind if I sit through the review so I can see how they're done?"

"I don't mind at all. In fact, I'm on my way to get the employee right now. It's Janie Davis. You've

met her before. You can sit in that chair in the corner and observe.”

When Aaron walked back into the office with Janie, Seth noticed a concerned look on her face. Aaron explained to her that Seth was observing the review so he could learn how to do them with his own employees. From the moment she sat down, Janie was staring directly at the floor, with her shoulders rolled forward and her head hung down.

Aaron began. “Janie, as you know, I am required to do a review with you now that you’ve been with us six months. You’ve been doing pretty well, but I need you to focus on a couple things. You always forget to tell the customer you’re putting them on hold. Also, you never thank people for using Halifax. I need you to work on those two things for me.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now,” Aaron continued, “I’ll be watching for these things in your monthly observations. If I don’t see an improvement, I’ll have no choice but to write you up and put it in your file. I have faith in you that you’ll get the hang of it. Do you have any questions?”

“No, sir.”

“Okay, then. If you’ll sign at the bottom of this performance review, you can head back to work.”

Janie signed the form and left his office. Her shoulders were rolled forward and her head was hanging down. Aaron turned to Seth with a look of relief that he’d completed the review.

“I hope that helped,” Aaron commented. “Now, I’ve got to get these reports done for Hannah. Let’s grab some lunch today.”

“I can do lunch today. But before I leave, let’s talk about the review. I don’t want to be critical because I’ve never done one before . . .”

Aaron interrupted. "You're not going to tell me how I should have done the review, are you?"

"Absolutely not. I just noticed that she came in here looking dejected before you even said a word."

"They all come in here that way," Aaron said. "They're coming to see the boss."

"I just don't think coming to see the boss should be a bad thing. And it's one thing for them to come in here expecting something bad to happen, but I don't think they should leave here with the same dejected look on their face."

Seth had spent a lot of time getting to know Aaron, and he hoped their relationship was strong enough for this conversation. He believed the relationship was built on a foundation of trust. If it wasn't, Seth knew he may have just crossed a line.

After an uncomfortable pause, Aaron broke the silence. "If one of the other managers had just said that to me," Aaron smiled, "I would have thrown her out of my office, but I trust your opinion. What would you have done differently?"

Seth was relieved he hadn't offended Aaron. "First of all, like most employees, Janie came in here thinking she was going to hear what she was doing wrong, and she was listening for it. I thought you started out great telling her she was doing pretty well, but you jumped straight from that quick comment to telling her what she was doing wrong."

"But I needed to tell her what she was doing wrong."

"True. But she may have been more open to those ideas if you spent some time providing specifics of what you thought she was doing well. Maybe I'm wrong, but if it were me and I had an employee like Janie, I would spend 80 percent of my time in the review telling her what she was

doing well, and 20 percent of my time telling her what she could do to improve.”

“Anything else?” Aaron asked.

“I would have focused on some aspect of positive motivation. You had an employee you thought was doing a pretty good job, but you told her if she didn’t improve, you would write her up and put it in her file. She’s not running toward something, like Hannah talked about in positive motivation. She’s running away from getting written up.”

“You learned all that from Hannah’s lesson?” Aaron laughed.

“No. I learned it by putting myself in the shoes of the employee. Every boss I’ve ever had threatened me with negative motivation. When Hannah mentioned leading with positive motivation, it just made sense.”

Aaron and Seth spent some more time talking through the review, and Aaron agreed to bring Janie back in to share more of the things she was doing well. When Seth got back to his office, he realized two peers can teach each other when a foundation of trust is in place.

### **WINNER BY A NOSE**

If there was anything Halifax did exceptionally well, it was train its employees. Seth enjoyed the opportunity to learn from Hannah, and considered the chance to attend formal training sessions a bonus.

Halifax University was created over a decade ago as a central training location, and all employees were encouraged to take advantage of it. Not only did the company encourage it, but Hannah pushed all her managers to register for training. A week earlier Hannah had gotten a call from the

training center informing her of a last-minute cancellation for a presentations training workshop, and she offered Seth the opportunity to go. He jumped at the chance.

Seth was picking up his luggage in the baggage claim area that evening when his cell phone rang. He had just gotten back from the training session and was looking forward to going to his apartment to relax. But when Hannah called to meet at La Cantina, he figured relaxation would have to wait.

He didn't realize Aaron would be there. When he walked in, Aaron and Hannah watched him walk toward the table with smiles on their faces.

"What's all the smiling about?"

"April results came out while you were gone," Aaron replied.

"I got a call from Jill telling me one of my employees dropped the ball getting my team's results to her, so I thought there might be a delay. I asked Miles to take care of it for me while I was in training, and apparently he let me down. So much for empowerment."

"I took care of it for you," Aaron said.

"Then why didn't someone call me with the results?"

"We didn't call you because we wanted to see you face-to-face when you heard the news," Hannah replied.

"What news?"

"Your team is no longer in third place in attendance and quality," Aaron said. "They're in first."

Seth stared at Aaron as though it didn't register. He then turned and stared at Hannah. Neither said a word. They just sat and smiled.

Seth broke the silence. "Are you serious, or is this some sort of mean joke?"

“It’s the real deal, my friend,” Aaron said. “I’ve been in first place nearly every month since the office opened, and you just knocked me off the mountain. It was a photo-finish, but you won fair and square.”

Seth was ecstatic. He hugged Hannah. He hugged Aaron. He even hugged the waitress when she brought their margaritas.

“It’s not champagne, but it’ll have to do,” Hannah said as they raised their glasses. “To proof that a culture of employee engagement can truly make a difference.”

Seth’s team was measured in areas other than attendance and quality, but these were the areas that had shown significant improvement. He committed to Hannah that he would take his team from last place to first place in every area they measured within one year. He had gotten them to first place in two key measurement areas. In the back of his mind, he hoped to do it in six months. To everyone’s shock, he did it in four. He enjoyed the moment while it lasted. He would soon find out that getting to the top was one thing. Staying on top was another.

### **A LESSON ON EMPOWERMENT**

Seth couldn’t wait to get back to the office the next day to share the good news with his team. As he opened the door to the call center, he looked across the office to his cubicle. He could see the handmade banner in his cubicle. “Congratulations!” it read. As he walked through the office, several employees were giving him the thumbs-up sign. He looked toward Carmen’s office and saw her standing in the doorway with her arms crossed. Mad again.

As he walked into his office, he could read the rest of the banner. Across the bottom were the words "From the #1 team in the office!" Each of his team members had signed the banner. Apparently someone else in the office couldn't wait to share the good news.

"It's pretty rewarding when the people who did the work recognize their boss, isn't it?" Hannah asked as she walked into Seth's office.

"I'm at a loss for words."

"It shows they appreciate your leadership," Hannah replied.

Seth sat quietly for a moment. "I know I should be wrapped up in the excitement of my team's results, but I can't get past the fact one of my employees dropped the ball on getting the reports to Jill. I've got to figure out how to deal with that."

Hannah walked over and sat down. "At our next quarterly meeting, I'll be addressing empowerment. In the meantime, just know it's all about culture, and it takes time."

"It just seems too simple to take time for empowerment to work. I mean, we want empowered employees, and I'm sure most employees want to feel empowered. If that's the case, how can an employee like Miles drop the ball?"

