

PREFACE

A Game-Changing Approach

IT'S ABOUT GETTING THINGS DOWN TO RESULTS.

That's the key insight Jonah Hill's character, Peter Brand, had in the popular 2011 movie *Moneyball*. Brand was trying to figure out how the Oakland A's could capture a winning season without the benefit of big-name talent, but he might as well have been talking about the challenge facing any business today.

That challenge, simply stated, is this: there is not enough top talent to go around, so how do we get good, solid people to produce great results? The challenge is further complicated as companies inadvertently and incorrectly marginalize the importance of the front line by focusing instead on technology. It doesn't matter if companies are regionally or globally focused: if they hope to win in today's complex business environment, their frontline workers must perform consistently at or above standards. If they want to leapfrog the competition, companies must figure out how to develop leadership teams and frontline performers who are focused on the vital actions that actually drive the business.

But how best to do that? A solution is urgently needed. Today's corporations are dynamic environments in which leaders come and go, bottom-line pressures force us to think in the short term, and the next new idea on how to save the company is always right around the corner. Technological advances change

the competitive environment and demand our attention. Old alliances fade. People are viewed as unimportant. And if it can be digitized, disaggregated, and automated, the prevailing thought is that it should be. It seems that new strategies, tools, and pressures occupy every bit of available white space in today's organizations. The clutter is suffocating, and in the deluge, the few ideas that can truly have impact are drowned out by the constant noise of the new.

We have written this book to introduce a different type of solution to this underlying and basic issue facing all companies today: creating and maintaining predictable, high levels of front-line performance.

Our approach is based on thirty years of trial and error, on the research and practices of a small group of individuals who have been committed to performance of the front line, and on, quite frankly, years of asking the wrong questions, such as "What do people need to know?" "How do I engage the learners?" and "How do I modernize and mobilize my learning programs?" These are not bad questions, but they have not yielded the answers that really matter. Instead, we first have to ask a much more fundamental question: *What specific outcomes do I want my frontline performers to produce?*

Answering this question requires a shift of perspective; it requires a small but significant quarter turn in thinking about how to describe and focus the development of frontline performers. We call the approach that results from this quarter turn *Outcomes Thinking*.

Outcomes Thinking is a game-changing strategy. Let's go back to the baseball analogy for a moment. The insight of the Peter Brand character was to study baseball players' outcomes rather

than their physical profile, their perceived potential, or even their competencies. “Your goal shouldn’t be to buy players. Your goal should be to buy wins,” Brand says during a pivotal scene in *Moneyball*. To win, a baseball team needs to score runs. When the team started focusing on runs and how individual players could be deployed to get them, the Oakland A’s in the movie, just like the team in real life, transformed from a small-market team into a franchise that could compete with multimillion-dollar franchises like the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox.

But how does Outcomes Thinking translate from the baseball diamond to the boardroom? When properly deployed, Outcomes Thinking not only tackles the tough problem of frontline performance but also informs other important areas, such as recruiting, job design, capabilities, and learner engagement.

From the front line to the back office, our experience in putting Outcomes Thinking into practice has been both surprising and gratifying. When this new approach has been implemented, employees often let out an almost audible sigh that speaks volumes: “Finally, those people at corporate get it. They understand my job and are now providing me with real tools, training, and coaching to help me perform it better.” We have worked with hundreds of individuals in numerous companies over the past thirty years, helping each of them, in their own way, achieve this amazingly gratifying result.

Like most powerful ideas, Outcomes Thinking itself is simple and straightforward, but putting it into practice can be a challenge. Implementing and adopting the idea across an organization can get “lost in the noise” of too many competing initiatives and the unending distractions found in modern organizations. Moving an idea forward against all of that corporate noise requires grit

and focus. It takes both an inquisitive mind and determination—sometimes lots of determination—as well as a vision for how it should play out. As Albert Einstein said, “Example isn’t another way to teach, it is the only way to teach.”

With that in mind, we offer you a story of one person’s quest to discover the secret of performance—an example of how a focused individual can marshal a group’s performance to achieve the kinds of results that impact business.

Although the situation, the company, and the characters are fictional, we have drawn on many real-life experiences to create a story that condenses, but does not exaggerate, the “noise” found in companies today. And though our view of Navy’s football program is only from the vantage point of loyal and dedicated fans, the analogies used are relevant to the topic and the story.

No matter the size of your organization or the focus of your business, certain roles are critical to your success, and each of those roles has a few important outcomes that must be targeted. Our hope is that through this book you will find an ally in your quest to target, define, and create methods to produce the outcomes that are vital to your organization. In so doing you can cut through all the noise and be the catalyst for a winning leadership development strategy, one that ignites individual and organization performance so your company can reach new and exciting heights.

Greg Long
Butler Newman

CHAPTER 1

Monday Morning Staff Meeting

THE DOOR TO THE VOLVO WAGON CLOSED WITH A SECURE thud. Aimee Martin glanced over her shoulder to make sure her three-year-old daughter, Kylie, had not left any cherished objects in the backseat. *Whew*, Aimee thought as she eyed the lone remaining Cheerio. *All clear.*

Another smooth drop-off at day care. No complications. She was relieved to realize she would make it to her meeting on time. The squabble she'd had with her husband, Marc, before leaving the house, about why it fell to her to drop Kylie off at day care on the morning of the weekly leadership meeting, had been unfounded after all.

Her office on the east side of Washington, DC, was only twenty minutes away, and traffic flowed smoothly despite the morning drizzle of this early October day. She felt relaxed; her drive was unfolding without a hitch. Aimee, a confident and fit thirty-five-year-old with an impressive track record of success in both her business endeavors and personal life, attacked her commute with the same concentration and efficiency she applied to any other task. She believed in pursuing excellence in all her undertakings.

Aimee felt energized this morning and was looking forward to the Monday morning leadership meeting. That had not always

been the case during the four months since her return to Calara Enterprises. The decision to rejoin the workforce had been unexpectedly hard for her. She loved every minute that she spent with Kylie, and it had been hard to imagine anyone else—especially anyone outside the family—caring for her daughter during these formative years. Thankfully, Kylie’s transition to day care had surpassed Aimee’s best expectations. Kylie loved the social interaction with the staff and the other children and was thriving. Aimee’s confidence heading to the office this morning stemmed not from a new sales win but from her peaceful transition from full-time homemaker back to Calara Enterprises.

She wished Calara’s sales team was making equal progress with the transition. It was not, however, and Aimee was searching for answers. She had returned to the company specifically to sort through performance issues holding back the sales team. Sales had steadily slipped over the last year, enough so that Calara’s competitors were starting to take advantage of that slippage.

