

ATTILA THE HUN

465, 699

by James Collins

I worked for Attila the Hun. That was not his Christian name but that was the title assigned to him by John Sununu the governor of New Hampshire when he worked for the governor as the Commissioner of technical activity. His real name was Fred G. and he had the reputation of firing people at the drop of a hat if they violated any of his directions or company policy or ethics.

The company did \$220 million in business and had a large structure and a number of VP's and directors. At the time, I was director of programs and had numerous multimillion-dollar programs under my jurisdiction. I was leaving a meeting up in the executive conference room and walking towards the stairway when Fred called out,

“Jim, I need to ask you a question.”

“Sure Fred, how can I help you?”

“Jim, the Saudi's are asking a question about the remote box for the TTU 205 and I need to give them an answer. I need to know the present price of the device. How much is it?

“Fred, I don't know the number offhand but it is approximately \$4000. Just give me a minute to go downstairs to my office, get the file which is on my desk and bring the accurate information up to you within five minutes.”

With that, Fred went into a tirade. His face turned bright red. He started waving his arms around, and started screaming at me at the top of his voice.

“Dammit Collins, you are the program manager .You're supposed to know all these details right at the tip of your fingertips.”

“Fred, I have over 200 separate items that we sell of the various programs that I'm responsible for. I have a file on every one of them with detailed prices listed an itemized I can get them in a matter of minutes but I cannot remember all these numbers in my head. I can give you an approximate number but I cannot give you an accurate number, which I know, is what you need. Just wait a couple of minutes I will get the exact number for you from the file that is on the top of my desk.”

With that, I turned my back on Fred and walked to the stairway that led to my office. I had been the subject of these tirades before and knew enough not to stick around .You could not win, and if you made a mistake, you could be fired.

I retrieved the file from my desk. Walked back up the stairs to his office entered the door and walked over to his desk. He was sitting in a swivel chair glaring at me.

“Fred, here is the detailed report on the device. The cost is \$4132.85. Marketing then has to add markup, handling, warranty, and customs duties whatever else is required to give you the sell price.

With that, Fred became very calm. Everything relaxed and the color of his face went back to normal. He looked at me curiously and asked,

“Jim, why is it that of all my directors and vice presidents you’re the only one that is not afraid of me.”

He then listed each of the vice presidents and VPs by name and told me how they had cried or pleaded for their jobs because they thought they were to be fired.

“Fred what are you going to do to me? Fire me? You could do that anytime you wanted to over the last 13 years that I worked for you. What else are you going to do? Take a swing at me? Then you will be in the toughest fight you ever had in your life!”

Fred, laughed so heartily that he shook, and he slammed the palm of his hand down on the table.

Then Fred told me a story about one of his subordinates at Stromberg Carlson he had brought in to berate for some flaw. Fred said,

“The guy got so angry at me that he reached over the table, punched me in the mouth and laid me out cold on the floor.”

“I assumed you fired him after that.”

“No I had antagonized him and pushed him beyond where I should have. He blew up and decked me but it was totally my fault.”

To hear that response from the man known for firing people on a whim took me by surprise and gave me a new perspective on how my boss thought.

THE END