"There are several reasons," Hannah explained. "First, real empowerment requires the most enormous shift in thinking of any management practice in the workplace today. Most people lead others the way they were led, and it takes a pioneer to embrace the level of change needed to practice real empowerment. It requires that we give up the assumptions, behaviors, and processes that support the old system."

"So it really is about more than just giving people tasks to do."

“Absolutely,” Hannah continued. “Real empowerment is based more on culture than tasks. In fact, it’s based solely on a culture of trust. Since most people are practical and want a list of things to do after they’ve been through training or complete a book, many never get to the point where they are truly building a culture.”

“So you’re saying the only way an employee will take on responsibility is if he trusts the person who’s asked him to do it?”

“No, that’s not it,” Hannah continued. “What I’m saying is that real empowerment has a chance of surviving when trust is in place. If I ask you to do something and I haven’t built a culture of trust, then you may be afraid I’ll punish you if you do it wrong, or embarrass you if you make a mistake.”

“Carmen mentioned to me once that she doesn’t delegate work to her employees because she knows they’ll let her down.”

Hannah lowered her voice. “Carmen doesn’t delegate work to her employees because real empowerment requires the person to give up a significant amount of power. In the absence of a culture of employee engagement, the only tool many leaders have is position power. If Carmen hasn’t built a culture where employees want to do the work, how can she get the work done if she gives away the very power that forces someone to do it?”

Seth sat for a moment to let the lesson sink in.

“I know Miles let you down when he dropped the ball,” Hannah said as she leaned forward in her chair. “But remember that it probably has more to do with us than him. He probably has considerable respect for you, so let him know your concerns. He will probably work hard not to let you down in the future. But most importantly, just keep working on developing a culture of employee



engagement. When you've achieved that, empowerment will have a chance to work."

Although some of Seth's success came from what he did right to build the right culture, much of it came from what he didn't do wrong to tear it down. Hannah had a way of showing up at just the right time to teach a lesson that kept him from committing some culture-killing acts. This was one of those occasions.

### **BELLS WILL BE RINGING**

Seth and Jill had been meeting most of the morning. Although Carmen was the manager in charge of employee schedules, Jill was her backup. Hannah had asked Jill to ensure someone else in the office could do it in case they both were out of the office. Seth agreed to be the one.

Every twenty minutes or so, they would hear a bell ring in the office. The first two or three times they didn't think much of it, but when they noticed the call center reps were standing up to see what it was, they figured it was time to investigate.

They looked to see where everyone was staring, and it appeared to be Aaron's office, so they walked that way. Just before they got to his doorway, they heard the bell again. They looked inside and saw Aaron meeting with one of his employees. They were both laughing.

Not wanting to interrupt, Seth and Jill went back to her office. They figured Aaron would explain the bell ringing later.

After about an hour, Aaron walked into Jill's office. "It's working," he said with a smile.

"What's working?" Seth asked.

"The bell," Aaron replied. "I needed a way to celebrate the small successes of my team, and I

chose a bell. Every time one of my team members does something to reach a goal they've set for themselves, they get to ring the bell. Not only is it a way to recognize them, but it raises the curiosity level of everyone else in the office."

"Yes, it does," Carmen said as she walked into Jill's office. "And in the process, it distracts our employees. I don't know what the bell ringing is about, but it's got to stop."

"Carmen," Aaron replied, "you have a way of throwing a wet blanket on every idea someone else comes up with. Let's walk back to my office, and I'll explain to you what all the bell ringing is about, and why it's not going to stop."

As he was leaving Jill's office, Aaron turned around to Seth and said, "Oh, and by the way, the bell does one other thing. It raises the bar on my good friend Seth. You see, as I was walking down here, two of your employees stopped me to ask why you don't ring a bell when they do something great."

"Outstanding," Seth laughed. "I love a little competition, and I'm up to the challenge. Game on!"

### **A LESSON IN LIFE BALANCE**

Seth was from Texas, so he expected hot weather during the summer. He was hoping the unbearable heat would hold off until July or August, but June was bringing record temperatures. It seemed the heat put people in a bad mood. Particularly Carmen.

There weren't many mornings Seth wasn't one of the first managers to the office. He had gotten more involved with his church and just returned from a weekend retreat. It had been a particularly

long weekend, and he'd been working some really long hours the week before, so he decided to stay in bed a little longer than usual that Monday morning. According to the May reports, his team held their positions in every category, so he felt things were moving along well.

When he got to the call center that morning, he noticed someone sitting at his desk. As he got closer to his cubicle, he realized it was Carmen. She was shuffling through the paperwork on his desk.

"Have you lost something?" Seth asked with a little contempt in his voice.

"It's nice of you to finally show up to work. I've been dealing with a problem all morning, and I got tired of waiting for you to get here."

Carmen continued to rifle through his desk as Seth stood in his doorway. "I have an idea," he said as he put down his briefcase. "Step away from my desk, and I'll be happy to find whatever it is you're looking for."

"I'm trying to find a vacation request one of your employees says you approved. It's Deanna Curtis. I have her scheduled to work tomorrow, and she came in claiming you signed off on her taking the day off. I told her that couldn't be the case because she hasn't been here long enough to accrue any vacation days. She said you authorized it."

"First of all, get up." Seth stood behind his chair until Carmen got up and stood next to his desk. He sat down and motioned for Carmen to sit in the guest chair she was leaning against.

"I appreciate you trying to take care of this issue," Seth started. "It could have waited until I got into the office, but since you're here, let's work through it. First of all, Deanna will celebrate her six-month anniversary with the company on Friday."

“I know. I checked her employment date. But the policy clearly states she’s not entitled to vacation days until she’s been here six months. That means she can’t take days off until next week.”

Seth stared at Carmen for a few seconds before he responded. “Do you have a gentle bone in your body? This office is not going to collapse because we allow Deanna to take a vacation day three days early.”

“It’s our job to enforce the policies of this company.”

“The policies of this company are in place to ensure we have a structure by which to operate,” Seth argued. “I would maintain it’s not our job to enforce the policies. It’s our job to use the policies to help guide our decisions when running this company. And that’s exactly what I did, and exactly what I will do in the future.”

“I’ll take this up with Hannah.”

“I think that would be a splendid idea,” Seth smiled. “And while you’re at it, explain to her that my employee’s mother is going in for day surgery on Friday, and that she requested the day off to be with her family. Maybe you can explain to her that the employee agreed to come in early and leave late for the next week to make up the time since she knew she wasn’t entitled to a vacation day yet, but that I told her I would make an exception, and that . . .”

Before Seth could finish his comment, Carmen got up and walked out of his office. For a moment he questioned his decision, and wondered if he’d done something wrong. Then he thought back to Hannah’s lesson about encouraging life balance. He knew if he wanted his employees to be motivated enough to pursue the company’s vision, he had to continue to work on the culture. And part of

the culture for Seth would be a willingness to work with employees. He was willing to fight that battle any day.

### **THE THIRD-QUARTER MEETING**

Seth was amazed the third-quarter meeting was here. He wasn't sure if the time was going by fast because there was so much work to do, or if he was just enjoying the job.

Throughout the second quarter, Seth had seen several ideas implemented to celebrate the small successes in the office, and he was looking forward to hearing what everyone had to say. He initially planned to tell everyone about his ideas, but he was pretty certain they knew exactly what he'd been doing.

Everyone but Aaron was sitting in the conference room when Hannah walked in. The clock read 7:55. Hannah just smiled. "I almost stopped to wash my car earlier this week, but I just knew one of you would be late today. It just may be Aaron."