Aimee couldn’t yet put her finger on the root of the problem. The sales training initiative that had been put in place eighteen months ago had come highly recommended, but it was not well received by the sales force. Staff feedback was that it was too general and not really applicable to the sales role at Calara. The initiative had lost steam over the last few months, and it wasn’t immediately obvious how to get sales moving again. This lack of clarity frustrated Aimee. Part of her special talent had always been that solutions for going forward “just came to her” in the midst of whatever chaos existed, but so far, this challenge was different. Calara also seemed different to her. The “our people are important” ethic that she had experienced during her first stint at the company seemed to have eroded.

As Aimee negotiated the steady traffic, her eye caught a screen flash and she heard the chime of her iPhone, resting face up atop her leather-bound journal on the passenger seat. That particular chime indicated a new text message. She glanced over at her phone to check if it was Kylie's day care informing her that she had forgotten after all to send some important item in the rush to get out the door this morning. Instead, she saw Bill's name, her friend and mentor at Calara.

"Bill?" she said aloud to herself. "He never texts me. What could Bill possibly want that warrants a text message? I'll see him in twenty minutes at our meeting!"

She could plainly see the first few words of the message:

Hi Aimee, sorry to relay this through . . .

She couldn't see the rest without picking up her phone and entering her security code. *Why*, she wondered for the umpteenth time, *did the information technology services group mandate the use of security codes on personal devices?*

She thought about trying to enter the passcode while splitting her attention between the phone keypad and the two cars ahead of her to reveal the rest of Bill's message. Then she remembered how frustrated she gets with other drivers who pull that trick. Even so, she had to fight her curiosity as her right hand instinctively drifted over to her phone. She pulled her hand back to the wheel and her attention back to the road. Bill's message would have to wait.

Aimee's mind went back to the unexpected phone call just over four months ago when Bill had reached out to ask her to consider returning to Calara Enterprises as his "right-hand man" to lead the sales group through a modernization effort. The call had flattered her. Seven years ago he had picked her out of the pack,

guiding her through the corporate office maze. She liked him right away, and his counsel had always been sound. Bill had joined Calara within the first year of its formation. He liked to brag that his employee number was 9, still in the single digits. Bill was a smart sales leader, and Calara's founder, Richard, always turned to Bill for advice and guidance on the company's sales strategy and direction. Twenty-four years and much success had cemented Bill's legacy at Calara. Aimee was grateful that during her early years at Calara, Bill had helped her develop a relationship with Richard, who was now retired from the day-to-day operation of the company but stayed engaged as the board chairman.

Since her return, Aimee had noticed the tension between Bill and the new CEO, Ian, who had taken the reins just over a year ago. Although Ian and Bill never disagreed publicly, Aimee could sense the strain in their relationship. She wondered if this strained relationship was behind Bill's odd behavior over the last three weeks. He had grown quiet lately and was not engaging her regarding her efforts to reverse the sales team's slump.

Almost before the car fully stopped, Aimee threw the car in park and switched off the ignition in one fluid motion. She left her door closed, however, as she picked up her phone and impatiently typed in her passcode to retrieve Bill's text:

Hi Aimee, sorry to relay this through a text message. I wanted to give you a heads-up that I've made a sudden decision to change course. Can't explain. You'll do great.

Bill

Aimee read the message again—first quickly, then slowly, picking apart each word. *This can't be good*, she thought as she

sat frozen behind the wheel. Air rushed from her lungs, just like when Kylie had accidentally kicked her in the stomach last week.

Still staring at the message and only half aware of what she was doing, Aimee slid her thumb across the screen to locate Bill's number and hit Call Mobile. With each ring Aimee grew more anxious.

"You've reached Bill McCray. Leave a brief message and I will return your call as soon as I am able." It was the sound of Bill's voice-mail message. Now Aimee felt like kicking herself, thinking she should have called him back as soon as she got the text. "Doggone it!" she said to no one.

Aimee gathered her belongings quickly and headed to the eight-story building bearing the Calara logo. *Maybe I can catch Bill on the way to the conference room before the meeting starts*, she thought as she headed across the parking lot.

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There was no sign of Bill in the hallway, so Aimee stepped into the conference room. She quickly scanned the polished mahogany table as everyone gathered for the leadership meeting. The three empty seats near the head of the table confirmed Bill's absence, but Ian and the new marketing guy, Conroy, were also missing from the gathering. *Maybe I'm overreacting*, Aimee thought, reflecting back on Bill's text.

As she worked her way around the large table to her usual seat, she was greeted in typical fashion by Faith, her longtime colleague and the CFO.

"Hi, Aimee. How was your weekend?" Faith asked pleasantly.

"Not bad. Not bad." Aimee responded on autopilot, distracted by the fact that the chair beside her, usually occupied by Bill, remained empty.

She landed in her seat with an unenthusiastic thud that was atypical of her energetic style, and she felt a little uncomfortable that Faith had noticed. She took a deep breath and surveyed the room again. The air was filled with the normal Monday morning buzz—stories of weekend victories and laments at how fast the year was flying by. No one was acting the least bit out of the ordinary. Surely she was reading too much into the cryptic note Bill had sent to her.

Aimee exhaled a deep sigh and began readying her mind for the meeting in front of her. It had taken a few months for her to get used to the hurried cadence that had become typical of the beginning of each week since she had returned.

Conroy entered the room first, only a step ahead of Ian and both shot to two of the open seats near the head of the table. Conroy's face betrayed such a smug air of satisfaction, it looked as if all his favorite college football teams had won their weekend gridiron matches handily. Victory was written all over his face, and he visibly worked to constrain his joy.

Aimee's stomach immediately tightened at the sight. Ian had brought Conroy on board about two months before Aimee's return, and though she did not know him well, she had been suspicious of him from the start. From Aimee's vantage point, Conroy had shown no interest in collaborating with either Bill or her as he worked to formulate the new marketing strategy for Calara. He seemed always in a hurry and did little to understand the perspective of the people who had built Calara. Clearly Conroy was convinced he had a better way.

Aimee didn't agree. Their big difference was in their perspective of the frontline sales reps. Conroy believed in a top-down approach. Those from corporate, usually Conroy and others like

him, would decide the answer and tell everyone exactly what to do—what tactics to follow, what accounts to focus on, and so on. The sales reps' job was simply to execute the program or follow up the marketing campaign.

By contrast, Aimee inherently looked to the people on the front line. Experience had shown her that they were closest to the action, and that gave them a strong and relevant perspective that could inform executive decisions. Where she struggled, however, was how to capture and boil down that frontline perspective in a way that was straightforward to understand and apply.

