

# Spirituality in the Workplace

## October 2007

### Caught in the Middle

#### The Players

**Harry:** Background is in engineering. He is the Vice President of Sales for a regional company that sells tools and supplies to the steel fabrication industry. He is smart. He relates well with other engineers, though he's not "warm and fuzzy". He is involved with many key industry associations. He is a "hard charger." His favorite phrase is, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." He makes decisions quickly, and once they are made, they are set in concrete.

**Joe:** He is the most junior sales person in the organization. He started with the company as a delivery driver. He was given the sales job because he was making add-on sales while making deliveries. People began calling the office about what a great representative he was for the company. He learned welding and steel fabrication while in the Army. He has the smallest territory, makes the least amount of money. He is working on his degree. He's about half-way there. He and his wife are thinking about having a baby & buying a nicer house.

**You:** You have the largest territory. You are the senior salesperson. You were the first salesperson hired by the President when the company was small. You could have been the Vice President of sales, but you really don't like management and finances. You like selling. Joe thinks you are a god. Harry respects you. You are as close to Harry on a personal level as anyone in the company, but you wouldn't call him a close friend.

#### The Situation

The company is being squeezed by cheaper competition and a slowing down in the industry. Harry has worked with a robotics company to develop a steel cutter that works from computer-based drawings. The basic machine sells for \$350,000, but to get placement that price is being negotiated. There is very little profit margin left by the time the deals are made, training and support are provided, etc. Harry sees the machine as a way to set the company apart from competition and bring back strong earnings. He obviously has a lot invested in the success of the program.

It has been a tough sell. You have sold 3. Two went to the biggest steel fabricator in the region. The other went to a customer who always wants the leading edge stuff. There are a total of 5 sales people in the organization. Three other sales people have sold 1 unit apiece. Joe has sold none. The majority of his customers don't do \$350,000 in a year...

At the last sales meeting Harry was on everybody about their poor sales performance. Phrases like, "If you can't sell these units, I will find people who can" were used. No one was about to talk about issues with pricing, size of the companies who could use the machine, etc. Harry was especially hard on Joe.

Harry has already come to you about Joe. He doesn't think he's working out. He wants "documentation" from you. Harry has Joe in his gun sights. Joe has come to you about what can he do to make a positive impression on Harry, but he doesn't know how serious the situation has become. You think Joe is doing a very good job. His customers love him. No one else wants to handle these little shops, but Joe has an excellent understanding of that environment. He can't sell the big things because he has no experience in that area, and his customers don't need those types of units. He is making his numbers selling lots of smaller things.

## **What do you do?**

1. Defend Joe to Harry. Point out to Harry that his passion for this one project is coloring his judgment? Point out the job that Joe is doing in other areas? Tell Harry that no one else wants those small clients. Tell him to be happy he has someone who handling a tough area well. Point out that there may be some ego/ snobbery at work?
2. Tell Joe about the seriousness of the situation. He has a jump-start on finding another job, or he can be better prepared. Feed him strategies to defend himself against Harry's perceptions. Help him to be successful until the focus on the robotic system passes, and we go back to our routines.
3. Stay out of it!! You might see situation differently than your boss does, but he's the boss. Joe will never be an "executive salesman." Maybe the best thing for him long term is to find another company where he will be more valued. With his contacts he won't be out of work for long.

## **Your faith?**

1. Are there any scriptural answers here?
2. How do you relate to people when you know something that they don't know, or there's a heavy rumor going around that affects those people? (rumors about the marriage, rumors about the kids, rumors about layoffs...)
3. When do you step-up, when do you stay back?