

Safe Lifting / Employer & Employee Relationships

Tammy: Ugh. Oh my back hurts.

Carol: What in the world did you do?

Tammy: I have weak back from a previous injury. It has been fine up until now. But I bent over to pick up my grandchild the other day andoh, there it was again. I think my grand child is growing a bit faster than I realized

Hello! I'm Tammy...

Carol: ...and I'm Carol. This is Women of Hope. It's great to be with you again. Tammy, I am really sorry about your back. I know it must hurt – but I also know it is disappointing not to be able to lift your sweet little grandbaby as easily as you want to.

Tammy: Oh, I can still lift him/her – nothing could keep me from doing that!! I just need to be careful and remember what the doctor taught me about caring for my back. This reminds me, our storyteller is with us again. And today she has a story about a working woman with a back problem.

Carol: Well, I need to hear this. I have to make sure you are taking care of yourself and my husband has an occasional problem with his back. Let's get comfortable and listen.

Storyteller: Hello Tammy and Carol... and hello to you too. Are you ready for another story with a practical message to help you?

Faiyma was at the market, trying to find a casual job as a day labourer. She had worked hard in the fields while the harvest was on but she needed more work to pay her debts.

She felt trapped, because she had borrowed money from a man. The other women called him 'the vulture'. Have you seen a vulture pick the bones of a dead animal? Well, this moneylender took people's savings in the same way. He had cruel eyes. People only went to him when they were desperate for a loan of some money, because he charged such high interest.

And Fayima *was* desperate. Three months before, her roof had finally fallen in one night while she and her little daughter Susi slept. Her husband worked a long way away in another country to earn some money for Susi's school fees. She couldn't get a message to him to tell him, so she had to manage the problem herself. Her family wasn't able to help her because her young sister's wedding had taken all their savings. That's why she had borrowed money.

Finally Fayima was offered a job. But it was heavy work. She had to pick up the rocks from a field to get it ready for planting a crop. With the rocks, she had to help build the wall around the piece of ground.

Faiyma had done heavy work before, but she had hurt her back. She had gone to a clinic to get help for her pain and they had told her how to lift and how to do good exercises so she wouldn't hurt her back again.

The rules for lifting were easy to remember; they started with the first letters of the alphabet, ABCDE. She had to remember one rule for each letter and use her fingers to help her remember them.

The first rule started with A. **A**rch the back when lifting. She had to push her bottom out and push her chest forwards. As she held up her hand, her thumb stuck out, and this helped her remember to arch her back and stick her bottom out when lifting.

The second rule started with two Bs; **B**end the knees and **B**race the **B**elly, making it hard. Her bent second finger helped to remind her to bend her knees and not her back. That meant she must squat down, not lean over, to pick things up. Then, when she stiffened the finger, it reminded her to make her belly hard.

The letter C reminded her to hold heavy things **C**lose to her body... not at arms' length. She must not stretch out a long way to lift heavy weights. Her third finger squeezed close to the second finger to remind her.

Next, D stands for **D**on't twist while you lift, especially don't bend and twist. Fayima's mother used to tell her not to twist her ring she liked to wear on the 4th finger. So that reminded her not to twist her body to pick something up, but to turn around to face the thing she was lifting.

The last rule was to **E**qualize the weight on each leg. Fayima had a way to remember this too. Her

fifth finger was much shorter than the others, not equal. So this finger reminded her to put equal weight on each leg, and walk evenly.

The physiotherapist at the clinic had taught Fayima exercises to strengthen her stomach muscles so they could support her back. She had to pull her stomach in but keep breathing gently. She would hold her stomach in for 10 seconds and then relax and do it again and again, 10 times. She did this every morning and night.

She knew she was getting stronger by doing this exercise every day. Her belly was not loose as it was after the birth of her baby. Good! Maybe she *was* strong enough to lift rocks without hurting her back.

Carol: We're together on Women of Hope and listening to a story about Fayima and the rules she learned for lifting well. OK , I am going to test you now! (laughing) Let's see if together we can remember the five points.

Tammy: Let's do what Fayima did and use the alphabet to remember them. She had to *arch* her back and stick out her bottom when lifting. That was the 'A' part. And there were two Bs- *bend* the knees and *brace the belly*.

Carol: That's A & B! The C was she had to hold the weight *close* to her body, not far out. That's important.

Tammy: And the next letter was D - It was something *not* to do- don't twist and bend at the same time.

