

WAKE-UP CALL

Spending time in an empty airport wasn't exactly what Faith had in mind when she decided to offer her personal brand of consulting and training for professionals to the masses. Even so, as she sat alone in a short row of uncomfortable seats watching torrential rain splat against the window, there wasn't an ounce of regret. *At least I'm doing something important*, she thought, shifting her position to relieve the pesky lower back pain surfacing a couple of weeks prior.

"Is this seat taken?"

"Of course not," she grinned, enjoying the man's sense of humor, eying him as he eased his lanky frame into a seat, leaving one inbetween. "It is a little crowded . . ."

“Actually, I prefer it this way—not so much frustration!” A pause as he stretched his long legs in front of him. “What about you? Where are you headed on this dark and stormy night?”

“San Fran . . . you?”

“Same.” The man closed his eyes accompanied by a heavy sigh. “Sometimes, I think one of these days I’m going to give all of this up!” Opening his arms wide, he embraced the empty airport. “Yep. One of these days . . .”

Faith turned slightly in her chair, facing him. “What do you do?”

“I’m in the service provision industry—government, mostly. Back when I was young and stupid, I thought it would be a good idea to start my own business!”

“Was it? A good idea, I mean . . .”

A soft chuckle. “Well, that remains to be seen . . .”

“Meaning?”

Suddenly, he drew in his legs, turning to her. “Honestly?”

Faith nodded, saying nothing.

“Everything is different these days—what I began with good intentions is turning into something I never imagined.”

“How long have you been in business?”

“Thirty-three years . . .” A flickering, brief shadow crossed his face, eyes narrowing. “If I knew this were the way it would turn out, I never would’ve started.” Another pause. “Maybe my mom was right . . .”

“What do you mean?”

“She told me to be a plumber—said I’d make a lot more money with a lot less stress.”

Faith laughed, hoping to lighten his darkening mood. “Moms know everything!”

“Indeed, they do . . .”

Although she knew what he was telling her was clearly none of her beeswax, she couldn’t help herself. “Why are you so frustrated? Isn’t business going well?”

“Yes—and, no. Although, if you’re talking about the bottom line, it pays the bills . . .”

“Then . . . what?”

A satisfactory answer wasn’t exactly on the tip of his tongue—in fact, if Faith had to guess, he probably hadn’t really thought about what wasn’t working in his business. Or, if he had, he wasn’t considering the obvious.

“Well . . .”

“It’s a tough question, isn’t it,” she asked, smiling, recognizing he was suffering from the same thing as most of her clients—the inability to dig deep to figure out how they can change their own circumstances.

A nod. “Indeed—and, to answer your question, I guess I’d have to say it’s my people.”

“You mean the people you have working for you?” There was no question the man next to her was as high up on his business food chain as he could get. With her experience and knowledge, she figured it was a pretty good bet communication was an issue.

“Yes—there seems to be a certain . . . discontent.”

“Yours? Or, theirs . . .”

The man was quiet for a moment, thinking. “Both, I guess. When I walk through our offices, there’s a certain . . .”

“Negative energy?”

“Well, yeah—I never thought of it that way before, but that’s exactly what it is!”

Faith, too, was silent, wondering how far she should take the conversation. Finally, a decision. “Is the negative energy coming from you? Or, them . . .”

“Well, from them, of course! I want them to do well! You know, be happy and not hate their job every Monday morning . . .”

“You’re sure?”

His eyes narrowed slightly, then a flicker of recognition. “Are you saying the problem is mine?”

“Well, of course, I can’t say for sure—certainly, I don’t know you, or your business. But, it seems to me discontent usually begins at the top—not the bottom.”

“Not sure I follow . . .”

“Well, look at it this way—when was the last time you felt in control of your business?”

Seconds passed before an answer. “Years . . .”

“Why is that?”

Silence.

“You don’t really know, do you?”

The man shook his head. “No . . .”

“So, if you feel your business is out of your control, then doesn’t it make sense, your employees will look to you to right the ship?”

“Well, yes . . .”

“And, when they see you’re not doing that, is it fair for you to expect them to work to their potential when you feel it’s out of your control and you can’t work to yours?”

More silence.

A smile. “I know these are tough questions . . .”

“Yes, but they’re questions I didn’t consider—I didn’t think for a second the problem was me. When I think about it, though, it makes sense—I don’t always treat my employees with the respect they deserve.”

“And, I bet they dish up the same stuff to the people they work with—it’s all about communication. You know—decoding the crap, and getting down to the real reasons you think and act like you do . . .”

The man shifted in his seat, checked his watch, then again focused on the woman seated next to him. “How did you get to be so smart?”

Faith smiled, unwilling to engage in a conversation about herself—at least for the time being.

She had work to do.

“Oh, I don’t know . . .” A pause. “But, back to what we were talking about—how do you usually greet your employees when you see them as you make rounds talking to employees.”

“Well . . .” The man took a moment before answering. “I

guess I say good morning . . .”

“Do you say the same thing to everyone?”

“I suppose—I haven’t really thought about it.” But, when he considered it right then? He knew she was right—it was him. “So—that doesn’t seem too difficult to change. I’ll start being more friendly . . .”

Faith smiled, delighted he was beginning to see the light. “That’s a great start—but, it isn’t all about being friendly.”