Aaron ruined her fun. "I'm here. I'm here," he shouted as he rushed into the room.

"You almost didn't make it," Seth laughed.

"I had to pick up the cake for the Fourth of July party at lunch, and it wasn't ready," he said as he tried to catch his breath. "But I made it."

After Aaron got seated and Hannah got situated at the head of the conference table, she slowly looked around the table at each manager. She paused as she looked into the eyes of each manager and smiled.

"This past quarter was very rewarding for me," Hannah said. "I anticipated it would take a full year to start seeing a change in the culture, but it's already starting to happen. I know it hasn't been

easy, and I know you're working more hours than you were before I got here. I hope you see the hours you're spending now developing the culture as an investment in the future of your team."

For the first time, Hannah saw all four heads around the table nodding in agreement. Even Carmen was coming around. Or at least she was pretending.

"Now then," Hannah continued, "I don't need to hear about the things you did to celebrate your small successes because I've been made aware of them by your teams. However, who would like to share something you did with one of the other lessons we learned last quarter?"

Seth always had a story to tell and was eager to share his experiences with the rest of the team. He was starting to learn that sometimes it's better to let someone else have the stage, and he sat back and waited.

Aaron chimed in first. "Let's talk about this positive motivation thing," he said. "I let Seth sit in while I did a six-month performance review on an employee back in April. I reviewed the employee's performance just like I've always done."

"And I appreciate you letting me sit in," Seth interrupted.

"No problem. But here's the deal, and this is hard for me to say. Seth sat with me so he could learn how to do a review, and I think I was the one who learned the most."

Everyone sat quietly as they waited for Aaron to continue.

"For years I have been doing these performance reviews, and I always did them the way my boss did them when I was a rep. I used to hate getting reviewed because I always knew I'd get beaten up, regardless of how well I did. My boss would always

find something wrong and point it out. I realized I followed in the footsteps of my old boss.”

“Do you mean you always looked for the things they were doing wrong?” Jill asked.

“Yes. I actively looked for something they were doing wrong. I thought that’s what I was supposed to do, and it’s what I did with this employee. Ultimately, I got it turned around after Seth brought up some valid points, but it was an eye-opening experience concerning positive motivation.”

“Is Seth your own little personal coach now?” Carmen commented.

“No, Carmen. But I also learned in that experience that we all have something to learn from each other if we’ll put down our guards long enough to realize it.”

“Great lesson,” Hannah said. “Who else has something to share?”

Hannah didn’t expect her managers to be anxious to share stories at this point. She knew that while they were building a culture with their teams, she was building a culture with them. No one knew better than Hannah that building a culture takes time.

“Let’s move on to the final aspect of Engaged Leadership. Our meeting will be shorter than normal. I have an obligation at 10:30, so we won’t be taking a break this morning, and we may move rather quickly through some of the information. If you have questions after the meeting, I’ll be happy to make myself available.”

Hannah had once again set up the flipcharts at the front of the room prior to the meeting. On one she had her drawing of the puzzle pieces, and on the other she had the first eight lessons of Engaged Leadership. She approached the drawing of the

puzzle pieces. In the third puzzle piece she wrote the word *Organizational*.



“We started the first quarter discussing our responsibilities as Directional leaders. We learned the four lessons that will help us build a consensus for the vision. We then discussed our responsibilities as Motivational leaders. We learned the four lessons that will help us inspire the team to pursue the vision. And now we’ll discuss our responsibilities as Organizational leaders, and learn the four lessons that will help us develop the team to realize the vision.”

She turned to the flipchart with the first eight lessons and added the ninth when she wrote:





She sat back down. “When we look at the three aspects of leadership in the model, we can all identify one area that we are better at than others.”

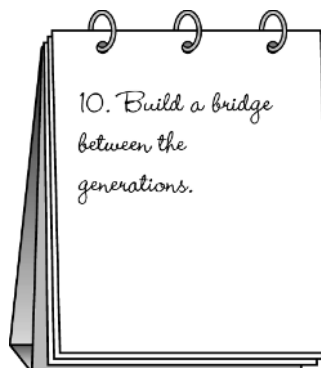
Seth jumped in. “I’m definitely better at Motivational Leadership than Directional Leadership. I’m pretty good at building consensus, but I’m definitely more comfortable inspiring my team.”

Aaron chimed in. “I’m just the opposite. I enjoy inspiring my team, but I’m definitely better at building consensus for the vision. Even more than that, I’m always thinking about the future, and trying to come up with new ways of doing things.”

“Can you imagine if we had an entire team of visionaries?” Hannah asked. “Everyone would want to plan the future and build consensus toward the vision, but no one would have the ability to inspire the team. Or how about if we had an entire team of managers like Seth who were really great at inspiring the team, but weren’t sure how to develop the team as a whole? We have a responsibility to focus on individuals, but we also have a responsibility to develop the team so the organization is bigger than certain employees.”

Jill asked, “What’s next?”

Hannah walked back to the flipchart and wrote:



"I suppose you mean we need to adjust to these spoiled little brats," Carmen said in her most sarcastic tone.

"I think it means we need to adjust to old people like you," Aaron laughed.

"I'm not that old. I just turned 54."

Seth laughed silently and slowly covered his mouth. "My mother isn't that old."

Everyone laughed. "Careful, Seth," Hannah replied. "I turn 51 later this year."

"How old are you, Seth?" Jill asked.

"I turn 24 in a couple months."

"I have socks older than you," Carmen frowned.

"You should probably think about getting some new socks," Aaron laughed.

Aaron and Jill were in the middle. They were both 35, and had been hired by the company as call center reps when they were younger than Seth.

"What I mean by building a bridge between the generations is we're all different," Hannah said. "We all grew up at different times, and our values are different. We have to be able to adjust to that, and not allow the generational differences to get in the way."

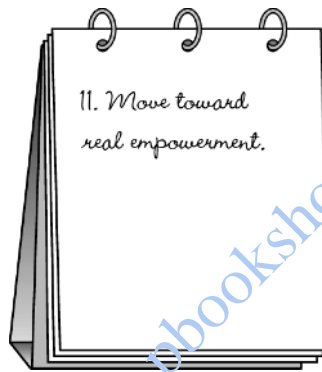
"That's hard for me to do," Carmen said. "For instance, when I grew up, my parents started work at 8 o'clock, and they didn't leave until 5. Period. They didn't show up late if they were tired, and they certainly didn't ask for time off early. I do the same thing, and it's annoying to watch Seth wander in here whenever he wants."

"But he stays long past 5," Aaron chimed in. "He doesn't have kids, so while we're at home taking care of kids, he's up here working."

"Keep in mind that the generational thing doesn't just apply to us," Hannah said. "You

have several different generations on your teams, and you need to adjust to them as well. I have some information on the generations in my office, and I'll e-mail it to all of you. In the meantime, just be tolerant of generational differences."

Hannah walked back to the flipchart and wrote:



She sat back down and said, "This next lesson is about our ability to empower our employees."

"Finally," Carmen sighed, "something I can agree with. We need to be giving some of this work to our employees. Delegation is the key."

"It's interesting you would say that because empowerment is perhaps the least understood of most management practices," Hannah said.

"It's pretty simple to me," Carmen replied. "Give someone a task and get out of the way!"

