

“They’re not being mean; they just want you to get where they are. It takes time. Screwing up is gonna happen. Recovering from it is the main thing, and they are just reserving judgement until they see how you manage that.”

After they left the diner and went their separate ways, Mark phoned Wendy Manteno, director of Taggart County Emergency Communications.

“Hi, Wendy, this is Mark Perkins.”

Wendy was always happy to hear from Mark. He rarely called to complain about her telecommunicators, and when he did have something to say, it was always accurate and helpful. They had worked together for years and got started right around the same time, Mark as a rookie on the street and Wendy as a “newbie” dispatcher.

“Hi Mark, how you been? What can I do for you?”

“Well, I just had coffee with Grace Ramirez, and I’m just checking to get your

point of view on how she’s doing. I think she feels a little lost.”

Wendy thought for a moment and said, “Mark, Grace is awesome. She’s always on time, doesn’t complain and is a quick study. I put her on the fire desk because she tested well on organizational skills and multitasking. And she is one of the most confident young ladies I’ve come across in quite a while.”

“She says she’s having trouble fitting in,” Mark said.

“Mark, it’s a lot different environment than what she’s used to. I know. I used to wait tables, too. There’s an easy comradery in the restaurant that doesn’t exist in the comm center. But once you do develop those relationships it’s much deeper than most other jobs. I think Grace will be fine. But since I know she’s one of your ‘projects,’ I’ll keep an eye on it and let you know how things are going.”

“Thanks, Wendy, I knew I could count on you!”

On her way home from the diner, Grace thought about all that Mark had said. In some ways it helped, but she couldn’t stop thinking about the way Tom had reacted to her management of the balloon incident. And no one ever talked to her directly during roll call. She made up her mind to try to set up a time to talk with Wendy about it. Since the moment she met Wendy, she felt a connection with her and really respected the way she ran things at the comm center. She felt sure Wendy would give her good advice.

When she got home, she phoned the comm center and asked for Wendy.

“Wendy is not here at the moment. Can I take a message?” It was the voice of the assistant director, Pat Croner. He had been easy to talk with during the interview process, but since she had started working there, he had become more remote.

“Hi. This is Grace Ramirez. I was wondering if I could set up some time to speak with Wendy about something.”



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