

CHAPTER 8

HANDLING THE WICKED IN YOUR WORKPLACE OR BUSINESS - PART TWO

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

Matthew 10:16 (NASB)

*O you who love the Lord, hate evil!
He preserves the lives of his saints;
he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
Psalm 97:10 (ESV)*

*Through thy precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.
Psalm 119:104 (RSV)*

⁶ Thus Ab'salom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Ab'salom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

2 Samuel 15:6 (RSV)

¹² And while Ab'salom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahith'ophel the Gi'lonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Ab'salom kept increasing.

2 Samuel 15:12 (RSV)

⁶ And David said to Abi'shai, “Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Ab'salom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he get himself fortified cities, and cause us trouble.”

2 Samuel 20:6 (RSV)

*¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

*¹¹ Behold, all who are incensed against you
shall be put to shame and confounded;
those who strive against you
shall be as nothing and shall perish.*

*¹² You shall seek those who contend with you,
but you shall not find them;
those who war against you
shall be as nothing at all.*

*¹³ For I, the Lord your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, “Fear not,
I am the one who helps you.”*

Isaiah 41:10-13 (ESV)

Resolve now, ahead of time, that you will never change your course of action as a result of any intimidation, no matter what people threaten to do.

Many people, even leaders and managers, make decisions on the basis of fear. They fear to take a particular step, even if they know it is the right thing to do. You can't prevent yourself feeling fear. It

is a natural reaction to a threat, and can even be beneficial. But you can decide that you will never let fear *influence you* or cause you to alter your actions or choices. What you do is a matter of choice and should be decided solely by your *will*, not by your feelings.

Irrespective of how afraid you may *feel* you can always choose, as an exercise of your will, not to *act* on your fear. Then, no matter what people threaten to do to you, or to your business, you can press ahead regardless, if you believe that to be right. You can do exactly what you think is the right thing to do, even if you feel afraid. I stress this because I have often heard people speak as if it is reasonable, and even inevitable, that they should alter their plans if something frightens them. That is not valid. We should never let ourselves be controlled, or even influenced, by our fears.

Fear is never a legitimate basis on which to act, or react, or to refrain from acting. Even if the threat is entirely real, it is still not a valid basis for buckling and giving in. That said, most threats are actually lies anyway and the person threatening us cannot carry it out. For example, I had a PA called Julie who was very devious and manipulative. That had always been so, but I did not discover it until the end, when she was caught fabricating evidence to falsely accuse another employee of damaging a board room table. In fact, she had damaged it herself, and on purpose.

When I confronted her she tried to resist the investigation by attempting to intimidate me into taking no further action. She denied the charges and told a pack of lies. I told her I was suspending her and would be interviewing her again as part of our investigatory/disciplinary process. I also said that one of the outcomes could, potentially, be her dismissal. One is obliged by law to point that out. When I said that, she adopted a sinister facial expression and tone of voice and said: "*It would be such a shame if it comes to that, because of all the things that will come out that will damage other people.*"

She was suggesting that she knew things about me, and about others working for me, that would be embarrassing if made public at an Employment Tribunal. For a few seconds her words alarmed me, as they were meant to. However, I reminded myself that I had resolved, years before, that I would never, *under any circumstances*, be guided by fear, especially by fear of other people or the threats they may make. I then began to think clearly again and asked myself: "*What things? What people? What damage?*" Even as I asked myself those basic questions, I realised she was bluffing.

There were no "*things*" that might "*come out*". It was all nonsense. All she could do was lie about me. The truth could do me no harm. I also resolved that even if she was willing to tell lies, and even if those lies damaged the firm, I would not give way to her. I was determined never to be influenced, in any way at all, by her threats. So I braced myself and said: "*You can say whatever you like, truthfully or otherwise. Nothing you can ever say will prevent me investigating your conduct and then moving to a disciplinary hearing, and even contacting the police, if the evidence supports it*".

As I said that, she maintained a defiant face, but I ignored that and gave her a date and a time to return to the office to continue the investigatory procedure. It quickly emerged that her bold face, and her threats were a bluff. She went straight out to her car in the firm's car park and came back *immediately* with a letter of resignation! There was no time to write or print that. She had *already typed it, even before she came to see me*, and before she made her threats. I realised that her whole stance had been a bluff from the outset. She never had any intention of carrying out her threats.

It was just an attempt to intimidate me, but with no substance. In any event, I had already made that decision, long before, that I would never bow to any threat, *real or otherwise*, so I did not need any time to think it over. My policy had already been settled in my own mind long beforehand. Therefore, from the moment her threats were made, I set my face like flint and resolved to press ahead with the investigation, regardless of what she might do or say. That said, I was under no illusions and was fully aware that she could easily invent something and harm me because lies are often believed.

It also takes a lot of time and effort to disprove lies, which costs money in itself. Nevertheless, those potential costs and dangers had no bearing on my *decisions* because I was adamant that I wasn't willing

to be manipulated or intimidated by her, *no matter what the cost might be of standing up to her*. It has to be that absolute. If not, people will discern that your resolve has limits and that all they have to do is to keep the pressure on you, until you reach the limits of your endurance and give way to them. If you give them any basis to think that you have a limit, beyond which you won't go, they will make certain to take you up to that limit and beyond it.

Never negotiate with 'terrorists'.

I recommend that you adopt the same policy and confront wrongdoers head on. Do it firmly, decisively, and without ever paying any attention to their threats. If you are consistent, word will get around that you "*never negotiate with terrorists*". That is a useful reputation to have and you should do all you can to develop it. Julie used to be my PA so she had seen me at first hand dealing with other wrongdoers. She knew that, once I have realised I am being deceived or manipulated, I leave no stone unturned in investigating them.

Therefore she knew I would eventually be able to prove that she had deliberately damaged the boardroom table. She also knew that I would not hesitate to sack her, and even go to the police to report her actions as a crime. But she still felt that intimidation was worth a try, even as a bluff. However, once she saw that I was not going to budge she gave up immediately and resigned in order to avoid being sacked and even prosecuted. Wicked people are very calculating.

