

STRATEGO AERO – I **(The Basic Case)**

Chris Harding, now 58, has been considered the best plant manager anywhere in the Stratego Aero Corporation. A genius at keeping production running on schedule, Chris has turned in an impressive performance, year after year, in Minnesota, in Missouri and in New Hampshire. Top management at Stratego Aero Corporation has hoped Chris would stay until age 65, and has decided to use Chris to train the plant managers of the next few years. With defense funding now super-competitive, Chris is a highly valued manager. Some months ago Harding was sent southwest to a new plant.

Sandy King is the up and coming assistant plant manager at this new plant in the southwest. Stratego Aero has been particularly pleased with Sandy, an African American who speaks excellent Spanish and who gets along well with a wide variety of Caucasians and people of color. Top management is happy to have a person of color in a position to grow swiftly into the top job, at a plant where well over half the incoming employees are minorities. Even more to the point, Sandy's technical skills are superb. Stratego's management is particularly hoping that Sandy will be a successful apprentice to Chris and take over the plant in a year or so. But all is not well.

Back at Corporate a call came in for Dana Idris, the division head. Dana was surprised to hear a very angry Sandy King upset at Chris Harding and talking of leaving. "I do not need this job," said Sandy. "But I wouldn't quit without giving you fair warning."

The problems, King reports, mainly concern Harding's manners and style. Harding was very unsupportive about observing the Martin Luther King Day holiday this last January. Sandy did not like Harding's disdain and was particularly hurt when Chris made a crack about how Sandy King probably just wanted a "King holiday." Chris is in fact often patronizing, and occasionally tells contemptuous stories about Latin Americans (especially Mexicans) and offensive jokes about Africans that relate to sexuality and AIDS, and worse. Chris also reacts publicly to current news in ways that offend people. For example there was a news item about a soft drinks company, where senior managers were taped making offensive remarks about African Americans and South-east Asians. As Sandy King heard the story, Chris Harding had been heard to say that the matter was "totally overblown," and the soft drinks company was "forced to knuckle under just because of undue pressure."

Chris also does not appear to wish to delegate responsibility, says Sandy, and even poohpoohs Sandy's superior technical expertise. Harding interrupts King in public meetings and fails to invite King to dinners with visitors from Corporate.

King reports many weeks of attempting to stay calm, be reasonable, and learn everything possible from this remarkably experienced superior. But Sandy hates the feeling of either being invisible or being treated as a not-too-able Equal Employment Opportunity statistic. Until recently Sandy thought things might improve when the two senior plant

managers got to know each other better. Sandy speculated that Chris had never had a black colleague and was just uneasy.

But yesterday Chris had blown it in public. Several Latino employees had come to the plant office concerned that equipment manufactured by Stratego was being sold to enclaves of extremists in Latin America, and perhaps in Africa and the Mid-East, via a European intermediary. Chris, in dealing with the question, ignored the central issue, according to Sandy.

Chris instead had focused on Stratego's economic importance to their own local city area in the US Southwest. Chris managed to imply that these minority employees would never have been able to find employment without Stratego's help. What was worse, Harding had sounded off on the subject of how Latin Americans were not really able to run their own countries. The Stratego employees were very angry. And Sandy has had it: Chris goes or Sandy goes.

Idris placed a call to Chris Harding. Chris saw it all quite differently. Sandy has potential, is learning the ropes as fast as might be expected, maybe seems a bit too sensitive on racial issues. For example, yesterday King missed an opportunity to show real leadership. "It's the kind of incident that makes one wonder how fast responsibility can be delegated to King," said Chris. Clearly it was a good chance for Sandy to have picked up the ball and shown some company loyalty, especially since it's obviously absurd that equipment like theirs would be sent illegally to other countries. And especially since the "trouble-making" employees were "King's own people or at least close to those people." If Dana is planning to call Sandy back, "perhaps Dana could put in a word for company loyalty and showing leadership" ...says Chris.

What should Idris do? Stratego really needs both of these people in today's competitive environment. Sandy is a find—technically outstanding, learning very fast. But Chris' long-term experience and superb past performance also cannot be duplicated.