"Well, let's get started," Ian said as he settled into his seat. The weekend buzz quickly abated and the group turned its attention to Ian. Bill's chair remained empty.

"I'd like to begin with an update on the marketing front. Conroy?" Ian continued as he nodded in Conroy's direction.

Conroy smiled broadly, but before he could get the first word out of his mouth, Aimee interrupted.

"Ian, don't you think we should wait another minute for Bill? I know he will be interested in the latest on the marketing front."

"No, we can begin," Ian said curtly. "Conroy?"

"Thanks, Ian." Conroy stood up, which was not customary for this meeting. He had just been handed the stage, and clearly he was going to take maximum advantage of it.

"Well, as I mentioned briefly a couple of weeks ago, I've been working on a plan to radically change the way we go to market. This plan will springboard Calara Enterprises into the modern—into the digital age," he said with a smirk, "even if it is kicking and screaming."

As the rest of her colleagues gave a polite chuckle, Aimee dropped her head and stared at the blank page in her journal

lying open on the table in front of her. The overbearing manner in which Conroy was delivering his message created knots in her stomach.

“Ian and I worked much of the weekend to finalize the framework of the plan, and we’re both very excited to brief you on it—”

Aimee suddenly brought her head back upright and swung her chair to face Ian. “Ian, have you gotten Bill’s input on this plan?” she interrupted Conroy without apology.

Conroy shifted and positioned himself to continue his briefing, acting as if neither he nor anyone else in the room had heard Aimee’s fiery reaction.

“Wait, Conroy.” Ian held up a hand, reasserting control over the meeting. “Let me address Aimee’s concern.”

He turned to face her. “Aimee, that’s a valid question. However, you all should know that, despite my best efforts to persuade him otherwise, Bill has resigned—effective immediately.”

A hush filled the room. Conroy remained standing, facing the rest of the team, clearly the only one in the room who was not surprised at the news. He tried to feign a sad look but fooled no one.

As Ian continued, Aimee could feel the eyes of the leadership team as they stole glances at her, curious at her reaction. The color drained from her face as she glared in Ian’s direction. A hundred thoughts raced through her mind. She felt alone without her ally and mentor, isolated at the table among the other leaders of Calara.

Ian continued, “I know that you would like to hear more in this regard; however, Bill and I both agreed not to share the details of our discussions—beyond the final result, that is. So while I know that this news is disruptive, I urge us all to stay focused on our task at hand. I will be working with each of you in

the days ahead to understand the impact of this change and what we must do to push forward.

“Conroy, please continue with your briefing,” Ian said quietly but firmly.

Aimee didn’t hear another word Conroy had to say. She felt betrayed on all fronts. Betrayed by Bill, who hadn’t given her any indication of what he must have known was coming. Betrayed by Ian. None of this made sense. Why had Bill hired her to help him move the company forward and modernize sales if he was planning to go soon? For all intents and purposes, Bill had vanished and left her to face the challenges alone.

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Aimee closed the door behind her as she returned to her office. *What is going on?* She wanted to just leave, pick up Kylie, and call it a day. She quickly pushed those thoughts aside. She knew leaving early would be seen as a sign of weakness by Conroy, and she wouldn’t give him the satisfaction.

Her thoughts wandered back to her earliest days with the company. She drew strength from the memories of a different Calara. It had been an electric time. Everyone was engaged in moving the mission forward, extending the growth streak, and ultimately taking the company public. The work hadn’t always gone perfectly, but there were never any crazy surprises like today’s.

She smiled as she remembered how she was initially afraid of Bill. His intensity intimidated her, but before long, she adjusted to his style and the two of them clicked. The more she understood him, the more Bill came to rely on her. She also had built a strong relationship with Joe, one of their early sales rep hires. He

shook things up by consistently blowing his numbers out of the water. Bill and Aimee never completely understood just how he worked his magic. But whatever his secret was, the three of them together became an unstoppable force, consistently performing above expectations. They even played together as a team: Bill introduced Aimee and Joe to his passion for the sport of cycling, and they often took early morning rides together before the office opened.

That alchemy between sales and management to produce results was just what she and Bill had been trying to revive among the sales force. Now with Bill gone, she was sorry that she hadn't spent more time with Joe upon her return. If nothing else came from today, at least she would commit to spend more time with Joe and get his perspective on how to reinvigorate Calara and return it to the productivity of old.

Before she even quite realized what she was doing, she reached for her office phone and dialed Bill's number on impulse. He must be able to tell her something about what was going on—he owed her that much.

The phone didn't even ring before voice mail picked up: "I'm sorry to have missed your call...."

Aimee sighed. But no sooner had she hung up the receiver than the soft ring of her desk phone was announcing another call.

"Good morning, this is Aimee," she said brightly, expecting to hear the sound of her former mentor's voice on the other end. Instead, she immediately started scowling as the customer on the other end of the line unloaded a tirade of complaints. While listening, Aimee picked up her sales territory sheet and saw that this was one of former sale rep Frank's customers. She'd been worried something like this might happen when Frank suddenly quit.

“That’s correct, Frank is no longer with us. No, I can’t discuss the reasons for his departure. Yes, it was sudden. No, I’m not aware of your situation, but if you’ll take a minute to explain.” Immediately Aimee was almost sorry she asked, but still she listened intently.

“My deepest apologies, Mr. Cameron. I can tell that you’re upset, and I’d like to meet with you face to face to better understand the situation and determine how best to rectify it.” Aimee seamlessly shifted into customer repair mode, shrugging off the shock and disappointments of what transpired in the morning leadership meeting. Her ability to change gears quickly was one of her strengths as a manager.

“Yes, I agree. You have every right to be upset. That is not how we operate. You have my commitment that I will personally sort this out and get it fixed.” Aimee’s directness and comforting tone were having the desired effect.

“How about your office at nine a.m. tomorrow morning? ... Again, please accept my apologies. Obviously this should have been attended to much sooner. I will call you when I arrive in your lobby. Thanks, Mr. Cameron, for letting me know. Yes, you can be confident we will make this right.”

The phone was still rocking in its cradle when Aimee swung open her door and bolted down the hall to her administrative assistant’s desk.

“Doris, find Joe and clear both our schedules for tomorrow. Tell him I need him to go with me to Richmond this afternoon. We’ll leave at three for a critical customer meeting. Tell him I’ll brief him in the car.”

In a military-like about-face, Aimee headed back to her office to call Marc to arrange for Kylie’s pickup at day care, while still

barking orders to Doris over her shoulder. “And pull all of PBH’s and Frank’s other customer files. I need them on my desk as soon as possible.”

