

Case 1: Ethics, Decision-Making, and Responsibility: Tough Call Knowing Someone Loses

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Scene 1: Welcome Aboard!

Thomas held out his hand and welcomed Mike “aboard.” After a three-month search, Thomas was certain he had found the right man for the job. He was impressed with Mike’s credentials and felt good to be able to deliver such good news to a man he knew had been out of work for six months. Although Thomas would never have placed Mike’s credentials as a committed Christian over the basic skills and experience the candidate would need to be successful in this job, Thomas was pleased to hire a man who made it clear he, too, possessed Christian values. Thomas was especially impressed with the manner in which Mike spoke openly in the interview about his love for his family and his active work as a Christian. He felt pleased that Mike felt comfortable enough to volunteer this information in the interview. Thomas already felt an affinity for Mike. Sometimes the business of defense contracting could be harsh, and it felt good to have a new employee to whom he could relate in more personal terms. No sooner had Thomas delivered the good news than he felt the façade of playing “interviewer” start to drop.

“So, tell me more about yourself since we’ll be working together,” Thomas queried. They spoke casually for about 20 minutes before John Spencer stuck his head in Thomas’ office and asked Thomas if he wanted to go to lunch. Replying affirmatively to John, Thomas turned to Mike and asked him to join them. Several others joined the group, and they all enjoyed getting to know one another better at lunch. Afterward, as they queued up to pay their lunch bill, Mike, standing in line in front of Thomas, appeared shocked that his credit card was rejected. Without missing a beat, Thomas said, “Allow me to get this,” and paid for his and Mike’s lunch. As they walked to the car, Thomas remembered that Mike had been out of work for six months, and he imagined that things might have gotten very tight financially for Mike and his family. He thought nothing else of the incident for some time.

As they approached their work site, Thomas felt more positive about the future than he had in a while. He was responsible for Alsom Defense Technologies' (ADT's) support operations at the federal government's system program office, and all of his crew worked within the government's organization on site. His government client could be a tough taskmaster, but he had developed an unusually good relationship with his government bosses/customers, and the rules for working with government employees were well-known and documented. He knew Mike would not have any trouble adjusting since Mike had more than 20 years experience in this business. Thomas felt that one of his highest responsibilities was to always conduct himself, his employees, and his business in a manner beyond reproach. When he hired, he always included this as one of his chief considerations. Thomas had spent 27 years creating a reputation as both caring and competent, and he was determined to keep it.

Scene 2: Two Months Later

Cindy Johnson looked serious when she approached Thomas. It turned out she was serious.

"I don't know if this is a real problem or not, but Mike just tried to sell me an insurance policy," Cindy blurted. She didn't sound angry, just concerned.

"What do you mean by 'an insurance policy?'" Thomas responded. "Was he telling you about some good insurance product he's found?"

"I don't think so," Cindy replied. "I got the impression he's got a business of some sort."

Thomas was really too busy to worry about this right at the minute. He would look into it later. In the meantime, he thanked Cindy, telling her it was probably just a misunderstanding, but he would look into it.

Thomas was irritated because he knew Mike should know better than to sell anything on company time. All of the ADT crew were on billable hours to the government, and conducting personal business on government time would be the worst kind of offense, but the issue would have to wait. By the end of the day, Thomas had convinced himself that it was probably an isolated incident and that it was not likely to happen again. He had not had time to say anything to Mike that afternoon, and by the next morning the issue was forgotten. That is, until two days later.

Sara Marker had been with Thomas since they started ADT's work with this government customer. She was reliable and well-respected, so this time, when he heard the same story Cindy had told two days earlier, he had to listen. Sara added one more item.

"I also think Mike's hitting up some of our customers to buy his product as well," she said. "I overheard him talking to Julie Langston about insurance."

Thomas could tell by Sara's tone of voice that Sara was more certain of her convictions than her words allowed. He didn't want to believe it, but it was becoming clear that Mike was placing all their jobs in jeopardy by his misconduct. As far as Thomas could tell, Mike was a very competent worker; however, carrying on personal business while being paid to perform work for his government customer and, even worse, attempting to sell his personal insurance product to that very same customer were extremely serious breaches of ethics. Furthermore, Mike, like all ADT employees, had received initial training regarding both ADT policies and U.S. law governing contractor/government employee relations. He had signed a statement declaring he understood what was required and what was forbidden.

Thomas returned to his office to consider what needed to be done next. He thought about how Mike had been unemployed for so long and how Mike had probably turned to his "business" to make ends meet between jobs; however, his overwhelming thought was anger that Mike would do such a thing – that he would endanger his own job and those of his ADT co-workers. Most of all, Thomas was upset because he thought Mike should know better, because he expected Mike to conform to a higher standard than his actions were betraying.

That night Thomas found time to think over both Mike's behavior and his own reaction to it. He opened his Bible to search for an answer. The first verse he thought of came from Romans 3:23 – "... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...". Thomas remembered his own past and the many opportunities God and others had given him when he made errors in judgment. As he read on in Romans, he was struck by the sheer number of calls for Christians to love and care for one another. Thomas felt convicted of a need to respond to Mike on a higher level than simply as his boss. Still, Thomas had to reconcile a deeply felt responsibility to care for everyone under his leadership, regardless of his or her religious beliefs. He reminded himself that Sara

and several others were Christians as well. The same passages that admonished Thomas to care for Mike directed him to care for the others, too. Just before closing his Bible for the evening, Thomas' eyes fell upon one last passage: Romans 12:8-10 – "If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other." He bowed his head to pray.

First thing in the morning, Thomas decided that it would be best to call a meeting for 3 p.m. that afternoon to discuss proper protocol and ethics with all his ADT employees. That way, it would be clear to all what the rules were, and Mike would immediately see his error and take corrective action.

