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## FEAR, RESIGNATION, AND REPUTATION

### YEAR 1 SESSION 3 CASE STUDY

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# CASE STUDY

## *Fear, Resignation, and Reputation*

### PART 1

You served as president of a Fortune 50 company for 5 years after having been appointed by the CEO to take his place, even though he had four sons. Your work during that five-year period was exhilarating, yet troubling. You knew in your heart you were striving, at any cost, for the applause of your boss to the neglect of what was most important to you. Your youngest son asked you to be part of an early Friday morning Father/Son Bible study during his high school years. You declined because you were afraid your boss would disapprove. Your other children often asked you to attend some of their academic, arts, and sports programs at school. Again, you were afraid of how your boss might react, so you declined the invitation of your children. You knew your boss would question your loyalty to the company and the important work needed to be done. Deep down, you wanted your work ethic to merit your promised and prized CEO position.

Your executive parking spot in the garage was right next to your boss. He would always arrive at 6:00 a.m. and would jokingly comment if he did not see your car when he pulled in. In fact, he was so competitive, he would comment if he saw your car was missing anytime during the day. To attend some of your children's school events, you would have your EA get you a car from the rental fleet so you could leave your car parked in its normal spot, thus preventing him from noticing your car missing.

You began to consider leaving the company. You wanted to be more available for your four teenagers and wife and you did not think your current CEO would be understanding of that desire. At 47 years of age, you are concerned your reputation would be ruined if you left. You are well known in the community because of your prominence and success within the company, so you feared there would be many rumors regarding why you would leave such a prominent position after so much success at a young age. Your reputation mattered to you. Your concerns increased about what people might think about you – when you no longer had a “big job.”

Additionally, though chosen to be your boss's successor, the timeframe was far longer than you were willing to wait. A tipping point for you, and the final impetus for your resignation, was the CEO was involved in a long-term extramarital affair with a senior executive in the company. Although this had become common knowledge among the executive team and you and the CEO had discussed it, he was not willing to address the situation. You advised him you would not condone this behavior under your leadership. You also noted his behavior was having a significantly negative impact on morale, performance, and leadership of the company.

When you resigned, the CEO was disheartened and made you feel as if you were indebted to him for your success. Though the CEO knows the true reason why you decided to leave, you kept those reasons confidential to protect him.

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During your transition, you participated in the SLI Core Class. Though you had been a follower of Christ your entire life, it was a daunting experience. In your capstone thesis paper, you shared that you initially thought people in the cohort would be judgmental of your decision to step down, possibly even thinking that you had been fired. But as time went on and you shared your story, you felt understood and encouraged.

You struggled with how to be a spiritual leader of influence without holding a lofty position in a big company. Since you were not leading thousands of employees, you did not have a “big” assignment from God, right? However, as SLI continued you learned that God has a different definition of “big.” He used SLI to develop your character and your understanding of God’s heart, especially the importance of abiding in Christ and of how God equips us for and values our assignments.

Presently, you run a \$10B energy investment company, which is rewarding and furthers your walk with God. Within a year after your departure, you were approached by a headhunter for a board position of a prominent and major company. You sought counsel through prayer, conversations with your spouse, and discussion with friends and felt led to pursue the opportunity. All indications pointed to you being a strong candidate, including encouraging phone conversations with the chairman, alignment of values with the CEO of the company, and uplifting reports from the headhunter following his discussions with the chairman. The first reference the headhunter provided the chairman of the board is the CEO of your former company.

Your former CEO is the founder of a major parachurch ministry in your area, on whose board you have served at his request for several years since leaving the company. You and he have common interests and have retained a cordial, friendly relationship. Your former CEO indicates he is supportive of you and will provide a positive reference upon being contacted. However, the following week you hear that the headhunter is no longer pursuing you as a candidate for the board. You are informed by the headhunter that your former CEO provided a very poor reference – so poor that no other references will be contacted.

## **PART 1 QUESTIONS:**

1. What do you think about the president’s decision to resign?
2. How would you label his working behavior with his boss?
3. What actions might have been taken earlier to set expectations?
4. Can you relate to his behavior? If so, why?
5. Is it possible for our reputations to matter too much to us? How would we know if that became the case?
6. At this point in the case, what would be your next steps?

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### PART 2

You are devastated and confused. After seeking prayer and counsel, you schedule a private meeting with your former CEO. He denies speaking with the company or headhunter, even after you share specific details about the conversation relayed to you. After asking him the same question three or four different ways, he continues to deny he ever spoke a bad word about you and that he ever spoke with anyone related to the company. Then he changes the subject, attempting to have you approve of his ongoing adulterous relationship with the senior executive at his company.

Finally, he transitions to discussing the non-profit board you serve on, wanting to know why you disagreed with a recent proposal he put forth. He instructs you not to disagree with him in the future. You reply that you were placed on the board by him to bring expertise and independent counsel. You affirm that when his ideals or plans prevail with a board vote, you will faithfully support them as board policy, even if they do not have your personal vote. However, you cannot commit to not disagreeing with him.

After further prayer and counsel, you decide to contact the headhunter to verify the call took place with your former CEO, which he verifies did take place by providing the specific time and date. You explain the situation to the headhunter, indicating that your former CEO has lied to you. You resign immediately from the non-profit board without reason, aware that your reputation is at stake, and you are advised by counsel to be prepared for your former CEO to lie about the reason for your resignation.

#### PART 2 QUESTIONS:

1. What biblical passages or themes would be most helpful to you while navigating a situation like this?
2. Are there ways you would have handled this situation differently or are there additional steps that you would have taken?
3. After an experience like this, what biblical truths would be most important for moving forward?

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### **A Memo from the President**

John Doe, founding partner ABC Ventures, Inc. and former President XYZ, joined me for lunch in XXX XXXXXXXX, Texas across the street from his corporate offices. He provided practical advice on how to give careful thought to your ways (**Haggai 1:8**) before you fall victim to workaholism and approval addiction. He asked me to pass this along to you:

- Set priorities collaboratively with your spouse and family.
- Find out what is important to your spouse at the deepest level.
- Find out what is important to your children.
- Make sure you honor your company and work hard.
- Be strong in letting people know what is important to you with respect to your family. If it's important that you participate in a Bible study with your child, ask if that's okay. Your boss can either say yes or no. But then leave the consequences to God.

He concludes by saying, "Stand firm and be bold in what is important to you. Do your job exceedingly well and be committed to your company, but don't give up on those things you will regret when you get older."

I would add, the words of Jesus ring loud, clear, and true, "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (**Matthew 16:26 NIV**) Jesus admonishes us to work to gain what is important in life according to what is of deepest eternal value. In another setting, He said, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In my words, what is most important to you will grab the affections of your heart and guide your behavior. So, make sure you give careful thought to your ways.