She set her jaw determinedly. There would be no more surprises around Calara—not if she could help it.

CHAPTER 2

Ride from Richmond

“THANKS AGAIN FOR COMING WITH ME ON SUCH SHORT notice, Joe,” Aimee said as he slid into the Volvo’s passenger side, ready for the ride back to the office.

“Sure, no problem,” Joe replied with a sure and confident smile.

At age fifty-one, Joe had a fit form that was a testament to his passion for cycling, but his staid manner of dress belied his years in the sales business. A simple button-down shirt, khaki slacks, and a blue blazer were his standard wardrobe. No fancy suits for Joe, even though, based on his sales track record, he could easily afford them. He had a knack for getting close to his customers in an authentic way that led to deep, lasting, and very profitable relationships. His uncanny relationship skills supported Joe comfortably and allowed him to send his daughter to Georgetown and his son to Notre Dame. Joe had spent his entire adult life in sales of one type or another but really seemed to settle in at Calara Enterprises.

“I don’t know what I would have done in there without you,” Aimee continued. Joe smiled and gazed out the window at the passing scenery, as if receiving so much heartfelt praise made this modest man just a tad uncomfortable.

“I reviewed all of Frank’s files yesterday. I don’t think this is the only customer of his that has potential problems. How did we

miss this? I guess I've been focused too much on internal matters lately." Aimee was talking to herself as much as to Joe.

He had turned his head back to face her and nodded as she spoke.

"We need to reassign all of his accounts. And we need someone experienced to take over the PBH account. That one is really important to us." Aimee mentally ran through the list of reps in this region and came up empty. She paused, hoping for Joe to offer up a name.

He didn't.

She glanced at him. "Okay, so we don't have someone proven, someone with the right level of experience. Looks like we'll need to hire someone, but who?"

Joe smiled. "It will take too long to hire someone from outside and get them up to speed in time to have any impact on the PBH account. But I do have an idea. It's a little risky, however."

Aimee frowned. "What or whom do you have in mind?"

"Sally," Joe offered.

Aimee had met Sally briefly at a regional sales meeting. She seemed personable and carried herself well. But she was so green. She had been with the company for only six months. *We do so little to prepare new reps at Calara these days*, Aimee thought as she processed Joe's idea.

"Sally? I don't know." Aimee unconsciously shook her head from side to side. "I don't think she has the right level of experience."

Aimee was frustrated. If only she could just hire a superstar, plug that person in on the PBH account, and not have to worry about it further. Though she hesitated to admit it, she knew that wouldn't work. Everyone in the industry wanted to hire people from the limited supply of truly top talent. Calara had its fair

share of top performers like Joe, but she wanted more. She sighed because she knew it was unrealistic to simply hire them. What she really needed was a way to help good people achieve sales success at Calara. But how? How do you get great results from good people?

She said, “I guess Sally could be a possibility, but you know as well as I do that we’re not out of the woods yet with PBH. Is she up to this kind of challenge? Even I’m not clear how we should handle this customer and turn the account around. I’m especially disappointed that Frank let the account deteriorate so badly. I anticipated PBH growing into a big account—and having real impact on our fourth quarter.”

“Not to worry, Aimee. Mr. Cameron is going to come around. We’ll be fine. Sally will do a great job, and I’ll back her up all the way. We won’t let you down.”

“How can you be so sure, Joe?”

“I have dealt with clients like this a dozen times before—with a dozen different names in a dozen different companies. Mr. Cameron is just looking for someone he can trust. This was his first test to see if we can be that kind of partner.”

Joe’s confidence was like that of a pro golfer who had just hit a spectacular approach shot on his home course. His statement hung in the air for a moment just like a small white golf ball bouncing in the middle of a deep-green fairway.

Aimee’s gut instinct told her Joe would see this through. *I just need a way to clone Joe*, she mused. *That’s what I need to figure out. How do I make more Joes?* She realized that was the problem at Calara—the success of sales reps had been left up to chance or, worse yet, to “wishful” hiring.

Just then, the distinctive ring of an incoming call through the Volvo’s Bluetooth phone connection interrupted her thoughts.

Conroy's name displayed on the console screen in the center of the dashboard. *Oh great—Conroy. I really don't want to talk to him right now.* But she reached out and pressed the Accept button on the console anyway.

"Hello?"

"Aimee, it's Conroy."

"Yes, Conroy, what's up?"

"You missed the webinar this morning on digital selling." His barbed tone was even sharper than normal. "It was important for you to be there. At last week's leadership meeting we all committed to attend, *remember?*" His sarcasm made it not so much a question as an accusation.

"Ian really noticed your absence," he continued, "so I told him I'd give you a call to follow up. This doesn't have anything to do with Bill, does it?"

"No, Conroy. Nothing like that." Aimee was short in her retort and then fell silent, not trusting herself to control her anger with Conroy.

"Hello, Aimee, are you still there? Did we lose the connection? Aimee?" Conroy blasted, irritation building with each word.

"Yep, still here," Aimee returned in an even tone that betrayed nothing.

"Aimee, do you have any idea, *any idea*, the trouble I went through to line up ACP for a private presentation of this webinar?" Conroy's rage was building and totally disproportionate to the circumstance.

"Conroy," Aimee replied, her even tone recalling the times she cooled Kylie down from a temper tantrum, "I know you like this expert from ACP, and from the little research I've done, he

seems pretty credible. But come on, don't make this into such a big deal—”

“Aimee, this *is* a big deal!”

“Please slow down, Conroy. Let's talk about this.” Aimee tried once again to restore some calm to the conversation.

There was no reply.

“Conroy . . . Conroy, are you there?”

The familiar sound of a disconnected line abruptly emanated from the speaker.

She glanced at the dashboard control screen, expecting to see the message “Call failed.” Instead, she saw the routine message “Call ended.”

“He hung up on me.” Aimee said, incredulous.

“What?” Joe, who had obviously been listening to the conversation, chimed in.

“Oh, nothing,” Aimee said quickly. “We must have lost our connection.”

“Come on, Aimee, what gives? I couldn't help but overhear Conroy and his tone.”

“It's nothing . . . I think. Don't worry about it.”

Aimee wanted to open up to Joe and let him in on what was behind Bill's abrupt departure, but she couldn't. Not yet. She needed to know more about what was going on with Conroy and the digital selling initiative with ACP. The last thing she needed was to unnecessarily spook Joe and undermine his productivity. Until she had a firm grasp on what was going on and how to move forward, she would insulate Joe from the craziness.