The meeting that afternoon was very short. Thomas explained company policy and U.S. law regarding the conduct of personal business and emphasized that conducting personal business on company time would result in immediate termination. He emphasized that if the government managers found out this was happening, they could throw all of ADT's employees out of the building, resulting in all of them losing their jobs.

That afternoon, as Thomas walked through the parking lot to his car, he heard Mike call his name from behind. Thomas stopped and waited for Mike to catch up.

"Thomas," Mike apologized, "I'm really sorry about that. I didn't mean to cause any trouble. I started this business when I was out of work, and it's a really good product. It saves folks a lot of money. But I promise I won't sell my product at work again."

Thomas listened quietly as Mike spoke. Mike explained more about his business, but Thomas was no longer listening. He was searching for the right response.

He replied, "I understand your need to take care of your family, Mike, but you've placed us all at risk and, frankly, I expected more of you. As Christians, you and I need to be above reproach. We need to look out for one another and not just ourselves. I need you to understand that what you were doing was unethical." Mike didn't respond.

"Look," said Thomas, "I know we can get past this and I won't hold this over you, but this cannot happen again." Mike confirmed that he understood, and they parted ways, each heading to his own car.

Over the next month, Mike appeared to be a model employee. Thomas, feeling his confidence in Mike being restored, looked toward the future and decided he needed to acquire additional training for himself and Mike. The customer was willing to send Thomas and Mike to Boston for a week to receive training in new project management software their customer had purchased. Thomas made travel arrangements and, to ensure nothing fell through the cracks, he scheduled Mike to attend first and scheduled himself for two weeks later. Thomas was pleased that he and Mike would be first to receive the training, as it would further secure ADT's position with this customer.

The time came for Mike to leave for Boston, and Thomas went over the details of what Mike must be sure to learn. So it was with great disappointment that Thomas found out upon Mike's return that he had been unable to learn what was needed. Mike explained that the computer training system had "crashed" during the week, and they had only been able to complete about two days of training out of the four days allotted. Thomas didn't say anything to Mike, but he determined that he would take this failing up with the contracted training organization when he traveled to Boston himself.

Scene 3: Not Again!

Boston was cool that November, but not cold. The training facility sat on the northeast corner of an intersection of two highways and was plain but quite functional. The staff seemed professional enough, and the first day was filled with about six hours of basic software instruction. During a break on Tuesday, Thomas mentioned to the instructor that he had sent Mike up for training three weeks earlier and was disappointed that they had had so much computer trouble that week. The instructor gave Thomas a quizzical look.

"Who was this you sent here, and what company do you guys work for?" he asked.

"Mike Carlin, and we work for ADT out of Dayton, Ohio," Thomas responded.

“I’ll tell you what,” the instructor stated, “I think there’s someone you need to speak with. I’ll make arrangements for Nancy Quinlan to meet with you on our next break. She’s our director of training.”

Clearly, there was something wrong, but Thomas knew he would have to wait for the lunch break to learn what Ms. Quinlan had to say. It was only an hour, but Thomas found himself struggling to concentrate.

Nancy was waiting for Thomas just outside the training room door as he exited. “I understand Mike Carlin works for you,” she said. “I would like to talk with you in private. Can we go to my office?”

This didn’t sound good, but Thomas was compelled to answer Nancy affirmatively. He followed her through a maze of cubicles to arrive at the double cubicle she used as an office.

“Look,” she started, “maybe this isn’t my business, but I think you should know this. Mr. Carlin spent at least half his training time on the phone in the break room. Your instructor said you were under the impression that our system was down for two days. That is untrue. Also, one of our employees whose cubicle is next to the break area complained that it sounded as though he were conducting business over the phone and selling something. He was speaking on the phone so much that it became disruptive to her work. I know our companies both work for the government, and I know that if I were you, I would be very concerned about this.”

Thomas was speechless. He sat in the chair as if the air had been sucked from his body. Gathering his thoughts, he thanked Nancy for her concern and assured her that he would take action. He then asked to use the phone himself.

Thomas placed a call to his vice president of operations in Dayton. The two of them had come far since their early days of establishing ADT’s operations with their Dayton clients, and the VP trusted Thomas. That made Thomas feel all the more guilty that he hadn’t informed the VP of Mike Carlin’s earlier mistakes, but he had thought he could handle it himself. After what seemed an eternity of explanations, the VP simply said, “What do you want to do?”

“I don’t know,” Thomas said, sounding defeated.

“I’ll call the human resource manager in California and get her feedback,” the VP responded. “Don’t do anything for now, and I’ll call you at your hotel room tonight.”

Thomas felt very small as he waited in his room for the call that night. The decision was tougher than he expected. He was torn between his convictions to reach out and help a fellow Christian in trouble and his duty to protect others for whom he was equally responsible. He wished that the answer would be as simple as finding the right Bible passage that would tell him what to do, but he sensed that the answer wouldn’t come that easy.

The phone call came two hours later. He had clearance to terminate Mike, but the decision would ultimately be his.

Scene 4: Decision Time

Thomas’ flight arrived in Dayton just before noon. He went over again and again what he would say to Mike and how he would say it. As soon as Thomas could get to his office and return a few phone calls, he summoned Mike.

Thomas stated, “Mike, I have discovered that you were conducting personal business on company time, that you did not attend much of the training the government purchased for you, and that you lied to me about the training system being ‘down.’ I warned you about such behavior previously, and I’m truly sorry you didn’t take me seriously.” Mike looked shocked. There was no more time for Thomas to mull this over; a decision had to be made.

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