"That sounds great because on the surface it seems simple. If we give people more responsibility, then they're empowered. If we give people the power to make decisions, then they're empowered. But it's not that simple. For empowerment to work, we must have a culture in place that allows people to fail without the fear of being knocked down. Quite

frankly, I don't think that culture exists here yet. It will if we follow each aspect of Engaged Leadership and build a culture of employee engagement."

"What do we do in the meantime?" Aaron asked.

"I would suggest you do a couple things. Start with giving your employees more information. For empowerment to work, employees need information. If I empower one of you to take on a task for me, you're going to gather all the information available to get it done. Too often we're protective of our information and don't share it with our employees. Give them more information so that when the culture is ripe for empowerment, they'll feel they have the information to take on more responsibility."

"Anything else?" Seth asked.

"Yes," she answered, "there is one last thing you can do related to empowerment. Stop solving all their problems. The one thing I've noticed since I got here is we solve too many problems for our employees. We don't challenge them to think through their own problems. If we don't turn them into thinkers, they'll never be ready to take on more responsibility through empowerment."

Hannah walked back to the flipchart and wrote:



“This is the last lesson for today. How many of you can tell me who you’ve been grooming to take your job if you get run over by a bus tomorrow?” Hannah asked.

No one said a word. Aaron broke the silence, “I personally look both ways before I cross the street in hopes of never getting run over by a bus.”

Everyone laughed.

“You know what I mean. Something could happen to any of us. People get promoted. They get transferred. They retire. We have a responsibility to ensure life goes on around here without us, and that all the good work we’ve been doing is carried on. Our presence here shouldn’t be required, and it won’t be required if we establish a strategy to maintain success. Any questions?”

“Are you referring to a succession plan?” Carmen asked.

“That is certainly a good example of a strategy to maintain success. You’ve each worked awfully hard; it’d be a shame to let someone else take over who may not be up to the task of filling your shoes and carrying on the work you’ve done with your teams. Any other questions?”

“What’s the fourth piece to the puzzle?” Seth asked.

“You’ll find out at the fourth-quarter meeting in October. Any other questions?”

Seth needed more information on the last lesson, but it was obvious Hannah was in a hurry to end the meeting. He wasn’t about to open his mouth and keep everyone else from getting out early. He decided he would hold his questions until later.

“The reason I am leaving early today is I’m expecting a call from my boss, Ross Harrison. He’s noticed our office results have improved significantly the past six months, and he told his boss

about us. Her name is Amanda Suttle, and she wants to come down here to see what we're doing."

"We've never been visited by a corporate vice president before," Aaron said. "Are you going to give her a presentation of what we've been doing?"

"No. You will."

Hannah had a way of bringing total silence to the room.

"I will?" Aaron asked.

"All of you. Your teams have produced the numbers, and you've led your teams. I'm not about to take credit for your work. You made the effort, and you're going to have an opportunity to strut your stuff in front of the big boss. She'll be here two weeks from Friday. I'll give out presentation assignments soon. In the meantime, you know the routine. Go out and have a great quarter. Let me know if you need any help."

With that, the final four lessons of Engaged Leadership had been taught. Seth had a feeling there wouldn't be much effort made over the next few weeks to implement the last four lessons. Everyone would be focused on the visit from Amanda Suttle.

Seth was glad he took advantage of the presentations training workshop back in May.

### **THE BIG BOSS**

Seth had no idea so much effort could go into planning for a visit from an officer of the company. In fact, nearly every available minute for two and a half weeks in July was spent making preparations. Seth wondered if these executives would ever make visits if they had any idea how much it cost the company in preparation time alone.

Since Seth's team had once again held its position on the monthly reports for June, he felt he could spend some time getting ready for the meeting. This was not just any meeting. Not only was this to be the first visit to this call center by a corporate vice president, she was coming to examine exactly what it is they've been doing that has led to their recent successes.

Since these visits didn't happen very often, everyone was surprised when Hannah didn't spend the entire day meeting with Amanda on her own. Everyone but Seth. He knew Hannah's commitment to the development of her team, and this was her opportunity to put managers in front of a company executive.

Each manager was assigned a specific area of improvement to present. Seth didn't get nervous very often. He certainly wasn't nervous about his presentation. However, he was nervous about his task before the presentation. Hannah had asked him to pick up her boss from the airport.

"How do you people live like this?" These were the first words out of Amanda Suttle's mouth as she approached the company car sitting at the curb outside the airport. "It has to be 150 degrees out here. I hope the air conditioner works in that thing," she laughed as she approached the car.

"It does, ma'am," Seth replied as he opened her car door, "and we're only an hour from the office."

After Seth closed her door and ran around to get in the driver's seat, Amanda turned to him with a smile and said, "Call me ma'am again and you're walking to the office. My name is Amanda. And I am a grown woman, and can open my own car door."

"Sorry, Amanda. I was born and raised in Texas, and my mother . . ."

Amanda interrupted, “I know, I know. Your mother taught you it’s a sign of respect. I may live in New Jersey, but I was born in Texas. I appreciate the gesture.”

Amanda Suttle was nothing like Seth imagined. He expected her to be uptight and formal. She had a way of making Seth feel at ease. In fact, for the entire ride to the call center, they never even talked about business. They visited like they’d been friends for years.

### DOWN TO BUSINESS

Everyone knew they had spent way too much time preparing their presentations for Amanda’s visit. In fact, Seth was concerned the teams would feel neglected during that two-week period. He was surprised at first to see how much support he got from his team. After he gave it a little thought, it made sense. This wasn’t just his presentation. They were as much a part of it as anyone, and they were proud of what Seth was going to present. In a nutshell, they had become engaged.

Hannah spent the morning with Amanda. From time to time, she would come out of her office to get some call center reps. She’d take them in her office and close the door. Even though they were doing a good job building a culture of employee engagement, the managers still got a little nervous knowing one of their employees was sitting in a closed office with their boss and her boss.

After a quick lunch, they all gathered in the conference room. Each manager had one full hour to make a presentation and to answer questions from Amanda. Although they may have spent too much time preparing their presentations, it paid off by the end of the day.



"I've been visiting call centers this year to see what kind of progress we're making on employee engagement," Amanda said. "There are some offices doing a nice job, but I can honestly say I've been the most impressed with what I've seen here. You're not just talking about it. You're making it happen. Hannah shared with me the model of Engaged Leadership, and explained you are implementing the ideas in your day-to-day activities. The key to your success is following a model, and I applaud you for that."

Amanda paused for a moment and looked around the room to allow her words to sink in.

"Your presentations were outstanding. You have a lot of potential in this office, and I wish you the best of luck for the remainder of the year."

After a full day of presentations, Amanda's mind was focused on business on the return trip to the airport. Seth had the opportunity to drive her back to the airport and enjoyed the entire hour hearing more of her observations.

"What do you think of Hannah?" she asked Seth.

"I think she's awesome, and I don't know how she does it. She really spends more of her day leading her four managers than doing management stuff. She's constantly teaching us something, which we then apply to our teams, if we're smart. If it works, which it normally does, our results improve."

"I want to encourage you to do two things for me," Amanda pleaded. "One, learn as much as you can from Hannah while you're here. Her style of management is the exception, not the rule. And two, promise me you'll take those lessons and become the kind of leader Hannah is to you. We need more leaders like Hannah, and you have the chance to pass it on to others."

“I promise you I’ll do both, Amanda,” Seth said as they pulled up to the airport.

As she got out of the car, she turned around and looked at Seth. Before she closed the door, she said, “Forget the Amanda thing. From now on, call me Mandy.”