“Conroy was upset that I missed a meeting this morning that he had planned for over a week. I'm sure Doris told him I couldn't attend when she cleared our calendars for today.”

“Maybe he just missed the message,” Joe offered. “But did he ask you where you were instead of the meeting?”

“No. The thought that I might have a more pressing issue than his meeting apparently never crossed his mind.” Aimee had meant for that reply to sound offhand, but she could hear the frustration in her voice and knew Joe heard it, too.

Joe nodded and then looked out the window thoughtfully.

“We are where we needed to be today, Joe—with a key customer. I just hope this Mr. Cameron comes through for us. I’m counting on you to guide Sally. We can’t drop the ball again.”

“I’ll guide Sally to make sure Mr. Cameron comes around,” Joe reassured her, relaxing as the conversation turned back to more comfortable ground. “I guarantee it.”

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After she dropped Joe off at the office, Aimee stayed in the parking lot and placed a call to Faith. She wanted to get Faith’s read on the situation with Conroy. Aimee had always been able to rely on Faith’s guidance to help her navigate the politics of Calara.

“Hello, Faith, it’s Aimee. Thanks for picking up so late.”

“Sure, what’s up?” Faith’s question carried no surprise.

“Hey, I just needed a sounding board. I think I screwed up with Conroy and have gotten myself into hot water. Did Conroy say anything to you?”

“Yes, he called and was pretty upset. I tried to talk him down a bit. I said that I was sure you had a good reason for missing the meeting.”

“That’s just it, Faith. He didn’t even ask where I was or what had pulled me away.”

“So where were you?”

“I was with Joe making an emergency call on a client. Frank really bungled this one,” she explained. “I think we managed to avert the worst, at least for the time being. Joe was really good, as always. We’ll get the relationship back in order.”

“I suspected it was something like that. I know we can always count on you to handle the tough situations with clients. That is one of the reasons we brought you back.”

“Thanks, Faith. But what about Conroy?” Aimee’s confidence waned as she shifted the conversation.

“Conroy’s upset, very upset,” Faith’s tone was sharp. “The digital strategy initiative is important.”

“Of course,” Aimee demurred, a bit surprised by Faith’s tone. “I’ll call him tomorrow. Any advice on how to approach the conversation to get past this?”

Faith’s pause was longer than expected and much longer than was typical in a conversation with Aimee. The dead silence caused Aimee’s stomach to do a flip.

“Okay, I won’t call. I’ll go to his office to meet him—”

“Meanwhile,” Faith cut Aimee short—her voice had transformed from that of a reassuring confidant to that of a person in a position of authority—“you need to know I’ve asked Doris to put some time on the calendar for us tomorrow to talk about the quarter’s projections. We have to make sure we’re meeting the street’s expectations. There are some hard choices ahead for us all.”

“I see” was the only response that Aimee could muster. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Faith concluded abruptly.

Aimee felt sick. She didn’t need to know the details to understand that tomorrow’s conversation would be an unpleasant one.

CHAPTER 3

Changing Faith

FAITH'S OFFICE HAD ALWAYS SEEMED WARM AND FULL OF cheer. Maybe it was the fact that the overcast day blocked any hint of sunshine or the tone in Faith's voice last night was coloring Aimee's perceptions in a new way—whatever it was, Aimee twitched in the chair, her arms folded to ward off the chill she was experiencing as she waited for Faith to return from the printer. Aimee wasn't used to feeling this way when it came to Faith. The two of them had always maintained an open and supportive relationship. The warmth, even in Faith's greeting as Aimee came into her office, was absent. It occurred to Aimee that this was symbolic of the new Calara itself.

Faith held the unstapled sheets of paper close to her body as she returned to the office. Without a word, she found her way around her large, well-managed desk and placed the freshly printed pages face down in front of her. Aimee waited silently, arms still folded, for Faith to speak. Her nature was to jump right in and break the silence, but she resisted. This was Faith's meeting: *I'll wait for her to set the tone*, Aimee reasoned. Besides, even if their communication styles were different, in the end they all wanted the same thing—business results. Since they were aligned on that, surely they would eventually align on how to go about it.

“Aimee, I really . . . we all really appreciate the way you have jumped in to keep things going since Bill’s departure. Yesterday’s Richmond trip is just one example.”

“Thanks.”

“One of the tasks that Conroy was helping Bill with was a review of our overhead associated with the sales force.” Faith picked up the papers from the desk—keeping them close as she found the right words for Aimee. “Changes are going on that require us all to think differently about the way sales operates.”

What changes? Aimee realized Conroy had lots of ideas about how to change the marketing approach, but what sales changes has he convinced Faith of? *What, she wondered, could Conroy possibly know about the sales force?*

“Conroy finished his analysis late yesterday. Bottom line: we need to reduce our sales force substantially, with a 20 percent cut immediately.”

The clipped cadence of Faith’s words did not invite comment from Aimee as Faith diverted her eyes from Aimee’s face and busied herself with the papers on her desk.

Though Aimee did not speak, every fiber of her body was sounding an alarm. She knew from the phone call yesterday that this was not going to be a pleasant meeting, but this was worse than she thought. Canning the very people who held the relationship with the customers? This was a short-term fix to reduce costs that would jeopardize the long-term profitability of the company. What was Faith thinking?

“Aimee, there are tough choices to make. Here is the recommended list of initial cuts that Conroy developed based on an analysis of last quarter’s sales results.”

The two women avoided eye contact as Faith pushed the list across the desk to Aimee, who reluctantly received it. Without glancing up, Aimee began to scan the list. As she did, she realized the names were mostly people that had joined the company during her absence. Then her eyes landed on a familiar name.

“What? Faith, you’ve got to be kidding!” Aimee blurted. “Joe Fabri is on this list! There is no way he should be remotely considered. Conroy is nuts!”

The sudden anger in her voice broke the tension in the room in a way that caught Faith off guard. Aimee sprang to her feet, towering over Faith, who remained impassive behind her desk.

“Faith, what is going on?” Aimee’s internal alarms started going off. “Why is Joe on this list? Why is there even a list?”

“Aimee, you know that we’ve been under serious market pressures over the last few months,” Faith replied frostily. “One of the reasons Conroy had the lead in developing the list is that we wanted to take the emotional element out of the process.” Faith eyed Aimee as if to underscore her point. “Joe’s numbers must not have been good enough last quarter when compared to his cost to the company,” she concluded dismissively.

Aimee had no doubt in her mind that Faith and Conroy were approaching this all wrong, with potentially disastrous results. She knew there was a better way to solve this challenge, but she just couldn’t quite articulate it.

