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Sent: Wednesday, December 05, 2012 10:23 AM
To: Tom Wagner
Subject: FW: December FOCUS



Focus

A publication of Wagner Consulting Group

December 2012

Truth and Hope

Santa and Bernard, Santa's Chief of Toy Manufacturing, sat companionably in front of a toasty fire on December 27, enjoying steaming mugs of wassail. The two old friends were basking in the afterglow of a flawless Christmas toy delivery, and the busy months preceding it, when Bernard piped up, "Nick, you've been at this for a couple of thousand years now, most of them with me, but I don't recall what you did before."

"Ah, Bernard, now that's a tale worth telling," said Santa, and so began the story of Santa as a maker of tasty pastry, rather than toys.

"You must remember back ages ago that there was no Christmas. In those times people celebrated the Summer Solstice. As for me, I still made deliveries to good little boys and girls, but it was pastries, not toys back then. Imagine if you can huge bakeries up here at the North Pole, popping out confectionery that folks could not get anywhere else. That made them very special. The favorite treat of all was called a Twinkle."

"But Santa," Bernard interrupted, "why did you change from sugary treats to toys?"

"Bernard," Santa replied, "that happened just over 2,000 years ago when my baking elves quit working. They went on strike! It's one thing to complain and such – you know how grumpy elves can sometimes be – but they made demands I just could not meet. It was the saddest time of my life.

“So we canceled deliveries that Summer Solstice, and the boys and girls sorely missed their Twinkles. Moreover, when the reality of that dawned on the elves, many were inconsolable and left the North Pole. Others, mostly the troublemakers who stirred up the dissent originally, were driven out by enraged baker elves who hated what had happened.

“So there I was with a depleted workforce of dispirited elves. Things were grim, Bernard, very grim.”

“So how’d you turn things around?”

“I used a story, Bernard, a story of truth and hope.”

“Truth and hope?”

“Yes. After many days of reflection and thinking, I gathered all the remaining elves together and laid out the brutal facts. The biggest challenge was that we didn’t have enough elves to bake all the pastries at the last minute. Unlike toys, Twinkles wouldn’t stay fresh forever, so baking ahead was not an option. Accepting the reality that Twinkles were gone forever was really difficult for all of us, me included.

“Then I painted a mental picture of a new reality – what could be. As I described my plan to make toys instead of Twinkles, I began to see stirrings of hope in the elves’ eyes. The more I described my vision, the more animated the elves became. They had hope.

“My presentation was going as planned until Elf Baggalutur complained that it was a shame the already disappointed boys and girls must wait a year for a treat from Santa. And I must admit that Baggy had a darn good point there. That’s when Elf Baxter came up with the brilliant idea of delivering toys at the Winter Solstice, only six months away. And we did and have ever since.”

“But Nick, why did you bother with telling the elves that truth part instead of just laying out your plan for toys?”

“Bernard, if I hadn’t begun with the bitter truth, some elves would not have bought into the new plan. They would have wanted to try to make the old way work. In addition to those outright resisters, many more elves would have wistfully hoped for a return to the good old days, and not put their heart and soul into making the new plan work.

“If you don’t tell elves the hard truths, they continue in life looking for something they can never achieve. Think what a sad and lonely life that can cause!”

“Roger that, Boss. I shouldn’t have questioned you. After all, you wear the big red suit.”

“Don’t suck up, you old rascal. But it was difficult in those early years. We had to stay disciplined and upbeat. That’s where envisioning our bright future helped. We made steady progress and celebrated our milestone events. Why, even Elf Sledda changed from his former pessimistic self to the wisecracking character we know today.”

“Aw, Nick, you went and spoiled a nice story reminding me of sarcastic Sledda!”

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May your Christmas be merry and bright, even without the Twinkles.



Tom Wagner

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A noble purpose inspires sacrifice, stimulates innovation, and encourages perseverance.
In so doing, it transforms great talent into exceptional accomplishment.

~ Gary Hamel

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