Seth didn’t know if the fact they were fellow Texans helped create the bond or if she was genuinely impressed with Seth, but he felt he was making a connection. He hoped it might help somewhere down the line.

#### **FOUR REASONS PEOPLE FAIL**

It was August now, and the corporate vice president’s visit was over. That was the good news. The bad news was the July report had just come out and Seth’s team had dropped to second place in attendance. Nothing of great concern, but Seth wanted to stay on top. He hoped it was just the distraction of Amanda’s visit that had thrown everyone off.

Hannah always beat Seth to La Cantina. For the first time, Seth was the first to arrive. He needed to think through a problem he was having with an employee, and figured he’d do his thinking at La Cantina before his meeting with Hannah.

The waitress was bringing Seth his second margarita when Hannah walked in.

“Well, well, well,” Hannah remarked as she walked over to the table with a grin on her face. “This is a first. You beat me here, and it looks like you got started without me.”

“I needed some quiet time to think,” Seth replied. “I figured I’d come over early.”

“Good for you,” Hannah replied. “Did you solve your problems, or are you going to need a few more margaritas for that?”

“I figure somewhere between the margaritas and your advice, I’ll find my answers. My car is in the shop, and I’m taking a cab home. Bring on the margaritas!”

Hannah sensed the first margarita was already going to Seth’s head. After she sat down, Seth explained the challenge he was having with Larry Marcus, a longtime Halifax employee. One of the key measurements in the office was called the First Resolution Rate, which measured the percentage of calls completed with a single contact. Since customers don’t like being transferred around, upper management put a high priority on completing calls with a single contact. Larry’s percentage was the lowest in the entire office, and it was keeping Seth’s group from moving from second to first place. Seth explained he’d done everything he knew to do. He’d set expectations. He’d set positive consequences. He’d set negative consequences. Nothing had worked, so he was considering termination.

Hannah looked at Seth and said, “I’m about to teach you one of the best lessons you’ll ever learn, so pay attention. There are only four reasons people fail. They fail because they lack one of these four things: skill, knowledge, resource, or motivation.”

Hannah looked at Seth for a few seconds to ensure it was sinking in.

“Now, if you have an employee who can’t seem to resolve a client’s issue on the first call, is that a lack of skill?” Hannah asked.

“It could be if he doesn’t know how to do it,” Seth replied, “but Larry’s been with the company for fourteen years. Twelve of those years he’s been a call center rep, and there haven’t been that many changes that would keep him from being able to

handle client issues. According to his file, every time a change was implemented, he was trained. So in his case, it is not a lack of skill.”

“Is it a lack of knowledge?” she asked.

Seth thought about Hannah’s question for a moment and responded, “I suppose it could be if he didn’t know what was expected of him, but I’ve made my expectations and consequences very clear. He’s just not responding. So in his case, it is not a lack of knowledge.”

“Okay,” Hannah responded. “Is it a lack of resource?”

“Larry has everything he needs, so in his case, it’s not a lack of resource.”

“Seth,” she asked, “If it’s not a lack of skill, knowledge, or resource, what’s left?”

“A lack of motivation,” Seth replied.

“Exactly,” Hannah replied. “You have an employee who’s not resolving client issues on the first call because he’s not motivated. What have you done as his leader to motivate him?”

“We do pay him every two weeks, don’t we?” Seth laughed.

“Yes,” Hannah replied with a smile. “But getting a paycheck to pay the bills doesn’t motivate most employees, and it’s obvious your positive and negative consequences aren’t working. You need to find a way to motivate him before you can fire him.”

“How do I do that?” Seth asked.

“I don’t know, hotshot,” Hannah replied. “That’s for you to figure out. Give it some thought. Just know that the goal must not be to fire people. It must be to find ways to keep them. Not only is it less expensive, it’s the compassionate thing to do.”

Seth and Hannah spent the next hour or so talking about Amanda’s visit, and what impact it

would have on the other managers. After she left, Seth stayed a while and solved all his problems while enjoying another margarita. It was a relaxing ride home in the cab.

### **A LESSON IN CHARACTER**

Seth's visit to Tucson started out less than smoothly. He had just arrived at the Tucson International Airport on a Tuesday afternoon and he was having a hard time doing what he'd done a million times when leaving an airport: opening the door to a taxi. The cab driver was nice enough to put Seth's suitcase in the trunk. Then he came around to try to get the back door open so Seth could get in the car. After several attempts and a grumble or two, he finally got it open and they were off to the hotel.

Seth was excited to be in Tucson on this September day, substituting the dry heat of Arizona for the humidity of Texas. The next morning he was going to start a financial management training session. Although he was excited to be learning what he needed to know about financial management, he wasn't looking forward to being away from his team for a week.

As Seth sat back to enjoy the half-hour drive, he noticed the cab driver was listening to a talk-radio show. It was an election year, and the discussion on the radio was surrounding a candidate who had confessed to some indiscretions in his personal life. Apparently he'd had an affair and hadn't been paying taxes on a housekeeper he recently hired.

From the backseat, Seth could hear the cab driver mumbling about what he was hearing on the radio. He looked at the cab license hanging on

his visor and noted the driver's name was Barry. Barry looked at Seth in his rearview mirror and said, "Can you believe this? This bucket-head seems to be more concerned with what's going on in this guy's personal life than what he's going to do when he's elected. I just don't get it."

It was a local race, and Seth wasn't familiar with the candidate, but he was curious about Barry's comment. So he asked him, "What is it that you don't get?"

"I don't understand why everyone is so concerned with this guy's personal life. What he does in his personal life is none of my business. I'm just concerned with how he does his job."

Barry was not the first person to ever express this opinion to Seth. In fact, throughout much of his young life, Seth had heard many people attempt to separate their personal life from their professional life. While Seth had no desire to disrupt his pleasant cab ride to the hotel, his need to hear more from Barry took over.

"Barry, let me ask you a question," Seth started. "Do you believe someone can lack integrity in his personal life, but suddenly have integrity in his professional life?"

"Absolutely," Barry responded. "If he tells me he can, then I believe him!"

At this point, Seth's desire to get to the hotel was stronger than his desire to enter a debate with his cab driver. Barry and Seth were going to agree to disagree on this subject, and Seth looked out the window in an attempt to enjoy the remainder of his ride.

After his arrival at the hotel, Seth had a few hours to relax before dinner. In the office, there never seemed to be a spare minute to do anything other than dive headfirst into a pile of work.

He decided to spend his free time now considering his options for the lessons he still needed to apply before the fourth-quarter meeting.

### **A RETURN TO HER ROOTS**

“I need you in the conference room for a quick huddle,” Hannah said as she stuck her head into Seth’s office. “It won’t take more than fifteen minutes. I’m gathering up the other managers right now.”

Carmen was the last one to show up. As she closed the door behind her, she looked at Hannah with her trademark frown, “What’s this all about? I’ve got a ton of work to do since we’re going to be out of the office for the quarterly meeting tomorrow.”

Although all eyes were on Hannah, Jill spoke up. “I appreciate you dropping what you were doing to be here. I promise this won’t take long.”

Everyone turned toward Jill, wondering why she was the one leading the conversation. Seth could tell she was nervous since she stared at the table for a few seconds before she began.

“As you all know, I was a call center rep my entire career before I became a manager. In fact, I was a good call center rep.”

“The best,” Aaron responded.

“I got a lot of satisfaction being a rep. As we’ve talked about employee engagement, I think I was one of the most engaged reps in the office . . .”