The best she could come up with at the moment was “Is this final? Will Conroy be taking action on all of these people—will he look them in the eye to give them the news?”

Faith folded her arms across her chest; she was in full authoritative mode. “No, taking action on the list is totally your

responsibility. We would like this to be wrapped up by the end of the month. Let me know your plan as soon as possible.”

Faith returned her gaze to the papers on the desk as she added, “And as always, don’t hesitate to call me with questions.”

Aimee took her cue. Without speaking another word, she folded the list in half, turned, and left. *Faith has lost touch with the people who make the company go*, Aimee thought. One of the reasons they had become such close colleagues over the years was Faith’s empathy for the people on the front line, those who did the hard work every day to keep the company moving and, until recently, growing. Whatever was behind her change of attitude didn’t matter. This was not the same Faith that she had come to know and trust.

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Aimee gritted her teeth for the rest of the day and reluctantly plodded through the remaining meetings on her calendar. When she finally returned to her office, she bypassed the motion detector on the wall light switch. Her head pounded with a relentless and sharp pain just in back of both eyes, and she didn’t want to face the bright, artificial glare of the overhead fluorescent lights.

Aimee sat alone in her office in the near dark. The day was lost. She did not remember a single conversation since she had left Faith’s office. The list Faith had given her remained folded in half and tucked into her journal, which lay open in front of her. Although emotionally she was dreading it, her business mind was telling her to pull out the list and review it in detail. She needed to start formulating her plan regarding each of the individuals on the page.

As she grasped the folded paper, she stopped short of pulling the page out and looking at it again. She knew who was on the list. Joe was on the list. This was all that mattered. Her heart sank. This was no longer the Calara that she—and Bill and Joe, for that matter—had helped to build.

As much as she admired Bill over the course of her career, at this moment she resented him. How could he leave her with this mess? He had to have known what was going on. Did he just bail? Maybe that explains why he didn't talk with her before he left. Maybe he was feeling guilty for leaving her with all the hard decisions. She still couldn't get over his leaving without warning. If he were still here, Aimee knew she would be sitting in Bill's office right now talking this over with him, and together they would sort out the whole mess.

She could hear Bill's voice in her head. "Aimee, you know what your problem is. You don't want to fire Joe because you admire him—you want to be like him. In many respects you are just like him, just a younger, more up-to-date version. You and Joe and I, we're all alike. We care that our customers' needs are met. When we have a conversation with any one of our customers, we are having a conversation with a person, a person who needs our help to succeed. We know this is not only the right way to be, it's the smart way to be."

Aimee knew this notion was absolutely right. She chuckled to herself. *Bill's not even here and he's still giving me advice.*

A flood of emotion hit her. Calara has been built into a successful company on strong connections with its customers—connections that come not through a slick digital marketing message but through dedicated efforts of people like Joe and her. She couldn't even imagine Conroy in front of a customer. She tried

to picture Conroy, armed with his defensive remarks and condescending attitude, conducting the meeting with Mr. Cameron in Richmond instead of using the can-do, we'll-make-it-right approach taken by Joe and her. *What a disaster!* she thought.

Aimee pulled the list from her journal and turned on the lights. As she stood over her desk reading the list, really reading it for the first time, the truth of the situation struck her squarely: if Joe goes, the stage is set for everyone like Joe to go. Joe is the first domino in a long line of sales team dominos—that would end with her.

She felt the blood drain from her face. *This can't be happening.*

Beyond her own situation, Aimee could see that without the skill of the sales team and the relationships it had forged with clients, Calara Enterprises' position in the marketplace would be in danger.

Her thoughts turned back to Bill. *Where is he?* Though she had always strived to be like Bill, it suddenly struck her that in this important matter she would not be like Bill and just abandon ship. She could not turn her back on Joe. She had to come up with a game plan.

Her mind now racing, searching frantically for a solution, she returned to her stiff office chair.

Bill may not want to be found. The reality hit her. Her body stiffened to match the chair, but her mind was flooded with conflicted thoughts, subconsciously scanning every avenue for a possible path out of this mess. She kept thinking about Calara's business and her history with the company. Aimee grabbed her journal and began to doodle on the first blank page.

She wrote the word "People" at the top of the page. She intuitively knew that the ultimate answer lay with the people, the sales

People



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Results

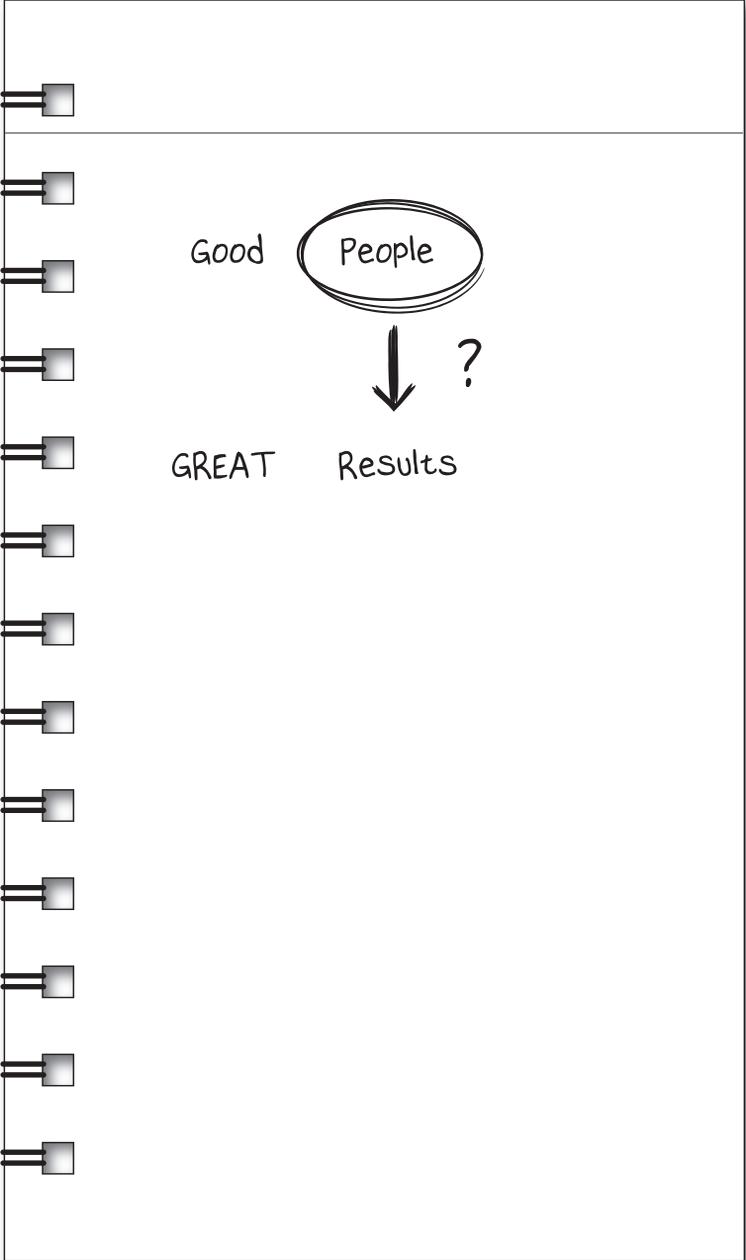
force, who had daily contact with their customers. A bit further down the page she added the word “Results.” Without question, that was what they were ultimately after.