They tend not to launch suicide missions in which they themselves will also be damaged. They may *threaten* to destroy themselves and you, but they will usually pull out, at the last minute, if they see that you are not scared. They need to be shown that you are completely willing to suffer any amount of loss and damage rather than give in to them, and that you won't alter your course, no matter what they may say or do. The wicked are rational and they know when they are beaten.

They also know when their own self-interest is best served by retreat, or even by fleeing from the fight. At first they won't *expect* you to be courageous in resisting them because so few people are brave. They are well aware that most managers will give in to threats. But the position changes once they realise you are an exception to that general rule and that you will never 'blink'. They will then give up, just as demons will when you wake up, resist them, and show genuine resolve.

The threats I faced from 'Mavis', a lawyer who was sacked and then sued me and also tried to intimidate me via the media

This story arose when I appointed a solicitor without knowing that she was a friend of 'Keira', to whom I referred earlier. I made Mavis a salaried partner and put her in charge of a team of lawyers and support staff. However, Mavis was a major disappointment in her abilities, attitude and character. So after only five months she was sacked because she was a 'dud' and would never make the grade. She had not given up any job to come to us. She had been out of work at the time we appointed her, so she was not made any worse off by our decision.

Mavis then brought a claim in an Employment Tribunal. She couldn't claim unfair dismissal because she had not got the necessary length of service. So she tried to be clever by inventing a way of turning her case into one of sex discrimination, rather than unfair dismissal. She did that by alleging that our real reason for dismissing her was not her incompetence but that I had objected to her wearing a short skirt in the office! That was nonsense and had nothing whatever to do with her dismissal. I didn't even know she had worn a short skirt, if indeed she ever had.

At any rate, I had never seen it. Nevertheless, her scheme worked for a while and she was allowed to issue her claim, even though it was pure fiction. She then began a weird media campaign. She contacted the national newspapers and they printed articles with photographs of her wearing the short skirt, to

which I had supposedly objected. I felt it reflected more badly on her than on me, but that wasn't how she saw it. In any case, she had no sense of shame and didn't mind making a spectacle of herself. However, she thought I would be mortified by it, which I was.

It was very upsetting to me, and also to my wife, to have all this bad publicity, especially as it was all invented. I wouldn't have minded so much if she had been criticising something I had actually said or done. On one occasion a journalist came to our house, while I was out, and tried to interview my wife. She was upset, but made no comment. Then, when that newspaper article came out, it was an attack on me personally and said that I “*give money to support anti-abortion groups*”. That was presented as a fault on my part.

The aim was to discredit me, at least in the eyes of the wrong-thinking element of the community, which is a sizeable group. So my being referred to as “anti-abortion” provoked more antagonism. The tactics which Mavis was using were designed to put me under personal pressure. She also imagined that I would fear going to a tribunal hearing at which she might make any number of equally weird allegations. She was an exhibitionist herself, but she knew that I wasn't one.

Therefore, she hoped that by keeping up a stream of adverse publicity I would eventually give in and pay her a lot of money. Moreover, her claim was not small, because there is no upper limit on the damages in discrimination cases. Therefore she was claiming over £100,000 (\$150,000) and perhaps even more. However, I had decided that I would never bow to her tactics so I appointed a barrister to represent me and let it go all the way to trial. That was a surprise to Mavis. She had expected me to buckle and to settle the claim with a large payment.

How Mavis abandoned her case and received nothing when I stood up to her

Because I did not cave in the first day of the hearing actually arrived. Her lawyer began his opening submissions and was asked some questions by the Chairman. It was Mavis who then began to panic, not me. She had fully expected that I would make her an offer, even in the corridor outside the hearing. When I didn't, she had to do some rapid recalculations, because she suddenly realised I was not bluffing and would never give in. The turning point was a verbal exchange between her lawyer and the Tribunal Chairman (they are now referred to as Employment Judges).

Her lawyer made a snide reference to me and told the Chairman that I was “*an evangelical Christian*”. This was said in a scathing tone, in the context of explaining why it was that I had ‘discriminated’ against Mavis. There is a growing animosity towards Christians, especially in the legal profession, which is very politically correct. Mavis' lawyer had hoped that this would turn the Tribunal against me, as if he had said that I was a drug dealer. However, it backfired. The Chairman began to shoot questions at her lawyer about the insinuations that were being made.

At this point I saw Mavis looking panic-stricken. She had assumed that the Tribunal would be instinctively hostile to me, due to my being a Christian, but she suddenly saw that they weren't. Mavis then instructed her lawyer to request a brief recess so that she could discuss the position with him. That was granted and we all went out. Then her lawyer came back asking for the whole hearing to be adjourned. They cobbled together some bogus reasons why they needed this, but I knew it was because Mavis had realised that her plan had not worked.

Shortly afterwards I got a phone call from her lawyer who was now speaking in the most charming tone, as if I was an old friend of his. He asked if I would agree to Mavis dropping her claim in its entirety, on condition that I would not apply for any costs order against her. Although I deserved a costs order, because her claim was not brought in good faith, I knew I was unlikely to get one. Therefore I agreed to the offer and allowed her to abandon her claim, with no damages being paid to her whatsoever. In other words, she had completely failed.

There was one final twist to the story which shows how malicious Mavis's claim had been. Her lawyer asked me to agree to a 'confidentiality clause', whereby neither party is allowed to speak about the case to the media. Mavis wanted that because she herself had spoken to the media from the outset. She did not want me to turn the tables on her by telling them that she had dropped her case and received nothing. I refused the standard confidentiality clause because I was not willing to be gagged. But I did offer a compromise.

I said I would not *approach* the media but that *if they approached me*, then I would be free, from then on, to speak openly. He said he would take instructions on that, but he was obviously unsure whether I could be trusted to keep to that deal. He knew I could very easily break that agreement and approach the media covertly, or get someone else to do so on my behalf. Nevertheless, he took instructions from his client and I was stunned by what he said when he rang me back.

He actually read out what Mavis had said to him, which was broadly as follows: "Yes, I will agree to that proposal, because Mr Kehoe is absolutely honest and we can totally rely on him to abide by any agreement he makes." I thought that was ironic, and somewhat galling, given that she had issued proceedings against me, making bogus allegations, and had effectively accused me of lying to the Tribunal when I denied that we had sacked her for wearing a short skirt.

