

46. The Retirement

(In the coffee room of an office. #1 is on the phone as he/she pours some coffee.)

- #1: Yes, I know. You're not giving me any new news here. *(Pause)* I know he didn't show up. *(Pause)* What? No, don't put him on hold. Transfer the call here. *(#2 enters. He/she goes up to #1 and starts to say something. #1 holds up a hand. Then talks into the phone.)* Burt, yes I know how long you've been waiting. *(Pause)* No, he was on his way over and his car broke down. *(Pause)* Because he left his cellular on his desk. He hates that thing. You know how my dad is. *(Pause)* I know it's not the first time. Look, John Alexander is on his way with the new contracts. He should be there in five minutes. I promise. *(Pause)* I'm glad I could help and I owe you a drink. *(Pause)* No, you tell my Dad that. He doesn't let me use that kind of language. *(Pause)* You, too. Good-bye.
- #2: Nice save.
- #1: It helped that my father and Burt Goldman have known each other for thirty years. So, have you seen my dad?
- #2: He's in his office. He's saying that he wasn't informed of the meeting.
- #1: Uh-huh.
- #2: Do you want me to talk to him?
- #1: Is he yelling at everyone?
- #2: Of course.
- #1: No, let him alone. He's mad at himself. He needs time to cool down. I'll talk to him later.
- #2: Whatever you say. *(Starts to exit, then turns back to #1.)* You know this is getting worse, don't you?
- #1: I don't want to talk about it. *(Picks up a newspaper and starts to read.)*
- #2: *(Walks back to #1.)* We have to.

- #1: No, we don't. There's nothing to discuss. My father is fine.
- #2: Yeah, and our company tops the Fortune 500 list. Look, there's no one I love more than the old man, but facts are facts. He really can't do his full job anymore.
- #1: That's not true. He's still the best at what he does.
- #2: True...when he's aware...or remembers. *(Pause)* Everyone knows his memory's no good now and...
- #1: Who did you tell?!
- #2: No one and I'm insulted you think I told anyone. You don't have to attend Harvard Medical school to figure out that there's a problem.
- #1: What's everyone saying?
- #2: The truth. That when he's aware he's fine, but he forgets too much, repeats himself too much.
- #1: So you're saying that nobody trusts him?
- #2: I'm not sure if trust is the right word, but in a nutshell... yeah. It's real hard to sit in a meeting and watch him ask questions that were answered twenty minutes before...or walk in on a meeting having no idea he was supposed to be there...or...
- #1: Or...forgetting a Burt Goldman meeting for the third time. Yeah, I get the point. *(Pause)* Have you heard if anyone on the board knows? *(#2 doesn't answer.)* Your lack of an answer doesn't bode well for my father.
- #2: I don't know anything definitive, but the talk is...they're planning to have a meeting about asking your dad to step down.
- #1: What? Why hasn't anyone talked to me about it? This is inexcusable...
- #2: Whoa, you wanna get a grip? I said it was just a rumor.
- #1: But what if it's true?
- #2: OK, what if it is? If they are planning to replace the old man, you're not exactly the first one they'll come to for support. Also, if they are holding this meeting, can you honestly blame them?

- #1: He started this company.
- #2: I didn't ask that. Can you blame them for thinking your dad should step down?!
- #1: *(Pauses, then quietly.)* No. *(Pause)* I went with him to see his doctor a little while ago. The doctor wanted to put him on some medication.
- #2: But your dad didn't want any part of it. And I bet he was very demure in his objections.
- #1: He's getting much better. He didn't go ballistic until the third word left the doctor's mouth. Still, he's not an invalid, so why shouldn't he work?
- #2: Hey, he's seventy. Most people are retired at that age. He's done a great job. He created this company and made it work. He doesn't have to give it up. Maybe he could be in an advisory position. But now's the time to sit back and enjoy life while he can.
- #1: Enjoy life? That's funny.
- #2: Why?
- #1: Because this place is his life. Get it? It's what he loves. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not going to be one of those people who say they never saw their father. I mean, he loved his family, but his work...I don't know. Maybe it's the way he used to walk out of the house in the morning. He just loved going to work. It's always given him something...I just can't describe.
- #2: Think of your dad back then. How would he judge his performance now?
- #1: He wouldn't like it.
- #2: Then convince him to go out on top. Not like a ballplayer who sticks around too long and can't contribute. Someone who can't be productive.
- #1: Sorry. Maybe the board should do it because I won't.
- #2: Why not?
- #1: Because I can't. Good enough?
- #2: Not even close. Don't you care about the business?

- #1: I care about him more.
- #2: Then you owe it to him to be honest. If you ask, he'll probably step down.
- #1: Exactly!
- #2: Exactly, what?
- #1: If I ask him, he will step down. He'll argue, eventually listen to me and retire. But I won't be the one to take this away from him. *(Pause)* I won't kill him.
- #2: Maybe he wants to step down.
- #1: Shortly after my Uncle Joe retired, my dad and I went to visit him. We spent the day going to the park, etc. Anyway, on the way home my father wasn't talking. I asked him if he was OK and he said, "If I ever say I want to retire, just shoot me right there. When I go, it's going to be at my desk with my pen in my hand."
- #2: Was that before or after his current problem?
- #1: Before.
- #2: Things are different. Your dad may not always be aware, but he's not oblivious. Maybe he's waiting for someone he loves to tell him it's OK to stop now.
- #1: In the movies, that would be the ending. But unfortunately this isn't Hollywood and he's not sweet, old Jimmy Stewart. It's not a very realistic hope.
- #2: If you don't talk to him, you'll never know.
- #1: I need to think about this.
- #2: Don't take too much time. If the rumors are true, this whole conversation will be moot in about three days. It's your call. *(Gets up and exits.)*
- #1: *(Watches him/her go, then pauses. Softly)* Why?