

## DANCING IN A MINE FIELD

BY JAMES COLLINS

When you are responsible for over 200 people in a commercial organization, it is analogous to being a captain in charge of a company in the army. You need good managers for this contingent but there is turn over. Some retire, get promoted, get sick or leave to go somewhere else (like being captured by the enemy). Mine had inherited lots of property in Florida and had resigned. Dave had to be replaced. After two weeks of discussions with my departing manger and the other key personnel who reported to me, we identified two candidates in our department for the job. One was head and shoulders over the other but he had repeatedly turned down promotions. It would be a tough sell but we had a backup if all else failed.

Cassidy was well educated with multiple engineering degrees and knew the products the customers and the technology. The rest of the personnel respected and liked this sensitive, well intentioned engineer and he had a wide social group of acquaintances in the department. If a problem arose he would jump into the fray and direct and push the team until a solution was found. The he would share all the credit with the team. They all loved him. However, Dennis Cassidy was Irish-American and stubborn as a mule once he made up his mind. There is an old proverb about the Irish, 'If you want an Irishman not to do something, order him to do it.' Freud also said of the race, "This is one race of people for whom psychoanalysis is of no use whatsoever." The only way Dennis would agree to do the job was if it was his choice. I knew I had my work cut out for me.

I brought Cassidy into the office and started to discuss the fact that we were going to be shorthanded especially as Dave was leaving tomorrow. I got no further in my spiel, when Dennis held up his hand, palm facing me, and said, "Stop right there. I know where this is going. I'm not interested in Dave's job. I'm happy right where I am. You'll have to find someone else."

"Dennis, you're the right person for this job and this is a great career move for you.'

"Jim thanks for the consideration but I don't want to be a manager."

“Why not you know everybody, they all respect you and you know the job as well as Dave. You’re a natural to move into the slot.”

“Thanks but no thanks. I like what I’m doing and I don’t need the aggravation of that job.”

“Dennis, what specifically are the aggravations you referred to?”

“Do you really need the list?”

“Yes, what is it that you are afraid of?”

“I’m not afraid of anything; it’s the nasty things that go with the job.”

“Such as?”

“Laying people off; making the work overtime when they don’t want to; making them work on weekends; having to fire them for sexual harassment like what happened to Spike. Stuff like that. These are all my friends and I can’t do those things to them.”

“Dennis, you’re right. Any of those things can and do happen. There are more, some of which you may be unaware like having to tell a person they have to bathe every day because they are offending the people they work with or notifying them their salary has been attached by the court for alimony payments. These are all part of the job. Also understand the new product with the Army is going to Afghanistan and some people will have to be sent over to help with training. That can be a little scary. But you know the people and can handle the job.”

“But that’s exactly it. These are my friends and I can’t do those things to them.”

“Dennis, I understand all your concerns about your friends but it is exactly why you are the best person for the job. You know them all and you care for them all. You will do your best to protect them. Let me put it another way for you to think about the job. Sure you will have to do all the tough things and you will be sending them out to dance in the mine field. But if you don’t take the job I’ll have to find someone else and he will send **you** out to dance in the mine field.”

“That’s a scary thought. Give me a day and I’ll give you my decision.”

The next day I announced Dennis Cassidy as the new manager and last week he retired after twenty happy and productive years. Everyone attended his going away party and dozens of retired members came back to wish him well. No mines were exploded!

THE END