

"Hey Mike, can I talk to you for a second?"

"Sure, what's up Will? Everything cool with my future All-Star?"

Mike loved talking like this. He seemed to think empty flattery like this would work with newbies on the team. And maybe it did with other guys. But I've been on enough teams to know how good leadership, meaningful leadership, actually works. And which kind of actions or comments motivate me and which ones are empty. Mike threw out empty garbage constantly. But to look at him, he might define Napoleonic. He was about 5'8", so maybe a little tall for that characterization, but the label was accurate. He was a big talker – and keep in mind, this is a real estate brokerage, you don't survive if you aren't a big talker – but he seemed to take it to a different level. He talked like he had been around for decades, seen everything, accomplished nearly everything, and therefore earned the right to talk over everyone around him. Especially his team members. And that they'd gush at his attention, and these empty attempts at flattery.

"Yeah, all cool. But that bill for the party 2 months ago. I still haven't gotten paid for it. Did you put it in to accounting yet?"

"I told you Will, I did. I'm gonna have to speak to them. They should know better than to slow pay this one, it's a priority. I'll call them again, make sure it happens. You made that party happen, you shouldn't have to wait, right!"

Will was impressed at Mike's ability to look him right in the eye and lie to him. Totally believable. That's a special skill, probably how he'd gotten as far as he had. Clients believe him when he says he'll get their property sold at a record price. Or when he tells buyers he'll find them a steal of a deal. He can point to countless deals he's done to attest to it. Most of those deals were done by other brokers in the shop, but the clients don't know that. Just say it with conviction, that's what Will has learned in his 4 months on the job.

The event in question was a party at the Seattle Athletic Club, that venerable hundred-plus year old club with an exclusive membership. Will was a member, which was highly unusual for a 23 year old. But it goes back generations – Will's great grandfather was a very influential member in his day, so his son carried it on, and his son, and by the time Will was in college he was told that he'd get his first job and then join the club. His family got him that in to membership, but he was responsible for paying the dues, which were steep. On his salary, with rent and living expenses, it was tight as hell. Once he started getting commissions it would get a bit easier. But when Mike found out Will was a member, and asked him to get the private room for a firm client party, Will felt obliged to say yes. He hated people knowing he was a member, he knew he hadn't earned it and that it was only his family that got him in. 10 years from now, maybe 20, when hopefully he's more successful, then it would be ok, he won't feel weird about it, but not now. Nonetheless Will secured the room, paid for it in his account, and expected the firm to reimburse him immediately. But two months later still nothing. Party was a big success, even senior brokers were in attendance. Mike took all the credit, of course, since his name was listed as the planner and primary host, but it doesn't happen without Will. Mike had to approve the expense, since technically it would go on his P&L. The firm was weird that way, these specific client events would be paid for by the firm but go on a specific team's P&L. Will put the reimbursement request in, but hadn't gotten paid. So Will went over to accounting to look into it, and found out that Mike had not yet approved it. That once he had it would get paid the same day. That was why he approached Mike, to get

his take. And of course Mike lied. And did a great job, unfortunately for him he couldn't know that Will had gone behind his back and gotten the truth. So why was he holding back on the approval?

Will looked right back at him. "That is weird, that you approved it and they still haven't paid it. You're sure, right, that it got through to them, didn't get held up or something?"

Mike's bushy eyebrows dropped, his forehead tightened. "I told you, Will, I did it. Are you doubting me? Seriously? For all I do for you, I give you this incredible opportunity, and you question me like this. That's really uncool."

"I'm just asking, it seems odd to me. That's all. But if you say you did it, then you did it, right? That's all I can ask."

"You're damn right that's all you can ask. I can't believe this, the balls on you. Frickin' newbie questioning me of all people."

At this point, Dylan had walked up, was standing outside the door to Mike's office. "Everything ok in here."

