

“Grace, Wendy is a busy person, and you work afternoon swing shift. It seems unlikely she’ll be able to find the time to meet with you. I’ll ask her and get back to you.”

Grace felt somewhat put off but was hopeful she would hear from Wendy before her next shift. She really felt like she was at a decision point. But she wanted to hear what Wendy had to say before she did anything.

For the next two days, work was miserable for her. While sitting in the chair, her mind was elsewhere. She got through both shifts, but her heart wasn’t in it.

On the morning of the third day, she awoke to find a message from Wendy on her phone! Surely Wendy could help.

“Hi Grace, this is Wendy. Pat told me you phoned. I can’t find time to speak with you anytime soon. Maybe you should talk to your training officer or shift supervisor before you and I meet. Besides, there is a chain of command at Taggart that has to be respected. I don’t want to undermine my supervisors and need them to trust me, too. So, if you can please talk with Anna or Susan, we can maybe have a chat after I hear what they have

to say. Thanks for reaching out. I appreciate your initiative!”

It was odd. Initially, her heart sank. Was Wendy also going to turn on her? But then, after she listened to the message a couple of times, she realized Wendy was being as helpful as she could and even a little encouraging. Grace realized she liked the reporting structure Wendy seemed dedicated to upholding. She didn’t know why she hadn’t thought to speak with Anna first herself. Wendy’s call helped her understand why she had to start with Anna.

Anna, her fire desk training officer, was a matter-of-fact woman in her mid-forties. She knew her job well and expected a high level of performance from Grace. She had been neither complimentary nor overly critical of Grace’s performance just matter of fact about it.

“Don’t forget to give them their time out when they go en route” or “Westmoreland dispatches a full-still for a dumpster fire, because they need to get volunteers on the way.” But also, “good job on that apartment fire” or “I’m going to take a quick break. You’ve got the channel, newbie.”

During the balloon incident, Anna hadn’t been overly critical either. She just took over when necessary, helped Grace to get things back under control, and then walked her through what had occurred after the dust settled so she could learn.

After the next shift, Grace asked Anna if she could have a few minutes of her time.

“Sure. I was wondering when you’d ask. Wendy told me you had phoned her. I felt a little left out.” She smiled wryly at Grace. Grace was a little confused. It was the first hint of warmth Anna had shown toward her. But, Grace realized, it was also the first time she had asked Anna something not related to training.

“What’s up, kid?”

Grace wasn’t sure exactly what she wanted to say. So she just said the first thing that came to her mind.

“I feel like such a failure. I mean, I can’t even ...” Anna cut her off.

“Whoa! Hold on a minute there, kid. Where’s this coming from?”

“Well, the balloon incident, and no one seems to want to talk to me, and Tom seems so grumpy toward me all the time ...” her voice trailed off.

Anna looked at Grace and smiled. Grace was grateful for that but was still unsure and looked at the ground.

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