Yet, here she was now, telling her solicitor that I was totally trustworthy and that my word could be absolutely relied on etc. She had known that all along, and was fully aware at all times, that I was telling the truth and that she wasn't. But those minor technicalities had not stopped her from pursuing her claim for all those months. She was then able to say all that at the end without a trace of shame at how she had tried to extort money out of me by intimidation. That was all water under the bridge from her perspective.

I had perceived that Keira was seeking to gather information to help Mavis. Therefore I fed her what I wanted her to pass on.

In chapter 4, I told the story of how Janet passed on information about how I was dealing with Yolanda's tribunal claim. I was naïve on that occasion and thought Janet was on my side when she was actually helping Yolanda. However, when I was handling the claim made by Mavis, I was more astute. I could tell that Keira was on Mavis's side. Therefore, whenever Keira sidled up to me, purporting to make conversation about how Mavis's case was getting on, I was ready for her. I didn't tell Keira that I knew she was disloyal, and that she was only seeking information to pass it to Mavis.

I let Keira think I was speaking freely in front of her, as if I trusted her, and as if I thought she was on my side. Keira was a salaried partner in my law firm, as Mavis had been. Therefore she ought to have been supportive of me as her boss. In fact she wasn't, but I saw no point in letting her know that I knew that. I felt I could gain more by letting her 'fish' for information about my thoughts and intentions and how I felt the case was going. I then fed her the information that I *wanted* her to pass on. So Keira effectively became a channel through whom I could present my own PR.

Handling devious, treacherous people who are intent on undermining you or your organisations

A classic example of a devious person who seeks to undermine from within is Absalom, the son of King David. He nursed a grudge for years, and had a growing ambition to seize the throne by undermining and then replacing his own father. We shall set out the account of Absalom's disloyalty and how badly King David mishandled the situation and made it worse for himself and for Israel. God wants us to learn from David's mistakes and to avoid being destroyed by the 'Absaloms' in our own lives. We are all bound to come across them in our families, workplaces and churches.

The mistakes that King David made in handling the rebellion of his son, Absalom

King David had many enemies but Absalom probably caused him the most grief. The origins of his rebellion were complicated. Absalom arranged for one of his half-brothers, Amnon, to be killed because he had raped Absalom's full sister, Tamar. King David made a series of mistakes in handling Absalom. He did not have him executed for Amnon's murder, or even prosecuted. But he didn't forgive or rehabilitate him either. He was merely exiled from Israel. Yet there was a lot of support for Absalom because, in some ways, his cause was just. Many felt he had good reason to kill Amnon.

Amnon should have been prosecuted for rape in the first place. Instead, David did nothing, which is why Absalom took matters into his own hands. That response was obviously wrong. But it was understandable to some extent, which is why there was so much public support for Absalom. It led to calls for him to be allowed to return to Israel rather than remain in exile. That request was even made by Joab, the head of David's army. David unwisely agreed to this, but without arranging for Absalom to be rehabilitated. He was not even allowed to be in the King's presence:

²³ So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. ²⁴ And the king said, "Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence." So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king's presence.

2 Samuel 14:23-24 (ESV)

Absalom was now in a kind of internal exile with no role and no means of relating normally with David. Even his supporter, Joab, would not see him, in accordance with David's orders. After two years of this, Absalom became so frustrated he took matters into his own hands to gain access to King David again. He arranged for Joab's field to be set on fire:

²⁸ So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. ²⁹ Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come. ³⁰ Then he said to his servants, "See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. ³¹ Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" ³² Absalom answered Joab, "Behold, I sent word to you, 'Come here, that I may send you to the king, to ask, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still." Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.'" ³³ Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.

2 Samuel 14:28-33 (ESV)

Absalom was eventually able to see David but there was still no reconciliation. Therefore the resentment continued, due to King David's mishandling of the situation.

When dealing with Absalom, David made the mistake of compromising and seeking a middle path, such that he did neither one thing nor the other.

David had already had to cope with the murder of one of his own sons and the fact that it had been arranged by another of his sons. Any father would find it all excruciatingly difficult to handle, both personally and professionally. That helps to explain why David adopted such a muddled policy, doing neither one thing nor the other. All the available options were unattractive, so David chose none of them. He went instead for a messy compromise which satisfied nobody. Many managers do the same when faced with a range of options, all of which are unpleasant.

David's approach achieved nothing, other than to create an even greater sense of grievance and resentment within Absalom. It also put him in a position to promote discontent and build a rebellion against David. He was at large in the city of Jerusalem, with access to all the key people, plus the

general population. To be in Jerusalem and yet to be excluded from the King's court must have eaten away at Absalom and given him added reasons to seize the throne. Absalom also saw himself as the rightful heir to the throne, as he was the third born son, after Amnon and Chileab.

Amnon was now dead and the implication is that Chileab was also dead because later, when King David was dying, it was Adonijah, the fourth son, who put himself forward as the next in line. It would appear that, at that point, Adonijah was the eldest surviving son. Thus, at the time of hatching his rebellion, Absalom must have been the next in line to the throne. Therefore he would not have found it difficult to convince himself that he was entitled to seize it now, as a pre-emptive strike, before David could promote one of his younger brothers, or even exile him again.

He was probably also aware that David had promised the Kingdom to Bathsheba's son, Solomon, who was younger than him. We know that, at some point, David publicly announced his intentions for the succession. If that was done before Absalom's revolt, then he would have known of it. The fact that Solomon had been publicly announced as the chosen successor may well have caused Absalom to conclude that he must strike quickly to seize the throne or it would go to Solomon.

The prospect of a younger half-brother being made king would have felt unjust and would seem to him to justify his plans. Therefore, Absalom started building a following to aid him when the moment came to seize the throne. He ingratiated himself with a wide range of people and gave them reasons to wish he could be king now, rather than in the future. The Bible says he "*stole the hearts of the men of Israel*". I have seen this done by many 'Absaloms' in churches and work places:

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. ² And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," ³ Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." ⁴ Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." ⁵ And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶ Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

2 Samuel 15:1-6 (ESV)

One would imagine David would have acted decisively at this point. He must have known what Absalom was doing. Yet this policy of muddle and drift went on for at least four years, during which David appears to have done nothing. That inactivity gave Absalom time to gather followers and also confirmed his impression that David would continue to do nothing, or too little. Eventually, Absalom felt the right moment had come to strike and he gave orders for the revolt to begin when he gave the signal:

⁷ And at the end of four years Ab'salom said to the king, "Pray let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the Lord, in Hebron. ⁸ For your servant vowed a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the Lord will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the Lord.'" ⁹ The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose, and went to Hebron. ¹⁰ But Ab'salom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Ab'salom is king at Hebron!'" ¹¹ With Ab'salom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their simplicity, and knew nothing. ¹² And while Ab'salom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahith'ophel the G'ilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Ab'salom kept increasing.