She paused for a moment and let those words linger in the air.

“ . . . but I’m the first to admit I’m not very engaged as a manager. I seldom share anything in the quarterly meetings because I haven’t implemented anything worth sharing. As we’ve worked

to build a culture of employee engagement, I've realized I won't ever be engaged as a manager. I've talked to Hannah and told her I want to go back to being a call center representative effective the first of January."

You could have heard a pin drop. Everyone just sat in silence for a full minute.

Carmen was the one to speak up first. "Are you sure you want to do this? You worked so hard to get promoted, and now you're willing to throw it all away."

"First of all, I don't think I'm throwing anything away because I didn't work hard to get promoted. In fact, I never even asked to be promoted. When there was a management vacancy at this new office, I didn't get promoted because I was the best person for the job. I was promoted because I was the most effective call center rep, and that's the wrong reason to promote someone."

"You're okay with it?" Aaron responded.

"Okay with it?" Jill laughed. "It was my decision. This is not a bad thing, and it's certainly no reason to be sad. In fact, we should be celebrating. I'm going to return to something I love to do, and you get to find a manager who is engaged and excited to be on the team."

Seth was never all that impressed with Jill, but he'd always known her as a manager, and knew it would be difficult seeing her as a rep. But he was smart enough to know if she was going back to what she did best, he wanted her on his team.

"I assume it would be odd for you to join the team you've been managing," he said. "If you're looking for a new team, I'd love to have you."

"Thank you, Seth. I would like that very much."

"Okay, here's the deal," Hannah responded. "No one in this office knows about this, and I



don't want anyone to know about it until the announcement is released tomorrow after the quarterly meeting. You are free to go back to work, and I'll see you tomorrow morning for the quarterly meeting."

Seth knew this would be one of the toughest quarterly meetings yet.

### **THE FOURTH-QUARTER MEETING**

Every month when Seth paid his rent, he always spent time visiting with the apartment manager. When he approached her about having the management team's quarterly meeting in the apartment complex's clubhouse, she thought it was a great idea.

Because the clubhouse had a kitchen, Aaron and Seth decided to surprise everyone by cooking breakfast. Seth enjoyed cooking and had gotten a lot of practice since he didn't have anyone around to cook his meals.

Hannah and Carmen walked in together. "What's all this?" Hannah asked as she watched Aaron putting out the place settings.

"Breakfast," Seth replied with a smile. "My mother always taught me that breakfast was the most important meal of the day, and I figured we better get started with a full belly."

Seth saw Carmen digging through her purse. She looked at Hannah and said, "I have just enough Roloids for the two of us."

Seth threw a towel at Carmen and said, "Just for that, you get to clean the dishes."

"Should I set a place for Jill?" Aaron asked.

"I assume she'll be here," Hannah replied. "Her job change isn't effective until the first of January, and she'd have to explain to everyone in the office why she's not here."

Jill was the only person who'd ever had to wash Hannah's car as a result of being late to a manager's meeting. She didn't like having to do it then, and she certainly didn't want to repeat the humiliating task.

"I'm not late, am I?" she said as she ran into the clubhouse one minute before 8 o'clock. "I refuse to let one of my last acts as a manager be washing Hannah's car."

"You're not late," Aaron laughed. "In fact, you're just in time for one of the best breakfasts you've ever had. The men are treating you to breakfast."

Jill had a look on her face as if to say, "You have got to be kidding me." She looked at Hannah and Carmen. They both shrugged their shoulders and smiled.

"Let's eat," Hannah suggested. "After we're done, I have a surprise for you."

After Jill's announcement the day before, Seth wasn't in the mood for any more surprises.

### **SOMETHING DIFFERENT**

"I have asked Aaron to lead the meeting today," Hannah stated as everyone was getting settled for the meeting. "I've run the last three, and thought you might like to have someone else take the lead. Also, today will be a short meeting, and you'll have the rest of the day off. Do whatever you'd like."

Seth appreciated the day off, but wondered if anyone was thinking what he was thinking. Why Aaron? Seth liked Aaron, but he had a hint of jealousy that Hannah hadn't picked him.

"Okay," Aaron started as he pulled a stack of papers from his briefcase. "Hannah taught the twelve lessons of Engaged Leadership. In the

second quarter, we discussed what we did to implement the four lessons in Directional Leadership, and in the third quarter, we discussed what we did to implement the four lessons in Motivational Leadership. Today, we're going to do two things."

Aaron passed out a sheet with all twelve lessons listed on it. "Since we don't have a flipchart here, I printed out the twelve lessons on a single sheet. We're going to start out talking about what we did to implement the four lessons in Organizational Leadership. Then we're going to reveal the fourth piece to the Engaged Leadership puzzle."

"Are we going to talk about how we're going to replace Jill?" Carmen blurted out. "I have someone in mind for that position."

"That is not part of today's agenda," Hannah chimed in. "I'll let you know when we'll be discussing that issue."

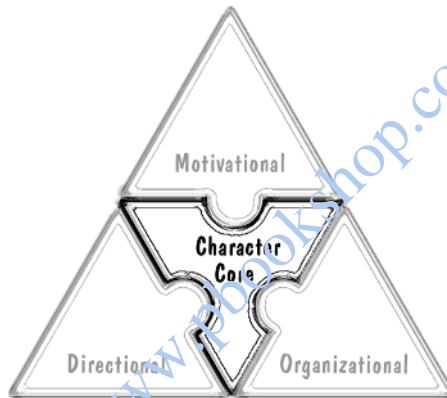
"Let's start by discussing the four lessons from Organizational Leadership," Aaron said as he tried to get control of the meeting. "Who has a story they'd like to tell?"

"I gave some thought to letting people know where they stand," Seth said. "I was telling my employees every month how they were doing, but I didn't really have a system in place. I took the goals they set for themselves at our first one-on-ones and had them printed on a 3-by-5 card, with a blank line next to each goal. Every month I provide my employees with a new card with the previous month's results. By doing this, there should never be a surprise when the annual performance review is done."

"Outstanding," Aaron responded. "I like the idea for two reasons. One, it's a constant reminder of how they're doing. But two, it's a system that can

be passed along to someone else after you're gone, which puts in place a procedure to maintain the success of your team. Anyone else have something they'd like to share?"

When no one offered up another experience, Aaron pulled out a sheet of paper with the drawing of the puzzle pieces. He wrote two words in the fourth puzzle piece, and held it up for everyone to see.



When he was certain everyone had seen it, Aaron put the sheet down on the table. "Character Core: Last week I asked Hannah why we hadn't talked about character at all in the model, and she shared with me that it isn't a part of one of the three aspects. It's a part of all aspects of Engaged Leadership, and is located at the center of the model."

"If you're talking about integrity, you're wasting your time," Carmen said. "We all have integrity, and we each manage our teams that way."

"I would agree that we operate our teams that way," Aaron replied, "but I don't think we're wasting our time talking about it. In fact, I think too many organizations assume their leaders lead

with integrity and don't believe they need to talk about it. These are the companies whose leaders get led away in handcuffs."

"I guess these people need to be put through a course on business ethics," Jill responded. "They seem to make some pretty lousy decisions."

"They do make some pretty lousy decisions," Hannah chimed in, "but these decisions aren't due to a lack of business ethics. They're due to a lack of personal ethics. Companies don't make decisions. People make decisions. If someone lies and steals at home, they'll lie and steal at work. You can't separate the two."