Aimee’s spirit brightened as she rapidly drew several circles around “People” and then added an arrow down the page from “People” to “Results.” She reinforced the arrow to make it stand out even more. *How do I tie these together?* Aimee thought as she added a question mark next to her arrow. Take the new sales rep, Sally: how do we help new people like Sally gain clarity about the job we are asking them to do so they know not only what targets to hit but how to hit them?

Aimee scrutinized the page in front of her and almost through reflex added the word “Good” in front of “People” and “Great” in front of “Results.” This was the question that haunted her: “How do we help good people achieve great results?”

Her doodling slowed and seemed to lose focus as she pondered this question. Then, out of nowhere, another name popped up: Shafe, her older brother. A football coach and former player himself, Shafe had a different way of looking at situations and had always offered her good advice over the years.

Her pulse picked up and the color returned to her face. *He’ll give me a fresh perspective.* She figured she could catch him between team practice sessions if she called him on the way into the office tomorrow. She smiled as she glanced down at her doodles again. People, yes. And the person to count on now was Shafe.



CHAPTER 4

Coach Shafe

AS AIMEE SETTLED IN FOR HER WESTWARD JOURNEY ON ROUTE 50 to her office just outside of DC, the sign for Rowe Boulevard, the exit that led to the Naval Academy, reminded her of conversations with her brother. Shafe lived and breathed football. He started playing in Pee Wees when he was six and fell more in love with the sport every year. She loved her big brother. She also loved the fact that all her female friends refer to him as “Clark Kent” on account of his jet-black hair, chiseled jaw, and broad shoulders atop his six foot, four inch frame.

When Shafe got the job as the offensive line coach at the Naval Academy, he was so excited it was hard to put up with him. Every conversation turned to football. Before long, Aimee felt as if she could coach the offensive line alongside Shafe. She had listened to so many impassioned explanations of football offenses, blocking schemes, and audibles or audios or whatever they called that stuff. But, she had to admit, Shafe’s passion for the game drove him and those around him to new heights. Navy actually had a pretty good football team, and Shafe’s passion was no doubt part of Navy’s success using the triple-option offense. Shafe spoke of the triple option admiringly—a multifaceted offense that relies mostly on running plays. Maybe, thought Aimee, she could translate some of that passion into something usable for Calara’s sales team.

She strained to recall what Shafe had tried to explain to her over Thanksgiving dinner last year. He told her the key to Navy's wins was somehow connected to scoring and time of possession of the ball.

"Oh gee, brother, winning has to do with scoring? Duh!" she'd teased him then. "Pass the turkey, will you?"

Now she wished she had actually paid attention. Had he been talking about how long it took to score or how to score with possession of the ball? And what about passion for playing the game? How did that factor in?

She reflected back on the situation with Mr. Cameron in Richmond. Lots of people had a passion for growing the business. But not all of them could channel that into action that mattered. Aimee knew she could always count on Joe, who consistently managed to convert his passion into tangible results on the front line of sales. But what she didn't know was his secret for doing it. Did he understand something that no one else did? Did he just care more? Or did he think about sales from a different perspective? Whatever it was, he was clearly more effective than most. Somehow, Aimee felt Shafe held clues that would help her get a new perspective on her sales team and fix the problems that lay ahead.

She pushed the Voice command button on the steering wheel, said "Call Shafe on mobile," and waited for the computer voice to respond: "Calling Shafe on mobile."

"Hey, Sis," he answered quickly.

"Hi, Shafe." Second thoughts gripped Aimee. Maybe she shouldn't bother him with her work woes. Shafe was in the middle of football season and must be overloaded already.

"Sis?"

“I know you’re busy . . . maybe I should call back.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I really don’t want to bother you.”

“Talk to me, Aimee.”

Aimee smiled—Shafe, always in problem-solving mode. “It’s just work,” she replied. “It seems to keep getting worse, and now they want me to fire one of my top sales reps before the end of the month! I feel in some weird way like it’s an attack on me, too. Not only that, this is all going to end up compromising Calara’s success.”

“Okay. Okay. Let’s back up. Do you really think that the company would allow something like that to happen? Why are they saying that your rep’s going to be let go?”

“Profits this quarter are down. They are looking for ways to quickly cut costs.” Aimee paused. “What they are forgetting is that Joe is one of our top performers. If I had lots more reps like Joe, more performing at his level, our sales team would drive the business through this slump.”

“Tell me how I can help, Sis.”

“That’s just it, Shafe. I can’t stop thinking about your passion around getting your linemen to perform. How do you get such consistent performance? Can I use the same principles here for our sales team?”

“Well, that’s an interesting thought. I’ve never really considered how our approach might be used in a business environment. What led you to this connection?”

“I don’t know, Shafe. Partly it’s you. You might not realize it, but I really hear the way you talk about your guys—how they are always giving their all. How the line is key to Navy’s turnaround.” Aimee paused. “I know it’s a stretch, but performance is

performance, right? There has to be something in your approach that I can use.”

“There you go again, Sis. Always thinking out of the box and looking for clarity. I love that about you. You could be on to something here. What’s the one thing that you and your sales team focus on?”

“Sales or revenue, I suppose.”

“Okay, that makes sense, but you have to get more specific.”

“What do you mean? What’s more specific than revenue?” Aimee asked with a renewed interest. She had always taken for granted that revenue was the end goal, the thing they should all focus on. But Shafe’s question immediately sparked an entirely new train of thought. What if she hadn’t thought deeply enough yet about the end goal?

Shafe continued, “Look. I’m slammed right now, but can you stop by one day after practice? We can start to map out some potential ways that Navy’s approach to equipping the team on the football field may help you with your sales team.”