2 Samuel 15:7-12 (ESV)

Due to four years of neglect and passivity, David was in a weak position. Therefore he had to flee from Absalom and his supporters when the rebellion began in earnest:

¹³ *And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom."* ¹⁴ *Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."* ¹⁵ *And the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides."* ¹⁶ *So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house.*

2 Samuel 15:13-16 (ESV)

It was only when the situation had reached this grave crisis that David at last woke up and began to deal with the threat. But, even now, David was in two minds. He mobilised his army, splitting it into three groups, and even proposed to go into battle himself. But he was still ambivalent about how to handle *Absalom personally*. He had told his commanders that they should "*Deal gently...with...Absalom...*". That was understandable, from a personal perspective. But, as a matter of military tactics, in the crisis of a civil war, it was a totally unworkable instruction:

⁵ *And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.*

2 Samuel 18:5 (ESV)

David's army defeated the rebels and Absalom was captured, but Joab's men did not kill him, because of what they had heard David say. However, Joab knew it was vital for Absalom to die or the civil war would continue. So he killed him himself:

¹² *But the man said to Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not reach out my hand against the king's son, for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake protect the young man Absalom.'" ¹³ On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." ¹⁴ Joab said, "I will not waste time like this with you." And he took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak. ¹⁵ And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him.*

2 Samuel 18:12-15 (ESV)

When King David heard the news of the defeat of Absalom's forces and the death of Absalom, instead of being pleased, he grieved for his son:

²⁸ *Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well." And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king." ²⁹ And the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was." ³⁰ And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still.*

³¹ *And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Good news for my lord the king! For the Lord has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." ³² The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man." ³³ And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"*

2 Samuel 18:28-33 (ESV)

King David's focus was not on winning the civil war, but on the personal fate of Absalom. He let his feelings as a father come before his duties as King. That is understandable, but it is no way to deal with 'an Absalom' who is undermining you from the inside. One needs absolute resolve, and even ruthlessness, or they will defeat you, because an 'Absalom' will destroy you if you give them any opportunity. David's reaction also dishonoured the men who had remained loyal to him. David could

not see this so Joab had to point it out, and he did so forthrightly, given the urgency and gravity of the situation:

It was told Joab, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." ² So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, "The king is grieving for his son." ³ And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. ⁴ The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" ⁵ Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, ⁶ because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. ⁷ Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now." ⁸ Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, "Behold, the king is sitting in the gate." And all the people came before the king.

2 Samuel 19:1-8 (ESV)

I have been undermined and betrayed by people whom I had *assumed* to be my friends and with whom I had worked for years. So I know a little of how David felt and how difficult it is to strike quickly and decisively when confronting such a person. Sentiment gets in the way and one can feel an ongoing loyalty to that person, even after discovering that they are malicious and are having a harmful effect on one's business, ministry or family.

Consequently, one can be slow to act and reluctant to fight as vigorously as one needs to. That reticence not only renders you ineffective in the battle. It can also lose you the support of those who are loyal to you. Their own resolve melts away when they see that you don't have the stomach for the fight, or the will to strike hard and to do what is needed to win.

When David later faced another revolt by a man called Sheba, he was far more swift and decisive in his response.

King David learned a lesson from the Absalom situation. When he later faced another rebellion led by a man called Sheba, he reacted much faster and there was no hesitation or indecision. This story begins as Sheba gathers supporters by whipping up discontent in Israel:

*Now there happened to be there a worthless fellow, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite; and he blew the trumpet, and said,
"We have no portion in David,
and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse;
every man to his tents, O Israel!"*

² So all the men of Israel withdrew from David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 20:1-2 (RSV)

On this occasion, David takes immediate action to put down the revolt and sends out his best men to pursue Sheba:

⁶ And David said to Abi'shail, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Ab'salom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he get himself fortified cities, and cause us trouble." ⁷ And there went out after Abi'shail, Jo'ab and the Cher'ethites and the Pel'ethites, and all the mighty men; they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.

2 Samuel 20:6-7 (RSV)

As soon as David's men found Sheba they laid siege to the city where he was hiding and began to batter a way through the city wall. They were determined to get him and there was no longer any indecision or lack of resolve:

¹⁴ And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-ma'acah; and all the Bichrites assembled, and followed him in. ¹⁵ And all the men who were with Jo'ab came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-ma'acah; they cast up a mound against the city, and it stood against the rampart; and they were battering the wall, to throw it down. ¹⁶ Then a wise woman called from the city, "Hear! Hear! Tell Jo'ab, 'Come here, that I may speak to you.'" ¹⁷ And he came near her; and the woman said, "Are you Jo'ab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening." ¹⁸ Then she said, "They were wont to say in old time, 'Let them but ask counsel at Abel'; and so they settled a matter. ¹⁹ I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel; you seek to destroy a city which is a mother in Israel; why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord?"

2 Samuel 20:14-19 (RSV)

When the people of the city saw how determined David was to get Sheba, they agreed to cooperate, for the sake of the city. They killed Sheba and threw his head over the wall to David's men:

²⁰ Jo'ab answered, "Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! ²¹ That is not true. But a man of the hill country of E'phraim, called Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David; give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city." And the woman said to Jo'ab, "Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall." ²² Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Jo'ab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, every man to his home. And Jo'ab returned to Jerusalem to the king.

2 Samuel 20:20-22 (RSV)

Compare the way this rebellion was so rapidly crushed with the slow, inadequate handling of Absalom's revolt. David had clearly learned how dangerous it is to give a rebel any time or space to gather support. The same applies in your own workplace or church. You must tackle agitators and rebels as firmly, and as early, as possible.

Solomon also learned from David's indecisive handling of Absalom. He and King David therefore acted very decisively when they faced the later crisis of Adonijah's rebellion.