"It seems some people believe there's a difference," Seth jumped in. "In fact, I met a cab driver in Tucson who believes someone can lack integrity in his personal life, but suddenly have integrity in his professional life."

"That cab driver was wrong," Hannah replied. "You either have character or you don't."

"I don't think anyone will be dragging us off in handcuffs," Carmen interjected. "We're not making decisions at our level that can have that much impact."

"That's probably true," Hannah said. "But I encourage you to keep in mind that your employees are watching you every day. They think they know your character, and they're looking for congruency in what you say and what you do."

"I don't think I understand," Jill admitted.

Hannah was about to give an example when Aaron jumped in first. After all, this was his meeting to lead.

"Let's use family as an example. If you tell your team that family is very important, but you work fourteen hours a day and every weekend, then you're sending a message that's not congruent

with your character. If you tell your team that flexibility is important, but you aren't willing to bend when they need to leave an hour early and you have the people to cover the workload, then you're sending a message that's not congruent with your character."

"Congruency is the key," Hannah added.

Everyone sat around letting the lesson sink in.

"Hannah mentioned this would be a short meeting," Aaron stated, "and it will be. I have two more things to cover. One, let me remind you that the follow-up to the Employee Engagement Survey is coming up in December. We still have one final quarter to continue building on our culture of employee engagement. And two, as Hannah mentioned, we have the rest of the day off. You can do whatever you want. Go back to work, go home, go to the mall and buy me a present for my birthday next month. . . whatever you want. However, I'm buying dinner for anyone who shows up at La Cantina at 6 o'clock tonight. I hope you all can make it."

Seth never considered himself a workaholic, but he began to wonder about that when he chose to go back to the office instead of enjoying a free day off. He couldn't get Aaron's comment out of his head . . . one final quarter to continue building on the culture of employee engagement. How could there be only one more quarter?

### **THREE AMIGOS**

When Aaron invited everyone to meet at La Cantina, Seth hoped it would be the first time the entire team got together in a social environment. As he suspected, Carmen came up with an excuse not to make it. Jill lived far from La Cantina, and

since she decided to spend the rest of the day at home, she couldn't be there either. It ended up being just Seth, Aaron, and Hannah. The three amigos.

"I assumed everyone would be here," Hannah said, "so I saved this quick announcement for tonight. But since you are the only two here, I'll tell you. I'm taking next week off. I have a quick meeting in New Jersey, and then my husband and I are going to spend the rest of the week in New York."

"Can I go with you?" Aaron asked.

"No, you can't. In fact, that was the announcement I was going to make. I'm putting you in charge for the week."

Aaron and Seth turned and glanced at each other with a look of surprise. Seth was excited for Aaron, but he also was somewhat envious.

"Do I get to make any major changes?" Aaron asked. "There are a few personnel changes I'd like to make."

"No, you don't get to fire Carmen."

"It was worth a try," Aaron laughed.

"It was certainly an interesting question. Just out of curiosity, if I did give you the authority to make major changes, what would they be?" Hannah asked.

Aaron thought about it for a moment. "I don't know if it counts as a major change, but I would expand the Town Hall Meeting to the entire office."

"Have you gotten a good response to those meetings?" Hannah asked.

"Incredible response," Aaron answered. "They ask great questions. In fact, sometimes Seth and I don't even know the answers. There's just a great dialogue about the vision of the department in these meetings, and I think the entire

department could benefit if we had one big Town Hall Meeting.”

“Done,” Hannah stated. “Announce the change next week when you’re in control, but wait until I get back to have the meeting. I want to participate and see how it goes. It may work well for 50 people, but it may be too big with 100. But I’m willing to try, and I think it would mean a lot if it came from you when you’re in charge.”

As they ate dinner and solved the problems of the world, Seth was wondering what change he would make. The opportunity to share his ideas would come soon enough.

### **A LESSON FOR THE TEACHER**

When Hannah had told her management team she’d let them know when it was time to discuss Jill’s replacement, Seth figured they would get plenty of notice. As it turned out, they got about an hour.

“I appreciate you making the time for this meeting,” Hannah started. “I had hoped we would have more time to discuss Jill’s replacement, but I just got word of a manager in my old department who’s looking to move to this area. She would be a great asset to this team.”

“Is this meeting to discuss how we go about replacing Jill,” Carmen asked, “or is it just to approve whoever you think we should have?”

“I’m sure some of you have thoughts on her replacement, but if we wait too long, this person is not going to be available and . . .”

“Hey, wait a minute,” Carmen interrupted. “Doesn’t this go against what you’ve been teaching us in Engaged Leadership? This is a major change for our management team, and you’ve done



nothing to prepare us for the change. In fact, you're just cramming it down our throats. And you certainly haven't empowered any of us in the process, since you went out and found your own person."

Everyone sat silently. Seth was shocked that Carmen would speak to her boss that way. Seth was even more shocked that what she said about Hannah was right.

After an extended period of silence, Hannah finally spoke up. "At least I know you were listening in all those quarterly meetings," Hannah said as she looked directly at Carmen. "I owe you and the entire team an apology. In my haste to get the person I thought would be right for the job, I didn't practice what I preach. I'm sorry for that."

After another moment of awkward silence, Aaron jumped in. "I can't believe it. It's taken a year, but we finally determined Hannah is human."

When everyone laughed at Aaron's comment, Seth could feel the tension leave the room.

"I am human, Aaron," Hannah said, "and I will make mistakes. I do my best to not make many of them, but they'll happen. I hold you accountable to building this culture, and I expect you to hold me accountable."

Seth realized the teacher had just become the student.

### **JILL'S REPLACEMENT**

"Let's try this again," Hannah smiled. "As you all know, Jill has decided to leave the ranks of management to return to her roots as a call center rep. Her departure will leave a vacancy as of the beginning of next year. This meeting is to discuss how we proceed in filling Jill's position."

Everyone smiled at Hannah's formal approach.

"As a member of this management team, your input is critical. Whoever fills her position is going to be a part of this team and will be helping us maintain the culture of employee engagement we've worked so hard to build. Not only is it important this person be able to help us maintain the culture, it is imperative we use this opportunity to identify and position the appropriate talent for our needs at this time. Based on my background and experience in another department at Halifax, I have someone in mind for that position. However, before I share my thoughts, I'm interested to hear what you have to say."

As expected, Carmen jumped right in. "I have someone in mind for the position."

"Who do you have in mind?" Hannah asked.

"Kris Archer."

"Why Kris?" Hannah asked.

"Because she's earned a promotion. She's been here almost eighteen years now, and she's been overlooked every time a management position comes open. She's one of our best call center reps, and she deserves the recognition."

Aaron could never pass on an opportunity to take a jab at Carmen. "You didn't list one single reason why I should seriously consider Kris Archer for Jill's position. I know Kris. She's a wonderful person, but I don't think she's the right person for this job."

Before anyone else could say a word, Jill jumped in. "I agree with Aaron. If we promote her for the reasons you just gave, you'll make the same mistake with her that you made with me. If you think she has the skills and knowledge to be a great manager, promote her. If you think she has the right attitude that can help her along until the skills and knowledge catch up, promote

her. But don't take one of our most engaged and effective reps and turn her into one of our most disengaged and ineffective managers just because you think it's her turn."

Jill made some great points, and Hannah knew it. "Perhaps we are getting the cart before the horse on this issue," she said. "We're trying to take a person and make her fit the job. Perhaps we should step back and identify what kind of person we're looking for, and then decide if either candidate we're considering is a good fit."

