



The Fortnight You'd Prefer to Forget

Your co-worker Michelle has been extremely cool to you over the last two weeks. Normally, you work well together. Admittedly, you are not close friends - and her personality is one of being introverted and quiet during meetings. But in recent meetings, she seems determined not to make eye contact or speak with you.

You find Michelle in the break room and decide to approach her. When you ask if there is anything wrong, she gives you a flattened smile without much eye contact stating, "no...everything's fine."

Something inside you won't let it go, and you ask if she can spare a few minutes. You both go outside to a private table. You sense she has something on her mind, but doesn't want to share it.

Suddenly she blurts out, "I can't believe you told Tom about the mistake I made. You know, I was counting on getting a raise on this quarterly review...and you ruined it for me."

You remember the conversation. It was a mistake where she didn't follow up with a client's requests...and that client wound up finding another vendor product. When Tom, the Director for the sales team asked you about negatives with Michelle during the quarter, you mentioned this.

Your initial reaction is to be defensive and push back. After all, SHE made the mistake and it likely led to the company losing an extra \$35,000 on an up-sell. Michelle is clearly in the wrong, but you decide to show empathy, followed up with an open-ended question.

"Wow, I can see why you'd be disappointed. Why do you think that what I told Tom kept you from getting a raise?"

"Because he mentioned it. How could you do that to me? I'm going through so much at home right now with my sick mother and the hospital bills. I am just under SO much stress."

You recognize tension building and coming with another round of empathy plus a question.

"That stinks about your mom. What's been going on?"



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Then Michelle, who is normally reserved decides to open up. She starts crying, telling you that her mother has Alzheimer's and her sister is selfishly unwilling to help with her care. Her mother lives with her, and she pays a helper to cover during the day.

Then you decide to add a piece of Conversational Intelligence® by using redirection.

"Michelle, I'm sorry that you didn't get a raise from your review. And I wish that I could have avoided sharing the remark to Tom, but we are accountable and ultimately it's for the good of the team and our efforts. Hey, I've made plenty of mistakes as well - but I also know and Tom knows you are an important part of our team...and we're glad to have you.

But I think this is a time to open up. What you're doing with your Mom is so honorable and I want to let you know that I'm here to help. I know the team would help - if you ever wanted to let them know. So I want you to reach out when you feel overwhelmed - if you need to share your feelings or if you need me to take on some of the load. I've got your back...okay?"

Michelle reaches over and touches your arm, *"thanks, I needed that."*

- W** - You stayed mindful. Avoiding a reaction of pushing back when being addressed with blame.
- A** - You used multiple injections of empathy and questions. Also, the CI technique of re-directing.
- L** - You let go of making the crux of the conversation about justifying your actions and focusing on her costly mistake. Instead, you listened to recognize her underlying stress.
- K** - In keeping track, you presented her with an opportunity to break out of her shell and engage in actions involving trust. You also validated her worth to Tom, the team, and yourself.