When King David was dying one of the last things he faced was a rebellion by another of his sons, Adonijah. He attempted to seize the throne before it could be given to Solomon. David had learned from his incompetent handling of Absalom's revolt and his much faster handling of Sheba's revolt. So, on this third occasion, he acted swiftly and got the key people to publicly declare themselves to be on Solomon's side. David also had Solomon anointed as King, even while he was still alive. Adonijah knew the succession had been promised to Solomon, not to himself. David had announced that many years earlier, when he gathered his officials and told them plainly:

David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the officials of the tribes, the officers of the divisions that served the king, the commanders of thousands, the commanders of hundreds, the stewards of all the property and cattle of the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, the mighty men, and all the seasoned warriors.

1 Chronicles 28:1 (RSV)

⁵ And of all my sons (for the Lord has given me many sons) he has chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. ⁶ He said to me, 'It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.

1 Chronicles 28:5-6 (RSV)

Therefore, when Adonijah knew that David was about to die, he acted swiftly, together with his supporters. He seized the throne and made himself the de facto king, in direct rebellion against what he already knew was the King's will, and God's will:

⁵ Now Adoni'jah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king"; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. ⁶ His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?" He was also a very handsome man; and he was born next after Ab'salom. ⁷ He conferred with Jo'ab the son of Zeru'iah and with Abi'athar the priest; and they followed Adoni'jah and helped him. ⁸ But Zadok the priest, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shim'e-i, and Re'i, and David's mighty men were not with Adoni'jah. ⁹ Adoni'jah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fatlings by the Serpent's Stone, which is beside En-ro'gel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah,

1 Kings 1:5-9 (RSV)

When this third rebellion arose David had the help of the prophet Nathan and Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, who went and told King David of it. Despite his frailty, David was swift and decisive in his response. He had Solomon very publicly anointed as the new King, so that the followers of Adonijah would see they had backed the wrong horse. David did not want to leave anything unclear, as he had when he mishandled Absalom's rebellion:

²⁸ Then King David answered, "Call Bathshe'ba to me." So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. ²⁹ And the king swore, saying, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, ³⁰ as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead'; even so will I do this day." ³¹ Then Bathshe'ba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king, and said, "May my lord King David live for ever!" ³² King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada." So they came before the king. ³³ And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon; ³⁴ and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' ³⁵ You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead; and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah."

1 Kings 1:28-35 (RSV)

David's instructions were implemented immediately by Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah, the chief of David's bodyguard. These were the key men in the Kingdom and David wisely made sure that he had them all on board. He knew that their public support for Solomon would be decisive in causing the supporters of Adonijah to switch sides:

³⁸ So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada, and the Cher'ethites and the Pel'ethites, went down and caused Solomon to ride on King David's mule, and brought him to Gihon. ³⁹ There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent, and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" ⁴⁰ And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.

1 Kings 1:38-40 (RSV)

David's tactic had the desired effect. The public honouring of Solomon was quickly brought to the attention of Adonijah's followers, unlike the confusion that persisted for years in the build up to Absalom's revolt. This time there was no doubt as to where King David stood, or who was going to win this battle over the succession:

⁴¹ Adoni'jah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. And when Jo'ab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, "What does this uproar in the city mean?" ⁴² While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abi'athar the priest came; and Adoni'jah said, "Come in,

for you are a worthy man and bring good news.”⁴³ Jonathan answered Adoni'jah, “No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king;⁴⁴ and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada, and the Cher'ethites and the Pel'ethites; and they have caused him to ride on the king's mule;⁴⁵ and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon; and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard.⁴⁶ Solomon sits upon the royal throne.

1 Kings 1:41-46 (RSV)

The people therefore realised very quickly, as David had intended, that Adonijah's coup had failed. They knew they needed to change sides immediately, before they got into trouble:

⁴⁹ Then all the guests of Adoni'jah trembled, and rose, and each went his own way.

1 Kings 1:49 (RSV)

Adonijah himself was also afraid so he fled to the Tabernacle and clung to the horns of the altar. This was, by convention, the way that a person could avoid retribution, as they would not be killed while taking sanctuary in the Tabernacle. Adonijah then asked Solomon to swear that he would not have him put to death. Otherwise he could not have left the Tabernacle:

⁵⁰ And Adoni'jah feared Solomon; and he arose, and went, and caught hold of the horns of the altar.

⁵¹ And it was told Solomon, “Behold, Adoni'jah fears King Solomon; for lo, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not slay his servant with the sword.’”

1 Kings 1:50-51 (RSV)

However, Solomon had learned a vital lesson from David's earlier mishandling of Absalom and was careful in what he now promised. He did not commit himself to granting a full, unconditional amnesty to Adonijah. He wanted first to find out whether he had genuinely given up all claims to the throne or whether he was still secretly harbouring an ambition. If he was, he could try to seize the throne later, at a more opportune moment:

⁵² And Solomon said, “If he prove to be a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die.”⁵³ So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and did obeisance to King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, “Go to your house.”

1 Kings 1:52-53 (RSV)

Solomon was right to be cautious and his misgivings were well-founded. Adonijah went to see Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, and asked her to intervene with Solomon so that one of David's youngest wives, Abishag, who had nursed him at the end, could be given to him as a wife. Bathsheba did not discern anything sinister in this, so she agreed to make the request on Adonijah's behalf:

¹³ Then Adoni'jah the son of Haggith came to Bathshe'ba the mother of Solomon. And she said, “Do you come peaceably?” He said, “Peaceably.”¹⁴ Then he said, “I have something to say to you.” She said, “Say on.”¹⁵ He said, “You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel fully expected me to reign; however the kingdom has turned about and become my brother's, for it was his from the Lord.¹⁶ And now I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me.” She said to him, “Say on.”¹⁷ And he said, “Pray ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Ab'ishag the Shu'nammite as my wife.”¹⁸ Bathshe'ba said, “Very well; I will speak for you to the king.”

1 Kings 2:13-18 (RSV)

Unlike his mother, Solomon was not naïve. He saw that the request was a trick. Adonijah wanted it to be known that he had married David's widow. This would have been viewed by the public as significant and would have strengthened Adonijah's position if he later made a second attempt to seize the throne. The request showed he was still scheming and trying to strengthen his claim.

