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Duty, Responsibility, and Pride

Andrew Sikula, Sr., and Terry L. Polen

DUTY

The man was almost deified. He was one of those few people who, even while living, attained an elevated stature. He had returned home, retired, and although he was still interested in the intrigue and issues that had driven him for so long, he now felt that he was too old and too tired to continue in public service. He was ready to spend time in Mount Vernon, spend time with Martha, and on the farm. The year was 1798, and George Washington was living comfortably in his Virginia retreat. Nevertheless, new storm clouds were rising on the eastern horizon. France was threatening to send an expeditionary force to invade our small new nation. President John Adams, in a letter to Washington dated June 22, "disparaged his own martial qualities, going so far as to express a wish that the might constitutionally swap places with the hero of the revolution" (Smith, 1993). It was clear what he wished, even if never directly stated. The president was calling Washington to duty once again. Washington did not wish to go again into "the boundless field of responsibility and trouble," as he called it. However, he also felt it would be his obligation if called on. He may not have wanted to do this, but he felt it was his duty. Now you know the rest of the story.

RESPONSIBILITY

Obviously, Sally and her situation in no way rise to the level of duty and responsibility that George Washington was to be called. Notwithstanding, the concepts remain the same. She holds the responsibility to do what she is called on to do. Each of us, in the level of authority and duty in which we live, find that on a daily basis we have a duty and responsibility to those around us. Who could argue that a parent's responsibility to a newborn could be usurped by a vanity? Who would not look askance at a parent who finds more interest in their own hobbies and interests than the raising, caring, and feeding of the child? That is a duty, a responsibility, and a calling. What responsibility do employees have to their employer? We, who must by needs be working for a living, are indebted to our employers to perform that which is within our scheme of

influence, responsibility, and capabilities. We do this with the constant realization that we must hold our principles above any position. We must never lose sight of our responsibility not only to our employer, but also to the people and the world around us. Sally is infuriated. In this situation, she certainly has a right to feel frustrated. Certainly, it is understandable that she would feel that way after preparing all summer for one class only to have another thrust on her at the last moment. She certainly has an inherent right to complain. Or, as Dwight Eisenhower often inferred, it is "a soldier's right to grouse" (Ambrose, 1990). Although complaining may allow one to vent those feelings, it is no way ameliorates the need for, in this case, her to teach the class. As Thomas Jefferson stated, "The first of all our consolations is that of having faithfully fulfilled our duties; the next, the approbation and good will of those who have witnessed it" (Kaminski, 1994). We must fulfill such duties to the best of our abilities.

MISMANAGEMENT

Why would Sally consider refusing? Certainly, this is within her general field of knowledge and expertise. It is also prudent for the chair to consider the needs of the students in selecting who has the best academic background to teach experimental psychology (we are assuming that the newly hired professor does indeed have that background). However, the management skills of the chair must also be called into question. How long did the chair know that a new professor was coming onboard? How long did the chair know that Sally was not going to teach the class? If the chair knew (and how could he or she not?) that this new faculty member was coming onboard in some not too distant time, then some fault, at a minimum, from a human relations perspective is vested with the chair. There is a simple and universal human behavioral concept of treating all people with respect. Humans must be treated with all of the care, dignity, and respect that they so richly deserve. Goleman, in his article titled "What Makes a Leader" (1998), stated that there are five components of emotional intelligence at work: self-awareness) self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. Although most of us at some time or another have worked for individuals who have displayed little or no emotional intelligence (by our reckoning thereof), we still had to work with them. Depending on the information beyond what was supplied in the case vignette, the chair may have been lax, or extremely lax, in his or her responsibility. In Goleman's aspect of social skill, the chair thus could be considered sorely lacking. In this case, if

the chair has been lax in the administration of duties, he or she is creating turmoil instead of pax—the latter of which is the status that we as managers should all strive for within our organizations.

PRIDE

The threshold question remains, however: Why would Sally consider not accepting the teaching position? By declining the position, she will no longer retain her funding. By declining the position, she will jeopardize her future. It seems that the crux of the issue from her side is pride. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Pride costs us more than hunger, thirst, and cold" (Kaminski, 1994). The chair's request is not unreasonable, although it seems to be untimely and poorly performed from a leadership perspective, nevertheless, it is not out of the scope of her job duties. She may have succumbed to and become a victim of the pride of personality, as we all do at various points. A difficult task in childrearing is to teach children (at some point in their youth, hopefully) that they are not the only person on this earth. Unfortunately, and seemingly, some never learn this. Pride can be a manifestation of our own belief structure. Pride can also be a manifestation of what we believe about others, and our opinion of their value and worthiness can be shown in our eyes. From a leadership vision, we can raise ourselves above that lower level by treating others as we desire to be treated. In other words (and as one example), when we follow the interfaith belief of the Golden Rule, others will typically follow us more readily and willingly. When others feel that we care for them and that we will do our best to help them, then going along agreeably with last-minute changes or the acceptance of concepts that do not fit with our ideals or ideas are (or can be) easier to absorb. Again, notwithstanding what could potentially be considered poor management, the issue at hand is not one of onerousness. It is simply a viewpoint possessed by Sally. "Why the, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison" (Shakespeare, 1603/1955). Hamlet in speaking to his old school chums Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (who both will soon become his nemesis), finds that the situation is untenable (and understandably so). He finds that, even in the finery of his life, Denmark is a prison. Although it is understood that in the case of Sally the situation is much more constrained, Sally must still bare the self-same warning. To allow a situation that is untenable to her to continue to gnaw at her will leave her in straits most difficult within her own mind. "What is he whose grief bears such an emphasis?" (Shakespeare, 1603/1955). The mind that continues to hold such things will find difficulties. Sally would be sagacious to accept

the assignment and view it as a way to more fully and completely learn the trade within which she has purportedly devoted her life.

CONCLUSION

We all find situations in our lives that are not as we desire and expect. We all live through times and circumstances that would not be if we could change them. An acceptance, whether in academe or other employment, leads us to a healthier and happier life. However, all of us, as George Washington did so many years before, have a duty and responsibility. Although we cannot and should not ever let go of our principles, we must also allow our duties and responsibilities to win out in our internal battles over our pride. Standing on principles is noble, when there are principles to stand on. Standing on principles when the only principle in question is pride is imprudent at best and stupid at worst.

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