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This was the good life: a solid job at a downtown bank, a com-fortable salary, extended lunches and fun co-workers. The purchasing department wasn't where I planned to develop a career, but hey, I could take any job as long as the ride was smooth.

Then Cindy came along.

Cindy applied for a co-worker's position and landed it hands-down. No wonder: Cindy was smart, outgoing, energetic and eager to impress with ideas that flashed as brightly as her smile. She dressed in killer business suits and spiked heels; she sported long, sun-toasted hair and a tan that turned male employees' heads. It seemed Cindy had everything — including, we'd find out, a volcanic temper.

I don't recall what caused the first eruption, but I do recall the tension crackling in our laid-back office. Cindy's green eyes darkened; her face flushed. She stomped down the hallway, threw folders and flung papers across the desk yelling, "This is wrong!" When Cindy found mistakes I'd made, her rage blasted in my face and melted my emotions. Quiet by nature, I slunk away hurt, humiliated ... and silent.

Cindy collided with employees in other departments as well. Each time, our manager Betsy pulled her aside and warned her to keep her temper in check. But Cindy was saving the bank money, and at nearly every staff meeting she bubbled with more cost-cutting ideas. Management wouldn't come down on her too heavily, no matter how strong her temper.

It didn't take long for the office conflicts to wear on me. I started waging inner battles, thinking myself stupid and inept. Although I wanted to avoid Cindy, I couldn't. In my mind the most Christ-like position was to make peace with her while keeping the hurt to myself. I did this by baking bread and giving a loaf to Cindy. "How sweet!" she oozed and patted me on the shoulder. *Maybe she likes me after all*, I thought.

But before long another error surfaced, and Cindy blew. She repeatedly scolded me. No matter how many times she drug me through the mud, Cindy flitted out the door on Friday afternoon wishing me a great weekend. I couldn't walk away that easily; I took Cindy home with me every night, weekend and holiday. I churned inside, recalling her tantrums. Reliving failures only made me commit more mistakes when I returned to work. I started grinding my teeth, and horrible jaw pain developed. I prayed more, read the Bible more, and asked others to pray for me. Still, every work morning I dragged myself out of bed, dreading potential confrontations.

My mother sympathized but encouraged me to take action. "Why don't you tell Cindy how you feel? Stick up for yourself."

How could I? *If I share my honest feelings with a non-Christian, I reasoned, what will she think of me as a believer? She knows I go to church. How will all this reflect on Christ?*

Instead, I retreated into my cubicle, saturated myself with Christian radio programs, and dreamed of resigning — or walking away. Then one afternoon I returned from lunch to see Cindy yelling in her cubicle and stabbing the air with a piece of paper — an order I'd placed for envelopes. "This is wrong," she snapped at me — in front of a salesman, no less. "We could have saved money on a standard size. I gave the specs to the company last week. I can't believe you did this!"

Cindy's rage even made the salesman squirm. Finding my voice, I stammered, "I'm sorry," and crawled back to my desk.

As if things couldn't get worse, Betsy called a meeting to explain department restructuring. Thanks to her contributions, Cindy would become my supervisor. Both Betsy and Cindy eyed me intently for a reaction, but I remained silent, to preserve my witness.

In tears, I vented to my mother. This time, however, Mom said something I'd never considered before. "If you don't confront Cindy now, you will carry this baggage into your next job. You won't get over it."

Once my emotions settled down, I realized she was right. My attempts at peacemaking hadn't accomplished anything. Could God's solution be honest confrontation? Paul did urge believers to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and Solomon described an honest answer as "a kiss on the lips" (Proverbs 24:26) — something positive.

I came to see that Ecclesiastes 3:7 is true: There are times I should be silent and times I *must* speak. In fact, stuffing my feelings was a form of falsehood: I projected the impression that Cindy's behavior didn't bother me when it actually did. What Paul wrote to the Ephesians applied to me as well: "Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor ..." (Ephesians 4:25).

In speaking the truth, however, I couldn't simply dump my feelings on Cindy. I had to think carefully about what I'd say. Proverbs 15:28 says, "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers." In a confrontation, my words must be healing, not hurtful (Proverbs 10:11).

These biblical truths were tested when I called a meeting with Cindy and Betsy. At last I voiced the feelings bottled up inside for months. I calmly explained that when Cindy vented her anger, I feared her and stayed out of her way, that I didn't intend to make mistakes and was doing my best. I never raised my voice or demanded an apology.

Cindy admitted the problems with her temper and apologized. She also explained, "When you didn't speak, I thought it meant you didn't care about your job." I hadn't realized that my silence had not protected my witness; it had created misunderstanding.

When we left the meeting all three of us were smiling — I the most: God had lifted the baggage of silent conflict. I'd seen firsthand that becoming someone's doormat does not honor Christ. My relationship with Cindy became open and honest, and my dread of her subsided. I left the bank a few years later with something more than a résumé: the knowledge that the good life isn't a smooth ride — it is using godly honesty to get over the bumps. And that, I know, is the best witness of all.

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