Solomon was decisive in his response, as he had said he would be if any ongoing wickedness was found in Adonijah. He had him executed immediately and gave him no further time to re-gather his supporters. Solomon was determined not to make the same mistakes that David had made in dealing with Absalom during his long plotting and preparing phase:

¹⁹ So Bathshe'ba went to King Solomon, to speak to him on behalf of Adoni'jah. And the king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne, and had a seat brought for the king's mother; and she sat on his right. ²⁰ Then she said, "I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me." And the king said to her, "Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you." ²¹ She said, "Let Ab'ishag the Shu'nammite be given to Adoni'jah your brother as his wife." ²² King Solomon answered his mother, "And why do you ask Ab'ishag the Shu'nammite for Adoni'jah? Ask for him the kingdom also; for he is my elder brother, and on his side are Abi'athar the priest and Jo'ab the son of Zeru'iah." ²³ Then King Solomon swore by the Lord, saying, "God do so to me and more also if this word does not cost Adoni'jah his life! ²⁴ Now therefore as the Lord lives, who has established me, and placed me on the throne of David my father, and who has made me a house, as he promised, Adoni'jah shall be put to death this day." ²⁵ So King Solomon sent Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada; and he struck him down, and he died.

1 Kings 2:19-25 (RSV)

Solomon did not leave it at that. He also removed Abiathar from his office as priest. He had supported Adonijah and Solomon did not feel able to rely on his loyalty. So he removed him there and then, rather than wait and see how things might develop. Solomon knew the rebellion had to be completely and unmistakably extinguished:

²⁶ And to Abi'athar the priest the king said, "Go to An'athoth, to your estate; for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you bore the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because you shared in all the affliction of my father." ²⁷ So Solomon expelled Abi'athar from being priest to the Lord, thus fulfilling the word of the Lord which he had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.

1 Kings 2:26-27 (RSV)

At the same time Solomon took swift action against Joab, the commander of the army, who had also sided with Adonijah. He had Joab put to death, despite the fact that Joab had fled to the Tabernacle and clung to the horns of the altar. This time Solomon was not going to take any chances at all, or rely on any promises of allegiance:

²⁸ When the news came to Jo'ab—for Jo'ab had supported Adoni'jah although he had not supported Ab'salom—Jo'ab fled to the tent of the Lord and caught hold of the horns of the altar. ²⁹ And when it was told King Solomon, "Jo'ab has fled to the tent of the Lord, and behold, he is beside the altar," Solomon sent Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada, saying, "Go, strike him down." ³⁰ So Benai'ah came to the tent of the Lord, and said to him, "The king commands, 'Come forth.'" But he said, "No, I will die here." Then Benai'ah brought the king word again, saying, "Thus said Jo'ab, and thus he answered me." ³¹ The king replied to him, "Do as he has said, strike him down and bury him; and thus take away from me and from my father's house the guilt for the blood which Jo'ab shed without cause. ³² The Lord will bring back his bloody deeds upon his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and slew with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself, Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Ama'sa the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. ³³ So shall their blood come back upon the head of Jo'ab and upon the head of his descendants for ever; but to David, and to his descendants, and to his house, and to his throne, there shall be peace from the Lord for evermore." ³⁴ Then Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada went up, and struck him down and killed him; and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.

1 Kings 2:28-34 (RSV)

Finally, Solomon secured the position even more solidly by appointing Benaiah, who had supported him, to be head of the army in place of Joab. He also appointed Zadok to be priest in place of Abiathar. He wanted to be sure that he had absolutely faithful men in both of those key positions:

³⁵ *The king put Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada over the army in place of Jo'ab, and the king put Zadok the priest in the place of Abi'athar.*

1 Kings 2:35 (RSV)

I am not suggesting that we should have our enemies put to death as Solomon did. Nevertheless, the underlying principle still applies that *swift* and *decisive action* is needed whenever we are dealing with rebels, plotters and schemers. We may not be kings, but we still encounter such people within our workplaces and in churches in particular. One cannot over-state the importance of appointing faithful, trustworthy people to work for you. The more senior they are, the more vital it is that they be fully honest and trustworthy, and that they be removed swiftly if they aren't.

How to handle Absaloms, Shebas and Adonijahs in your own workplace or church

In the light of King David's experiences, what can we learn about how best to deal with an Absalom, a Sheba or an Adonijah? By that I mean a person who ought to be loyal to you but is actually working against you and seeking to usurp your position. You must be clear-minded, bold and decisive from the outset. Your approach needs to be like that of David when he tackled Sheba, or of Solomon in his handling of Adonijah and his supporters, not like David's misguided handling of Absalom. Resolve to do one thing or the other, and be willing to face unpleasant decisions, rather than trying to pursue some painless, uncontroversial middle path.

Provided one acts quickly enough and early enough it might, conceivably, be possible to win over a disgruntled or resentful employee or team member and achieve a genuine reconciliation. Actually, that is extremely unlikely, because resentful, embittered people very rarely change. However, it is a remote possibility, so the option does at least need to be borne in mind. Alternatively, if that is not possible, or has already been tried and has failed, then you must act with even greater swiftness to remove that person from your workforce or team.

The one thing which you must never do is to try to do *a bit of both*, whereby you rebuke or discipline the 'Absalom' or the 'Adonijah', but let them continue working for you. As David found, when he unwisely allowed Absalom to remain in Jerusalem, they will use that opportunity to undermine you, defy your instructions, and poison people's minds against you. I speak with experience here. I have seen it happen many times, when I have warned a wrongdoer but then let him carry on working for me, rather than dismiss him.

The Bible tells us "*If you rebuke a fool he will hate you.*" Therefore, given that every 'Absalom' is wicked, and also a fool, they will not accept any rebuke or correction. They will only become more resentful and try even harder to hit back at you. That will usually be done covertly and it will happen no matter what assurances they give you as to their loyalty or their determination to change. In two decades I never once saw a person be rebuked for misconduct and then go on to behave well and become loyal. It just doesn't happen.