Dylan was a broker just like Mike, though much more chill and frankly more respected in this office than Mike. Mike was the big talker, and did achieve some results, but Dylan was more polished and didn't need to talk to garner respect. Some guys just have that way about them, people are attracted to them as natural leaders and sources of better information. That was Dylan. Will would've preferred to be on Dylan's team, but it wasn't his choice, when he was hired he was assigned to Mike's team. He got along with Dylan the few times they'd spoken though. And he knew they had something in common – they both rowed in college. It's not like it was an exclusive fraternity or anything like that, but to know the kind of person who can put in the work needed to row at the college level - the hours of early morning practice in any kind of weather, going to class dead tired, studying late nights even more tired, then rinse-repeat the next day – that wasn't a talker like Mike, it was a doer like Dylan. And Will.

Will walked out of Mike's office, the look of frustration clear to Dylan as he walked by.

"You believe that guy?" Mike said to Dylan. "Sometimes these new guys have no idea how the place works. No respect for what we give them."

"Yeah, right" Dylan replied, then walked away, shaking his head. He knew what Mike was all about.

Will didn't know what to do. He was out \$5500 right now, waiting to get that reimbursed. He had about \$300 in his bank account, which would be about \$1600 by the time his next paycheck got direct-deposited in a week. But his rent was also due in about 10 days, and that would pretty much break him. Since he did need to eat every once in a while, pay his cellphone bill, gas, that sort of thing. Mike left him no choice.

"Mr. Janneke, do you have a minute?"

It was the end of the business day, Will intentionally waited til now figuring the head of the firm would be in meetings or on calls all day.

"Sure Will, c'mon in. Good timing, I just got off an hour-long call with an unhappy client. Felt like I was trying to land a 747 without wings. Not fun."

"Wow, sounds rough, sorry."

"What can I do for you?"

"I hate to bother you, especially about something like this. Honestly, if I'm coming in here to talk I'd much rather do it about a deal, or to talk real estate. Something positive. But I'm in a bind, and I don't really know where to turn."

"Sounds ominous, what's up. I'm here to help, you know that."

"Yessir, thanks. So do you remember that client event at the Seattle Club a couple months ago? I think you stopped in for a while."

"Yes, I do. Great event. You guys did a tremendous job, clients looked really happy. The Seattle Club was a great call, we've never been able to have anything there before. Kudos to Mike getting that going."

"Yeah, about that. And thanks, we were really happy too, it went well. So the way we got into the Club was through my membership. I have a pretty long family history there, so I'm kind of obligated to keep it going and be a member. I like it, but frankly it's really expensive and I'm not exactly making the kind of money all the other members are making. But that's not the reason I'm here. I footed the bill, it got charged to my account. The understanding I had with Mike was that the firm would reimburse me. I put it through the next day, but apparently he has yet to approve it. That's what accounting tells me. He says he did, but to be honest with you I think he's held off for some reason. The problem is that I can't keep carrying that bill. I can't pay next month's rent right now unless I get reimbursed."

"That's a problem. Are you sure accounting isn't missing something, maybe overlooked getting the approval?"

"They checked twice. No e-mails, no paper approvals, nothing. He's approved other things since then, so it's not an issue with the communications. When I asked him about it he got pretty worked up. I thought this would put me in a good position on his team, getting the access to the Club, and now I feel like I'm in the doghouse or something."

"No, you shouldn't be. I didn't know you were a member, that's pretty great. Exclusive club, you should be proud. And you should be in good stead around here, you made it happen. Let me see what I can learn about this, we'll get you paid as soon as possible. How much is the bill?"

"About \$5500."

"Wow, yeah, that would cause a financial bind for sure. I'll make some calls right now."

"Thanks Mr. Janneke, I really appreciate this. And again, sorry to bring you into this. Hopefully next time I can come in here and talk real stuff."

"Door's always open, Will. And please, it's Whit. No Mr. Janneke needed here."

The next day Will saw that \$5500 was direct-deposited into his bank account. He walked by Whit's office, saw the door open, and poked his head in. Whit looked up after Will tapped lightly on the doorframe.

"Hey Whit, I want to thank you. I saw the money in my account. Whatever you did it worked fast."

"No problem, Will, happy to help."

"What ended up happening, if I may ask."

"Let's just say a little bit of P&L manipulation, but I corrected it. Made sure it won't happen again. And maybe it's on me to change how these events get booked in our system, not charging the teams for them. We'll see, nothing for you to worry about though."