Everyone around the table nodded, including Carmen. For the next few hours, they made a list of the characteristics for the ideal manager, and identified the personal values the person would need to have. Ultimately, they decided skills weren't nearly as important as attitude. Hannah said she could teach the skills, but she couldn't teach the attitude. The person would need to bring the right attitude to the table.

After a lengthy discussion, the team decided that neither candidate was the right person to move into Jill's position. The next day they began a search for a new manager.

### **THANKSGIVING DINNER**

Seth had been looking forward to November. He certainly enjoyed the cooler days, but it was more than the weather. When he looked back on the year, he was grateful for so many things that had happened over the past months. Personally, it was a fun year. He moved to a new town and met some new friends. Professionally, it was a learning year. He got to learn every single day from a wonderful boss, and got to work with some great employees. It was all good.

Seth was leaving the day before Thanksgiving to head home to be with his family. He loved Thanksgiving because it was an opportunity to get together with family and share those things for which he was thankful. It seemed appropriate to do the same with his new family at work.

He had never cooked a turkey before, and he certainly hadn't made all the other things that went along with a complete Thanksgiving dinner. But he made his team a deal. If they provided all the side dishes, he would bring the turkey.

Seth had no idea so much work went into cooking a turkey. It seemed like every few minutes he was back in the kitchen basting that giant bird. But when he walked into the conference room with it on a platter, all his efforts were worth it.

Every possible side dish was on the table that day. It was a great meal. And after the food was gone, they sat around and shared the things for which they were thankful. Seth enjoyed the food and certainly enjoyed the conversation. However, his favorite part of the afternoon was comparing the team of employees who had filed into that same conference room eleven months earlier as though they were attending a funeral to the team of employees who today laughed together and enjoyed each other's company.

Seth hoped he helped Hannah create a culture in that office. But even if he hadn't, he could leave knowing he helped create a family of friends. If nothing else, he was thankful for that.

### **ONE LAST VISIT TO LA CANTINA**

The November results hadn't come out yet when Seth and Hannah agreed to meet at La Cantina. Quite frankly, neither of them was too concerned

at that point, not because they didn't care if they were bad, but because they knew they would be good.

Seth spent a lot of time that year worried about how he ranked with his peers. His competitive nature provided the drive that made him want to win, and his commitment to Hannah to turn his team around was always at the back of his mind.

But Hannah always said that once employees were engaged and wanted to be a part of the team, there would be less need to worry about results. Seth figured they had gotten to that point as they met at La Cantina that December evening.

"I remember how I felt when you walked into the conference room in January and told us about the Employee Engagement Survey," Seth said. "I recall not caring what anyone said in that survey because it wouldn't be about me, but I was extremely worried what the following December survey would show. I never would have thought it wouldn't be a concern twelve months later."

"You were worried about the December survey?" Hannah laughed.

"Scared to death. I had no idea what I was doing, and prayed your lessons on Engaged Leadership would work. At that point, I had no idea if my employees would even respond to me."

"You did a good job of hiding it," Hannah said.

"When are they doing the survey?"

"Next week. They have it scheduled before most employees start taking off for the holiday," Hannah replied.

"I think they should hand it out at the company Christmas party. That should help us out."

"I haven't told the other managers this news yet because it isn't official, and I know how the rumor mill works," Hannah said. "I got a call from

Amanda Suttle. She wants to know if I'd be willing to run a region. She interviewed me when I was in New Jersey and wants me to come up for a job visit after the beginning of the year."

"A promotion?"

"Oh, yeah. I would be peers with my boss, Mr. Harrison," Hannah smiled.

Seth always wondered why Hannah stayed at Halifax. She could easily run her own company, and he knew she wouldn't be around long if someone didn't recognize her talents and promote her to the next level.

"If you get promoted, I'm going to need you to move your things out of the office as soon as possible. I want plenty of time to get settled!"

"Very funny," Hannah laughed. "I don't think the company plans to keep you here much longer. Your one-year assignment will be up soon, and you'll be off to conquer the world. But I have to say, I think this office would do great things if you were the boss."

"I appreciate that. I'm sure Carmen will do a great job leading this department into the future," Seth replied sarcastically.

"Did I forget to mention that part of your one-year assignment is you're required to take Carmen with you wherever you go for your next job?" Hannah laughed.

"The twelfth lesson in Engaged Leadership is establishing a strategy to maintain success, so I'm sure you've been thinking about your replacement."

"I haven't been thinking about my replacement," Hannah said. "I've been planning for my replacement since the day I got here."

"Aaron?"

"I suppose I could have gone outside the department to find someone," Hannah replied, "and I certainly would have if there wasn't an option here."

But Aaron showed promise from the very beginning. He just needed some development. He needed the opportunity to get some victories under his belt to build his confidence. He's responded well, and I think he's ready."

"Does he know?"

"He knows I'm grooming him for a promotion some day, but he doesn't know I'm being considered for another job. I don't want to get his hopes up if it falls through."

After they finished their dinner, they paid the check and headed out the door. Seth had a feeling that this might have been his last time with Hannah at La Cantina.

### **THE ANNOUNCEMENT**

Seth had never seen Carmen smile. At one point he saw what appeared to be a grin when her team edged out his team on a monthly report. A grin was as good as it got.

That all changed when the announcement was made. Hannah brought the management team into the conference room on a Friday afternoon in January to make the announcement that Seth had been given a new assignment in a different city. He would finish out the month and report to his new job the first of February. Carmen didn't grin when she heard the news. She smiled from ear to ear.

Before he left that month, Seth had the honor of presenting Mattie with a plaque for one year of perfect attendance. He also got to see the results of the Employee Engagement Survey. Needless to say, they had a considerable improvement and beat the Austin office. Surprisingly, everyone got their bonuses, including Carmen.

Prior to his departure, he had one last piece of business to handle. While he didn't enjoy this particular task, he had learned that some people never make the transition to a new culture. Larry Marcus had not, and Seth provided him the opportunity to pursue a new career outside Halifax.

It turned out that leaving would be much harder for Seth than he thought it would be. When he had arrived at this job, he saw it as a stepping-stone to the next job. He had never expected to learn as much as he did, and he certainly hadn't expected to make the friends he made.

One part of him was ready to go. He made a difference with this team, and he was ready to take on the next challenge. This opportunity provided him so many skills that he would be much more prepared for the next assignment. He was prepared to keep his promise to Amanda and pass along the development.

But another part of Seth was sad to leave. He knew he made a difference while changing the culture, but he knew there would always be a "Carmen" to shift the team back to the old culture. In fact, he could see it in their eyes at his going-away party.

Seth learned a lesson about culture on the way to that office a year earlier, and he learned a lesson on the way out. When managers come and go, it's imperative to change the culture if you want it to survive long after you're gone. Seth looked back and realized what he helped Hannah create really was a culture. These weren't just activities or motivational tactics. This was a culture. It was a way of life for these employees.

Seth didn't get to pick his successor. In fact, he learned months later that a replacement was not hired. The employees on his team were divided up



among the remaining three managers. He thought about them often, and hoped that a little part of the culture he helped create may have rubbed off on the managers who took on his team members. Whether it did or not, Seth knew he had made an impact because he helped these “misfits” experience the feeling of success. He made them feel appreciated. He let them know they were winners.

Seth also learned it's hard to change a culture in a year. He learned it's hard, but not impossible.

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