The only people who respond well to rebuke and correction are the wise and the simple, who are *already loyal* to you and to your business. However, 'Absaloms' and 'Adonijahs' do not come from either of those groups. Therefore you have to discern at the earliest possible stage whether they are hostile. If in doubt, it would be wise to assume that they are. The very fact that you are asking yourself such questions suggests you are under-estimating, rather than over-estimating, their malice.

I personally have never over-estimated the harm that a resentful person might do, or the likelihood of their behaving disloyally. They have always gone on to behave in even worse ways than I feared they

might. However if you are *completely sure* that the person can be won back, don't rebuke them at all. Instead, seek only to be reconciled with them and to resolve any differences amicably. Or, if rebuke is absolutely necessary, then only use it with those whom you already *know for sure* to be sincere, humble people. If they are not, your rebuke will only make them even more hostile.

You can only get rid of an Absalom if you are legitimately in charge of a team or business.

You can't deal with an 'Absalom' unless you have enough authority and power to make the necessary decisions, or at least to strongly influence the decisions that are made. If not, you won't be able to tackle an Absalom successfully. That type of person is well aware of how much real authority and power you have. They can also sense how willing you are to use it. They know that they can only be tackled and removed by the determined, decisive use of real authority. Hopefully you have such authority, or are part of a management or leadership team which does, and which will listen to you.

But if you don't have such authority, or if you aren't bold enough to use it, you will never defeat or remove an Absalom. The fact that they work in the shadows, behind closed doors, on the basis of whisperings and lies, means they have a major advantage from the outset. For a long time they will already have been fighting against you, while you weren't *aware* of that fact, and were thus not fighting back, or even on your guard. That is another reason why you need to act so swiftly when you do eventually discover what they are doing, or even when you first *suspect* it.

By that stage, they will already have been active with their campaign of sabotage for some time, while you were blissfully unaware. When you eventually discover their disloyalty you have a lot of catching up to do and cannot afford to waste any time in sentimental hand-wringing. You obviously need to investigate carefully and be sure of the facts before you act. However, you must also be quick about doing so, as the 'Absalom' will use every moment of delay on your part to further undermine you or obstruct your enquiries. Bear all of that in mind as it will help to prevent you from delaying for too long while you check facts and interview witnesses.

When you do get around to questioning those people, you need to be aware that an 'Absalom' will always be ahead of the game. They will have "*got to*" the witnesses long before you do and will have already influenced or intimidated them in some way. Whenever I spoke to staff, especially junior ones, about the wrongdoings of one of their colleagues, I always bore in mind that such witnesses were likely to have been lied to and/or threatened already. Therefore I fully expected them to be reluctant to speak about what they had seen and heard and I did not let their reluctance put me off.

The chances are they will be much more afraid of the illegitimate 'Absalom' than of your legitimate authority. Even worse, if those witnesses or colleagues are insincere or disloyal themselves, they may even approve of the 'Absalom' and support him against you. Whatever kind of people they are, they will doubt your ability to tackle the wrongdoer, or your resolve to fight to the bitter end. Therefore it is usually the 'Absalom' who emerges as the final winner because most leaders, managers or even owners don't have enough courage or determination to win such a fight.

Most colleagues are pragmatic rather than principled. They just want to be "*on the winning side*". Therefore if you want witnesses to give you information, you must convince them that you will be the winner and that the 'Absalom' won't succeed. You must also refuse to be fobbed off by their initially evasive responses, when they pretend not to have seen or heard anything. Most will persist in that until they are convinced that you are determined to tackle the wrongdoer and won't drop the investigation half way through or lose your nerve.

They also need to be reassured that you won't disclose what they tell you and put them at risk of reprisals. They need to be certain that you will remove the wrongdoer, rather than just slap his wrist and send him back to work. They are keenly aware that if that is all you do, then anybody who has helped you will have to face the wrongdoer's vengeance. That fact doesn't matter to many managers,

but it needs to be at the forefront of your mind if you are serious about getting nervous witnesses to give you the evidence you need.

In urging people to be swift and decisive in dealing with the wicked, I am speaking only to people who are *sincere*, with a strong sense of justice. Such characteristics can make them too cautious in identifying and confronting the wicked. Accordingly, such people need to be much more bold and they can afford to be without any risk of injustice, because they are already leaning too far in the direction of being merciful. However, if you are instead ruthless and harsh, then the need to act more swiftly would not apply to you.

Indeed, if you are such a person, I am actually speaking *about* you, not *to* you. None of what I am saying should be taken as advocating any injustice. When dealing with the wicked you must not act wickedly yourself. You do, however, have to realise that you will be up against wickedness from others. Therefore fully expect devious tactics to be used against you and your witnesses. But never use them yourself, either in retaliation or pre-emptively.

The time when I was the Chairman of a Conservative Association and had to tackle ‘Marjorie’, a very unpleasant Parliamentary Candidate

Some years ago I was a Borough Councillor and also the Chairman of a Conservative Association. That means I helped to run the party within that constituency. One of my responsibilities was to chair the committee which ran the election campaign for our prospective Parliamentary candidate (“PPC”) whom I will call ‘Marjorie’. I shall share a little about her here because it is a story of a wicked person, where the context was neither the workplace nor the Church. It took place within a political party where I was in an *elected* capacity and was not the owner of the organisation.

Therefore I did not have complete power and could not make unilateral decisions as to how to handle her, as I could if these things had happened within my law firm. That made a major difference to how much power I had and how decisive I could be. I could only inform others about her and try to persuade them to take action. Marjorie was manipulative, arrogant and controlling, all of which features are normal amongst the wicked. However, one feature she had which is unusual in a woman is that she liked to directly *dominate* others.

She was not content just to manipulate them indirectly. She used head-on confrontation to bully and intimidate people into silence and to get her own way. She was a ‘bruiser’, or ‘battle-axe’, whereas most women, if they are wicked, will seek to gain control indirectly and covertly by deception and manipulation. That makes them harder to detect or tackle, as people are not even aware of what they do or how they do it. Marjorie was therefore an interesting case, as she was a woman who acted more like a man and used traditionally male techniques for getting control.