"Well, thanks again." Will wasn't sure what Whit was talking about, but sensed he was right about Mike not being on the up-and-up.

Will walked back toward his desk, but heard his name being called. He looked across and saw Mike waving him over, not looking too happy. Great.

"Hey Will, come on in, I want to talk about something."

"Sure, what's up."

He closed the door behind me and sat at his desk. I sat down as well.

"You went and talked to Whit about the Seattle Club bill?"

"Yeah, I did. I felt like I had to, I was in a bit of a bind."

"What kind of bind, I told you I was taking care of it."

"I have rent due in a week, and right now I can't afford to pay it because I'm carrying that \$5500 bill. It should've been reimbursed 2 months ago."

"Like I said, I was taking care of it. You don't go over my head like that. This is a team, do you understand how a team works. We all pull in the same direction. Otherwise the boat goes sideways."

Will didn't know if Mike remembered he rowed crew, on an 8-man team. Mike was sharp, and obviously vengeful, so his word choice might have been intentionally ironic or just a funny coincidence.

"Yeah Mike, I know all about teams. Been part of them my whole life."

"Well maybe you should've realized this time that the team is the focus, and not gone outside the team. You really fucked me over on this one. I'm gonna take a huge hit, in my wallet and my reputation around here. That don't fly well with me."

"I'm confused. How does me footing a bill for 2 months make you take a hit in the wallet – is the firm making you pay for it?"

"No, asshole, not that. Listen, I'll let you in to a little bit of executive level knowledge about how things work around here. Not that you're entitled to it, being a newbie. I have a P&L, and every quarter we get bonuses based on our net. The quarter ends in a few days, I was going to hold off paying that bill until next quarter, so our numbers would look that much better. Our bonus would be higher, which we all share in. Caput?"

"Yeah, I get it. But why didn't you tell me that, be honest with me in the first place. I could've been ok with it, maybe if you helped cover me til it was paid."

"I didn't know you were running that tight. You gotta tell me these things if you need my help. I'm not omniscient."

"Didn't know I'd have to tell you, I thought the firm would reimburse me right away. Thought it was a good thing me getting us into the club."

"So you want to take all the credit, the party was all you? You really aren't a team player."

"That's not what I said. I'm just repeating what you said to me when you asked if I could get us in, that it would be huge for the firm, that the firm would be indebted to me."

"Well, you screwed me either way. I'm getting dinged by Whit. He said I was manipulating the P&L for the bonus, he's gonna reduce our pool this quarter. And he's handling the disbursement, so I'll probably get nothing. If it was up to me you'd get nothing."

"Listen Mike, sorry you're taking a hit, but it's on you, not me. You wanna blame me go right ahead, but all I did was help make a great client event and then have to pay the bill and get lied to by you. That's all. You're the one who fucked up here. And don't start questioning my integrity or team mentality. I rowed on an 8-man crew all through high school and college, won championships, and captained the team for 2 years. So I know way more about teams than you ever will."

With this Will got up and walked out the door. All he heard behind him was "Good luck finding a team, asshole."

Dylan walked by Will's cubicle, and poked his head over the partition.

"You ok? I heard a little of that. Getting screwed by Mike, huh?"

"Yeah, he's not too happy with me."

"Sounds like he was fucking you over. That right?"

"Yeah, kinda." Will didn't know how much he wanted to divulge to a different team, though right now he might have been a man without a country.

"Listen, I heard what happened. News travels fast through a place like this. Mike fucked you over, plain and simple. It was bullshit what he was trying to pull. I would never do anything like that. You want to join my team, I'd be happy to have you. We crew guys gotta stick together, right?"

"You serious?"

"Absolutely. I could just talk to Mike, if you guys aren't working out then I'm sure he'll be fine with it. No need for headaches if they can be avoided."

"That would be great, I'd be honored to be on your team Dylan."

Dylan laughed. "You don't have to be honored, it's not that great a thing. We're just sellin' real estate here."

"I know, but I respect you. I think I could learn a lot from you."

"Good, then it's done. I'll make it happen."

"Thanks Dylan."