

Thomas & Tutson (2009)

Cultural Intelligence:
Living & working
globally



Living and Working in the Global Village

LET'S JUST TALK IT OUT

Bob Weber hangs up the telephone and leaps to his feet. Furious, he bounds out of his office in search of his Korean-born administrative assistant, Joanne Park. He has just been berated by his customer in Pennsylvania for not sending the contract for softwood lumber to him on the date specified. This exchange, plus the current volatility in the Canadian stock market, is really making him edgy. As he walks down the hall toward the employee lunchroom, he begins to calm down. He knows he must handle this situation with an employee carefully.

He arrives at the lunchroom and pokes his head in the door.

"Is Joanne here?" He sees her at a table, sharing her lunch with several other administrative staff. He still feels annoyed, but he keeps his voice in control.

"Oh, I see you are in here. I was looking for that contract to Zott Industries that I asked you to type. Did you forget?"

Everyone stops talking. They look uncomfortable. Joanne gets up from the table.

"Oh, Mr. Weber, I am so sorry! I will do it right this minute!"

"No, that's okay. After lunch is fine. But, we do need to get it out today." He goes out.

Joanne averts her eyes. She looks miserable. The other staff are looking at each other knowingly.

A few minutes later Bob is sitting behind his desk busily talking on the telephone. Joanne comes in briskly and delivers the contract (with two hands, typical of Korean culture) into Bob's in-box.

She then turns and goes out just as briskly and closes the door firmly but quietly behind her.

Bob ends his phone call, gets up from his desk, and follows Joanne into the hall. His anger has gone. After all, Joanne has never made such a mistake before. Now he is concerned for her.

"Joanne, can you come in here for a minute."

Joanne comes in obediently and stands in front of him with her head down, not making eye contact with Bob.

"Is there some sort of a problem here? If so, we need to talk about it."

There is no response from Joanne.

"Does it have something to do with forgetting to type the contract?"

Joanne nods. She still doesn't look at him.

He is conciliatory, friendly. "Oh! That was no big deal! It's done now. Just forget about it. But in the future just make sure and tell me if something is wrong so we can talk it out. Okay?"

Joanne nods again.

Over the next few weeks Joanne takes several days of sick leave, and three weeks later she resigns.