

Getting Fired

Betty and Elaine had been close friends since high school. They had worked at a variety of jobs for a few years after graduation, and eventually Betty was able to start her own clothing store. Elaine was looking for something new to do, and before long Betty hired her as manager.

At first things went well. Both women were hard workers, and the company grew. Later, when Betty decided that she needed to spend more time with her family, she gradually reduced the number of hours she spent at work. Elaine continued at the same pace, however, even when Betty urged her to slow down. Although she worked many hours overtime, Elaine was content with a flat salary each month, especially when Betty gave her a car allowance and other benefits that had not been in their original employment contract.

As time passed the company prospered, but problems developed between Betty and Elaine. Elaine was assertive as the manager, and didn't hesitate to express her ideas about the business in a forceful way. Betty was rather easygoing and avoided confrontations with Elaine as much as possible, even when their opinions differed on important issues.

Without meaningful communication, their frustration grew until it erupted in a heated argument at the end of a long, hot day. Tempers flared, and soon Betty said, "That's it! I'm tired of you always telling me how to run my company. You're fired!"

Over the next few weeks Elaine's resentment at being fired deepened, and soon she was talking to an attorney about suing Betty to force her to pay \$8,000 for Elaine's overtime during the previous three years. Fortunately, a mutual friend learned of their falling out and was able to persuade them to submit their dispute to Christian conciliation. A panel consisting of an attorney, a respected friend, and a Christian conciliator met with them several times over the next few weeks.

During the early meetings both women were extremely defensive. Each justified her conduct and placed all the blame for the conflict on the other. After several fruitless meetings, the conciliators were losing hope of settling the dispute. They agreed to meet one last time, however, and asked both women to study certain Bible passages before they came together again.

God used those passages to change Betty's heart.

The next time they met, she took an entirely new approach to the situation. Instead of defending herself and focusing on her own interests, she began to admit the things she had done that had contributed to the dispute. She confessed that she had developed a critical attitude toward Elaine over the past year, which added to the tension in their relationship. In addition, she acknowledged that she had done a poor job of communicating with Elaine and had given her many inconsistent instructions. She also

admitted that she had let greed control some of her business decisions, and that she had been wrong to let her temper get out of control. Finally Betty looked at Elaine and said, "You know, I've not only ruined a good friendship through this, but I've also lost a great manager. I can't find anyone who works as hard or manages the store as well as you did."

Elaine's eyes filled with tears when she heard this. "You don't know what that means to me," she said. "I've never been fired before, and this really destroyed my confidence." She paused and then went on. "These events have forced me to see some changes I need to make in my life, too. What you just said helps me believe that I can do it."

Since Elaine had already accepted a new job, reinstatement was not an issue. Elaine agreed that Betty did not owe her any money, but Betty still decided to give her a generous gift to help her get back on her feet financially. Elaine accepted the gift with gratitude. By changing their attitudes and taking responsibility for their own faults, Betty and Elaine averted a lawsuit and preserved a valuable friendship.