“Then, what?”

“Interest. Think of it like this—when you see one of your managers next time, do you know enough about to ask how his son is doing on the baseball team, or how her daughter did in the school musical?”

Another silence—one with considerably more pressure and, while she waited for his answer, a flush began to creep up his neck. “I don’t even know their last names,” he admitted.

Faith said nothing for a few moments, allowing him to consider how his communication and behavior affected his business. “It’s all about reprogramming your behavior—it isn’t until you understand the dysfunction can you begin to function.”

For the first time since their conversation turned to serious, thought-provoking matters, the man smiled. “You know—that makes a lot of sense!”

“It does, doesn’t it? One thing is for sure—you can’t underestimate the power of perception. How your employees perceive you will rub off onto them—and, before you know it, you’re out of control and your business is barely surviving.”

“I know they’re not happy—but, honestly? In this job market? I think they ought to be thankful they have jobs . . .”

“That may be true—some of them probably feel beholden to you. But, that doesn’t mean they’ll stay that way, especially if you don’t take the time and make the effort to become someone they want to work for . . .”

Again, the man was quiet for a second or two. “So, that’s all well and good—but, how do I go about doing that? I’m not getting any younger, and I’ll be the first one to admit I’m pretty set in my ways.”

“Well, the main thing is to take action—don’t wait until it’s too late, and saving your business becomes a pipe dream. I guarantee a dissatisfied employee won’t stay forever—and, you’ll constantly be in a state of hiring people who won’t last. You and I know that’s costly in more ways than one . . .”

“How do I ‘take action?’ Just change how I talk to people?”

“That’s a start, but it’s a lot more complicated. It’s all about changing your mindset, not just your words—you have to change the cynical or apathetic view you have of your people, and replace it with greater expectations.”

As the man was about to comment, a voice echoed through the gate area, announcing it was time to board. “You’ve given me a lot to think about,” the man said with a smile as he stood to full height. “And, I don’t even know your name . . .”

“Faith . . .” With a smile to match his, she pulled a business card from her messenger bag. “Feel free to get in touch!”

With that they parted upon boarding, both taking their respective seats—she in front, him in back. Once settled, he

pulled the card from his shirt pocket, grinning as he read . . .

FAITH WOOD

Inspiring Minds

Communication & Business Paradigm Consultant

“May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.”

—Nelson Mandela



As flights go, the trip to San Francisco was fairly routine, the only difference being the man at the airport couldn't get the conversation with Wood out of his mind. *I should've known*, he supposed as he stared out the window, *as soon as she started asking questions . . .* But, what he was really thinking?

How can I chat with her again?

Within a couple of hours and as the jet taxied down the runway, for the first time—perhaps, ever—he knew it was time to take stock. Sure, he could go on as if his conversation with Faith Wood didn't exist, yet he knew if he didn't take charge of his company in a way no one would expect—well, let's just say there wouldn't be much to pass onto his children.

Glancing at those already disembarking, he spied her making her way off the plane, considerably in front of him. “Faith! Miss Wood!”

She turned, smiling as he hurried to catch up with her. “Yes?”

“Do you have a few minutes?” As they entered the airport together, he gestured to two seats side by side. “I won’t keep you long . . .”

Wood cocked her head slightly, a grin in the making. “Something tells me you want to talk about our earlier conversation . . .”

A slight flush creeping up his neck, he nodded. “For the first time, I was thinking about how I can change the environment at work . . . and, I realized it’s up to me, and no one else.”

“That’s true . . .”

So, for the next thirty minutes, they sat, Wood explaining how important changing thought patterns and behavior is to the success of his company. “What we perceive isn’t always the truth,” she informed him. “You may see a situation one way, and your employees may see it completely different—and, that creates a situation of things just waiting to happen.”

The man said nothing, listening to every word.

“Perception,” she continued, “is a powerful thing—it makes you believe. And, when you believe, what happens?”

“I act like I believe?”

“Exactly—what you tell yourself quickly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. When that happens? You act according to what you believe. Unfortunately, so does everyone else . . .”

“It really becomes a cycle,” doesn’t it?

A nod. “Realizing that, however, the question is how

can you shift from negative, self-fulfilling prophecies to those that will point you in the direction of success?”

Again, he said nothing.

“Well, first, to draft a new story, you need to identify patterns. It’s kind of like the definition of insanity—you know, when you do the same thing over and over expecting different results. It flat out doesn’t work . . .” A pause. “What are your negative patterns leading you down a road you don’t want to go?”

“I’m not sure I know . . .”

“I bet—it’s not easy to figure out. But, defining them is critical because, when you do, only then can you rewire your beliefs, and tackle them to move you down the road to success. Honestly? It’s the key to cracking the code—and, it’s not going to be easy. But, if you want new outcomes and experiences? It has to be done . . .”

“In other words, change my mindset . . .”

Wood nodded. “Precisely. Change your mindset, change your life . . .”

Both were quiet for a moment or two, each thinking of what they had to do. Finally, Wood stood, extending her hand. “It’s been a pleasure . . .”

The man also stood, not quite sure about what to say—a simple ‘thank you’ didn’t seem like enough.

Sensing his dilemma, Faith grinned. “You going to call me?”

Then, a gut-busting laugh. “How could I not?”

A nod, and a smile. “Indeed . . .”