“Shafe, that would be great!” Aimee told him—and then hesitated. “You’re not just being nice, are you? The idea doesn’t sound too far-fetched?”

“Absolutely not! Keep your chin up, Sis. I predict a game-winning score in your future. Whatever you do, don’t let the nonsense get you down.”

“Thanks, Shafe. See you soon.” Aimee pushed the End Call button on the console as she gave an audible sigh of relief.

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Aimee whistled her own rendition of the Navy fight song as she walked quickly past the BMW, Audi, and Infiniti in the employee

parking garage. She had a spring in her step that had been absent since Faith gave her Conroy's plan for eliminating jobs. She could hardly wait until her visit with Shafe next week. She was sure she was on to something—something that would not only transform the sales group but could spread to other places within the company. As she waved her security badge past the door reader, she reached into her small purse and grabbed her iPhone to quickly confirm her schedule. As usual, she was among the first in the building and she had an hour before her first meeting. Without thinking, she pushed the up arrow by the elevator door.

Aimee mentally began to map out questions she had to ask Shafe. How does he pick the starting lineup? How does he equip not only the starting players but the backups with what they need to get such consistent performance across the board, especially given the recruiting challenges Navy faces. Highly sought-after recruits from linemen to quarterbacks always shy away from Navy as a choice. The best high school players have pro football careers as their aspiration, and a five-year commitment to serve in the military makes a pro football career next to impossible. So who comes to Navy to play football? And what strategy do her brother and the rest of the coaching staff use to ensure they are competitive against other teams? How do they get such great results out of players who otherwise aren't superstars? What makes the difference? So many questions!

"I know! Joe!" Aimee said out loud, standing alone in the middle of the quiet morning elevator. It was all coming together: Joe loves football. He is always spouting off sports analogies. She'd talk through her questions with him before her meeting with her brother.

Joe was always her go-to guy. For new ideas, difficult customers, training for new reps—whatever she needed, Joe always came through. That’s why she knew she had to put a stop to the nonsense about firing Joe. She admitted his sales had been a little down over the last quarter, but he was experimenting with the positioning of the new product suite. Joe was the first to notice that the old messaging was not going to work, and he was at the forefront of working out a new value proposition. *No way we’ll let him go.*

She quickly shifted back to thinking about the sales team. *The Calara Offensive Sales Strategy, modeled after the famed Navy Triple Option. Joe is going to love it!*

The elevator door completed its lazy opening sequence, and Aimee quickly stepped out, her heels clicking down the nicely decorated hallway to her windowed office overlooking the atrium. As she rounded the corner, Aimee suddenly stopped and cocked her head slightly. What were those noises? As she listened closer, it sounded like Ian and Faith talking. Their voices were coming from her office—and her office light was on. What was happening?

Aimee’s heartbeat quickened as with each step she confirmed the curious gathering in *her* office, her island of sanity in this otherwise crazy existence.

“Hi, Ian. Hi, Faith.” Aimee summoned a firm tone as she crossed the threshold. The comfortable banter that Aimee had detected earlier from the hallway evaporated. “Didn’t expect to find you two here. What’s going on—am I about to get fired?” Aimee asked in an offhand, joking tone that belied the nervousness she felt.

Ian was first to speak. “No, no, of course not, Aimee.”

Faith chimed in: "Please, sit down. We apologize if we startled you. We all have a packed day ahead of us and Ian and I wanted to give you a quick heads-up."

"Heads-up? Heads-up about what?" Aimee's voice was missing its usual upbeat tone.

"Don't get concerned—it's good news. Things are moving fast around here right now. Lots of new ideas and the need to stir things up." Ian paused to gauge Aimee's reaction.

Ian looked surprised when Aimee smiled slightly as she suddenly saw the unplanned meeting as an opportunity to change Ian's and Faith's minds regarding cutting the sales force.

"I know that Faith has talked to you about the need to downsize the sales organization. We're not taking such action lightly. We both want you to realize that," Ian continued.

"I do realize it, and that's why I want to talk it through. This is a major change in direction, and we all need to understand the implications to our customers."

Ian cut her off. "Believe me, Aimee, we've already been through this. We weighed the pros and cons and have settled on a course."

Ian's tone shattered Aimee's hope of guiding the conversation to an about-face on the downsizing. Instead she suddenly found herself defensively reacting to Ian.

"So does that mean the decision is final? How can you make such a decision without a lot more discussion?" Aimee's voice clearly showed signs of frustration.

"Nothing's final, Aimee," Faith jumped in. "Look, I'll book some time for you and me to begin to map out our direction in regard to the sales function."

The room had become uncomfortable. Aimee looked out the window and away from the two intruders to gather her

composure. She wouldn't let them get the best of her in this "friendly" ambush.

Faith continued, "Actually, we didn't come here to talk about the sales organization."

"Really? What then?" To Aimee's mind, nothing was more important than saving the sales team.

"We just wanted to give you a heads-up that Conroy will be stopping by later today. He's going to ask for your help on the new initiative that he's spearheading," Ian said. His reversion to his usual matter-of-fact style calmed Aimee somewhat. "Conroy is onto something, Aimee. I think it will move the company to the next level."

"Conroy's new project will go a lot better with your help and support, Aimee," said Faith. Her tone shifted abruptly to that of mentor and confidant. "Just hear Conroy out when he stops by. That's all we ask."

"The company needs you to be on board, Aimee," Ian concluded as he quickly stood and moved toward the door.

"Let's talk again after you and Conroy have connected," Faith said in a reassuring tone as she followed Ian out of Aimee's office.

As soon as she heard the elevator door close and the muffled tones of Ian and Faith disappear, Aimee jumped up and slammed her door. The forceful bang would have garnered attention up and down the hallway had anyone else been on the floor at this hour.

Aimee stood motionless. Her shoulders arched against the sturdy oak, unconsciously bracing the door shut lest any additional intruders attempt to violate the sanctuary that she meticulously maintained.

What had this place become? Aimee was disappointed in Faith—using their friendship to manipulate her to support some

cockamamie plan of Conroy's. Aimee never wanted to open her office door again. She sighed. What made her think she could just walk back into the work world and pick up where she had left off? She had initially been so optimistic, comforted by the numerous successes she had achieved before she took time off to start her family. But the whole place was different now. Decisions were made in late-night private sessions instead of in team meetings and discussions. There were factions and alliances and secrets. What a mess! The old openness and team spirit seemed to be gone. Also gone was the willingness to think outside the box—even to *talk* about outside the box. How could she possibly think they'd be open to anything like applying lessons from Navy football to the business? What was she thinking? This was no football team, and she was no Shafe.