Carol: Good for you! And then the letter E; she had to *equalize* the weight on each leg. Now, I want to hear how Fayima got on with her job.

Storyteller: Fayima walked along the road until she got to the field. The day was getting hotter. Fayima knew she had to put this out of her mind as the 'vulture', the moneylender, would come in a day or two and ask for more money. She just had to do the work. Gradually her back started to ache as she carried load after load of rocks to the edge of the field. She walked across to where her boss had left some drinking water, wondering how she could keep going.

Fayima sat for a little while and then she remembered another thing the physiotherapist had taught her about back care. She remembered she must not work so hard that she felt the pain again. If

she could take a few minutes rest every now and again, it would help her last the whole day through. If her back got too tired it would be more likely to be damaged again.

The physiotherapist had told her, 'work hard but work wisely'. But what if the boss came when she was resting? How could she explain that she was trying to keep the rules she had been given by the clinic?

She hoped and prayed that her boss would be kind and understand. 'Anyway,' thought Fayima, 'he can see how many rocks I've carried today. I've nearly finished clearing his field'.

Evening was coming and she wished she could go home to her daughter. Susi was with her grandmother after school. Susi enjoyed school. She was learning to read and write; Fayima wished she had learned to do that. Fayima always encouraged her daughter to work hard at school so she would not have to carry rocks. She hoped Susi could get an education and get a good job.

Slowly the sun started to sink behind the hills. Fayima had worked so hard throughout the day. Her back had started to hurt but not as much as before. She had been careful to take lots of little breaks so the muscles were not too tired to do their job of protecting the spine. 'I worked hard and I worked wisely', she thought.

The boss had promised to come before evening and give her the pay. Fayima worked on, hoping that she would have the money in her hand soon. As time went by she felt frightened, and she thought perhaps she had been tricked.

At last she heard his motorbike coming closer. She was now angry because she was worried about her little girl and what her mother-in law-would say. The boss knew he had kept her too late. He said he was sorry but his bike had broken down and he had to wait to get it fixed, otherwise she would not have been paid at all.

Just then the boss looked into the field. He told her what an excellent job she had done and then he gave her more money than she had expected. This was wonderful. It almost made the pain disappear. Now she smiled her thanks, took the money and started her walk home. The boss surprised her again. He said 'I know it's late. Your husband is a good man who wouldn't like his wife out alone walking home in the dark. Here's some money to catch the bus; it will come soon.'

Fayima hardly knew what to say! She was so tired, but now she wasn't angry, but grateful, and rather curious. He was so different than the other bosses who had been so hard on her, and the 'vulture' who was so mean. Why was he different?

Tammy: Here on Women of Hope we've just heard a story about a woman who had to work hard. And it had a lot of good information to help us to remember how to protect our backs when we're lifting.

Carol: That story was interesting in another way as well.

Tammy: How so?

Carol: Well it ended with a boss who was kind. Bosses aren't always good, are they? I wonder what sort of bosses you've had.

Tammy: You're right. That really surprised me. Some bosses use their power to exploit and abuse their workers. Sometimes it's just a bit unfair, sometimes it's much more serious. Do you think it makes a difference if the boss is a follower of Jesus?

Carol: I really hope it does. Because God's word, the Bible, has some strong words for Christian bosses and workers. Why don't we look at them together?

Tammy: First, we need to understand what the world was like at the time of Jesus and his followers, 2000 years ago. The Roman Empire ruled the Mediterranean world, and slavery was a normal part of life. One third of the population were slaves. Some slaves were prisoners of war, some were criminals, and they were treated very harshly. But most were more like bonded laborers, not slaves for life. Often they had sold *themselves* to be slaves, to have a home and food, or to pay debts, or to learn skills. They had legal rights, they could earn money and buy property, including their own slaves! But they couldn't go and work for someone else until their master gave permission, and they were expected to obey their master totally. The master had to feed them and house them, look after them generally, and free them when they had served their time. Often they were freed at about 30 years of age, so another third of the population were former slaves.

Carol: So those first Christians were slaves, or former slaves, and some slave owners. Now in our community we probably have many workers, some people without work, and some bosses. But God's word still speaks to us today about being bosses and workers.

