

Insubordination
By James Collins

Mary Dirk was a big woman. She would fill an average doorway. In her mid-50's, she stood 5 foot 10 and weighed about 185 pounds. She looked like a retired running back for the NFL. Mary generated an imposing presence and used that to intimidate those around her. It was rumored by those who knew her that her husband was a slight man who cowered when she was present. Mary tried to control everyone and wore a perpetual scowl. She was not a happy woman. The only person Mary truly loved was her daughter Julie who lived on the West Coast. Mary, a secretary in my operation, did little more than a satisfactory job. Her reviews were average but her work was thorough. Often, she alienated people and did not have many friends in the operation except for the secretary to the vice president of marketing. They were bosom buddies and could be seen together at lunch every day.

Mary contacted her daughter by telephone almost every day at about 11 o'clock in the morning. Whether she called the daughter or the daughter called her seemed to vary. Both were using their own companies for their communication network. Mary waited impatiently as the clock approached 11 o'clock most days. Those people who did not like her, let this information seep up to management probably in an attempt to get her reprimanded or moved to a different department.

I had several managers reporting to my department and they worked together as a very effective team. One day Goddard Kennedy's secretary called in sick and Goddard had a proposal to finish and deliver by the end of the week. He desperately needed secretarial help. Mary's manager was on a trip and, as a result, she was available.

Goddard went over to Mary and requested that she come over to his operation to assist since her boss was out of town. Mary refused. Everyone knew that Mary was waiting for her 11 o'clock call from her daughter. Goddard had to get the job done, and since Mary said she did not work for him and would not respond to him, he came to my office to get help. I listened to Goddard and realized that he was trying to do what was best for the company and for our group. I walked over to Mary and told her that I wanted her to move from her desk and take the desk of Goddard's secretary who was out for the day. She refused saying, "This is my regular work station, and I am not going to move to help some other group."

I was taken aback and repeated my request for a second time; again, Mary refused. I told her, "Mary I will get back to you on this matter."

I then went and got Herb Sandberg, a manager from a different department, who was a friend, to come over with me to act as a witness. We went to Mary's desk and I said, "Mary, Goddard doesn't have anyone to spare so I'm again requesting that you move over to the secretary desk at Goddard's location and assist his group at least for the rest of today."

Mary again refused and said, "I will not relocate from here. This is my normal work station and I intend to stay here." She rose to her full height in an attempt to intimidate me. It didn't work.

"I will be back in a little while."

I then went to personnel and with Herb told the vice president of personnel what

happened and told him I wanted Mary fired for insubordination. He agreed and selected a personnel manager and a security person to accompany me back to Mary.

I returned it to Mary's desk and asked the personnel and security people to wait outside the door to that office. I then went to Mary and told her, "Mary, on two occasions I requested you to move to Goddard's area to do secretarial work at that location and you have refused."

Mary said, "Yes I did. I still do because this is my place of work and I will not change just because you think it's necessary. I talked to my friend upstairs in the VP's office and she said I am within my rights to do so."

"Mary I am here to inform you that you are fired for insubordination."

"You can't fire me. You have no right to do that."

"I have the right, and I just did. You are fired! Personnel and security are outside to take you out of the facility."

With that, personnel and security arrived. Mary was told to pick up her purse and her private belongings. The two-person escort walked Mary down to personnel and then out of the building.

At times, I still run into Mary at the supermarket. We are not friends. We pass in the aisles like battleships from different warring countries. No shots are fired.

THE END