She was chosen as the PPC shortly before I was elected as Chairman, so I wasn’t involved in her appointment. However, I quickly realised what a dragon she was and she became an ongoing headache for me and my fellow officers within the Executive Committee of the Association. Matters came to a head one day when ‘Henry’, the agent, a full time paid worker for the Conservative Association, came to see me with a resignation letter. He said he could not endure working with Marjorie any longer as she was “*such an appalling person*”. He told me how she acted towards him in their one to one dealings and of the imperious way in which she spoke to him.

It was more than he could endure and he had no idea how to address it, because he was a timid person. That was partly why she was so domineering towards him. She could see that he could be bullied and she exploited that. She also felt contempt for him, for the very reason that he was easy to push around. When I got Henry’s resignation letter I called a meeting of the Officers, which is a committee made up of the Secretary, Treasurer, President, Women’s Officer etc. We discussed how we could tackle

Marjorie without the media finding out what was going on. If they had it would have ruined the Party's chances of winning the seat back at the next election.

So the constraints within which we had to operate were tight, which made it more complicated. The Officers agreed that Marjorie was every bit as "appalling" as Henry had said. We had more dealings with her than the wider membership had, so we knew what she was really like, whereas most of them didn't. They only knew her public image. But she was a lot more polite with them than with the people she saw regularly, and especially those who got in her way. We were greatly helped by the advice of 'Arthur', one of the committee members, who was exceptionally astute. He was a retired Managing Director of a large company.

His advice was to keep everything very secret and to take confidential soundings from a committee which rarely met called the 'Vice Presidents of the Association'. These were local figures of distinction who had worked hard for the Association in the past. They could give us an indication of how the problem would be viewed by the wider membership. We needed to know that in case we had to go to the full Executive Committee to decide whether to de-select Marjorie or to keep her and let her fight the election. Arthur also advised that we should liaise with the Conservative Central Office in London, to seek their input on the handling of the problem.

We needed that because it could have an impact on the reputation of the Party, both locally and nationally, if the facts became known, quite apart from ruining our prospects of winning back that seat. Subject to what was said by our own Vice-Presidents and also by Conservative Central Office, we could then decide whether to call a full meeting of the whole Executive Committee of which we, as the Officers, were only a part. It was this whole committee, not just we as officers, who would have to decide whether to deselect Marjorie or to keep her and make the best of a bad job.

So, we had a meeting of the Vice-Presidents and I handed each of them a *numbered* copy of my confidential report setting out the facts of Henry's resignation and the Officers' concerns about Marjorie. At the end of the meeting I carefully gathered all of these numbered reports back in. I counted them to make sure none ever left the room and that none could be copied and leaked. We also travelled to London to have a meeting with the Chairman of the Conservative Party, an MP. He was concerned, but also anxious to avoid any of this being made public.

He then asked 'Oswald', the regional agent for the party, to liaise with us and to assist us in handling the next meeting. The main concern of Central Office was avoiding bad publicity. They did not worry much about the problems we faced locally of having such a monster for a PPC - and potentially as an MP. The unanimous advice of the Vice-Presidents was to escalate the situation and call a meeting of the full Executive Committee of the local party. So we called that meeting, a much larger one, though still only a fraction of the whole membership.

As before, I then handed out written reports and counted them all back in. The situation was then discussed in detail. We also had to deal with several interventions from supporters of Marjorie who had, quite obviously, been primed by Marjorie to speak up on her behalf. In doing that, she had breached the strict confidentiality rules to which the rest of us had adhered. We could have lobbied against her, but we did not. By contrast, Marjorie had been actively drumming up support and briefing her supporters on what to say.

Therefore several of them asked to speak in her support, whereas every other person came to the meeting having no idea what it was even going to be about. If we had told people that it was about whether to deselect Marjorie, more members may have cancelled other engagements in order to attend. But we never said a word. Therefore, we did not get as many supporters for her deselection as there may have been if we too had engaged in lobbying. However, it is more important to do right than to win.

The final decision of the Executive Committee was that it was too close to the General Election to de-select our PPC and choose another one. So, very reluctantly, and with a heavy heart, it was decided to

keep her. But we were asked to put in place strict safeguards to limit her future conduct and to warn her sternly against any further misbehaviour. From then on we managed to keep the show on the road. The agent withdrew his resignation and we planned and fought the election campaign, which Marjorie duly lost, but we had no major problems from then on.

Coming within an inch of deselection had chastened her. So although her resentment and bitterness were great, she restrained herself and moderated her conduct. I tell this story as a counter-balance to those I have told about how I handled the wicked when I was their employer and the 100% owner of a business. With them, I had virtually unlimited power and freedom of manoeuvre, subject only to obeying the law and behaving honestly. However, in my role as Association Chairman, I did not have such freedom or power.

I was obliged to work with others and had to persuade rather than give orders. Accordingly, the best I could do was to contain Marjorie, rather than remove her. Nevertheless, it was still an achievement, up to a point. We were able to put a stop to the worst of her antics and we made her much more careful. I believe God put me through that difficult situation as He wanted to extend the range of my experience beyond that of an owner-manager and to give me another perspective to write about in this book. He knew I would write about it one day, though I had no idea at the time.

The way in which ‘Oswald’ swapped sides in the dispute, according to whichever way the wind was blowing

‘Oswald’ was asked by Conservative Central Office to work alongside us to handle the Marjorie situation. He was a regional agent who worked with many different constituencies. He was not in charge of us and had no actual authority. But it was right that we should involve him and gain his input and the benefit of his experience. I mention him because I thought it was interesting how unprincipled he was. In particular, he switched sides during the dispute, solely on the basis of which way the wind was blowing.

He was not bothered about who was right or wrong. He just wanted to be on the winning side. Therefore when he attended the meeting with the Officers, and later with the Vice Presidents, he was critical of Marjorie and supportive of those who wished to remove her, because he could see they were very much in the majority. However, at the final meeting of the whole Executive, at which it was decided, reluctantly, to keep Marjorie, Oswald changed sides when he saw that the mood of that larger meeting was against deselecting her.

There was actually a look of triumph in his face as he saw that it was looking like the committee was going to keep her on. That was what he had really wanted all along, even when he was being critical of Marjorie, when he thought she was going to be deselected. So he took his mask off at that point and worked for her and against the Officers. But why hadn’t he done that previously, when it looked as though she would be removed? Both then and later he was behaving insincerely. It brought home to me just how two-faced and unprincipled people can be.