Tammy: We've heard many stories about Paul, a leader among the first Christians. He was often inspired by God to write to groups of people who had become followers of Jesus Christ. One of these letters was to a group at Ephesus, in Turkey. In the first part of the letter Paul encouraged the Christians to be humble, gentle, patient and loving, and to remember that they belonged to each other because they belonged to the one Master, Jesus (Eph 4:1-6). He told them 'Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, fighting, slander and malice. Be kind and show pity to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.' (Eph 4:31-32)

Carol: I think that last part is very important - we should treat each other like God treats us - he is kind and he forgives us. And he asks us to imitate him. Act the way he acts. Do what he does. (5:1).

Tammy: Then a bit later in the letter, Paul wrote to wives and husbands, and children and parents. He encouraged them to consider *each other's* needs first, before their own needs. Yes, he said wives and children were to respect their husbands and fathers who were their leaders; but he strongly told these men to love their wives as much as Jesus Christ loved his people and gave himself for them. Paul had no time for bullying men! A strong man *serves* his wife and children. He told these parents they were responsible to bring up their children properly, to follow God.

Carol: So when he wrote next to bosses and servants, can you guess what he said? It was the same message, really.

Tammy: Let me read to you first what Paul wrote to the slaves. 'Slaves, obey your earthly masters with great respect, and with sincere hearts, just as you would obey Christ himself. Don't just obey while they're watching. Think of yourselves as slaves of Jesus Christ, doing what pleases God with your whole heart, as though you're serving God, not your human bosses. You know that our Master God will reward everyone for whatever good they do, whether they're free men or slaves.' (Eph 6: 5-8)

Carol: That's interesting, isn't it? Paul was still thinking about relationships where one person has authority over another. The servant or employee must respect the person over them, and do their best to serve them well.

Tammy: He didn't say to be obedient and hardworking because your boss is generous and kind. He didn't say to work hard while the boss is watching, to impress him, and be lazy at other times.

No, he said to obey and work hard because your real boss is Jesus Christ himself, and you're trying to please *him*. I heard one carpenter say that every chair and table he made should be good enough to show God!

Carol: Do you do your work as well as you can to please God? Do you clean your kitchen, or weed the crop, work in the factory or serve your customers as though *Jesus* was coming to see you? Your boss or your husband or your mother-in-law may never praise you. But you know *God* will know it and reward you for it.

Tammy: I would like to think that most bosses *would* notice a good honest worker, and maybe reward them, like Fayima's boss did.

Well Carol, we heard what Paul wrote to the *servants*. What did he write to the *bosses*?

Carol: He wrote, 'You bosses, treat your slaves in the same way.' What do you think he meant by 'the same way'? I think he meant that bosses should be doing what pleases God, and respecting their slaves or employees. He continued, 'Don't threaten them, since you know that God in heaven is your master just as much as theirs, and he doesn't show favoritism.' (Eph 5:9)

Tammy: People with power sometimes threaten those who work for them and treat them badly. Have you found that? But God's word tells us that bosses should remember that they have a boss too, in heaven. God sees the big boss and the lowest worker as just the same.

Carol: The Bible often says that God values each person. He sees each one of us as a precious individual, with great dignity. You're not an *object* to be owned by another person... or just a number in a company.

In another part of the Bible, Paul wrote to slaves that they should get their freedom if they could. It's ok to improve your situation if you have the chance. But whatever your life is like, the important thing is to remember you belong to God, if you've put your trust in Jesus Christ. He has made you a member of God's family forever, and that means you are *equal* in God's sight, whether you're the boss or the sweeper. Let me read you some words that Paul wrote in another letter.

'You are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus Christ... There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, slaves or free people, men or women, in God's family, for you are all one in Jesus Christ.' (Galatians 3: 26-28)

Tammy: I love those words, don't you? What is *most* important about you? It's not your nationality

or race. It's not whether you're tied to your work, whether you have power or not, whether you're a man or woman. A woman who belongs to Jesus Christ is a daughter of the King of the universe, and equal to anyone on earth. So hold up your head, my friend! Sweep your floor like a princess!

We need to go soon. Do you think you can remember those tips for lifting well? Why don't you go over them again, ABCDE, to make sure?

Carol: You know, we'd love to hear from you about your life. Maybe you have questions we could answer. You can write to us in care of this station or at Women of Hope.

Tammy: The address: TWRWomenofHope@twr.org. That's TWRWomenofHope@twr.org. If you have missed a program or would even like to hear one again you can do that on our website TWRWomenofHope.org that's TWRWomenofHope.org. or by visiting us on our Facebook page.

Carol: Remember to protect your back and take care while lifting things..

We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

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