

The Long Game

Elena Vasquez had taken the job at Crestwood Regional knowing it was going to be hard. The division had been underperforming for three years, morale was low, and two of her predecessors had lasted less than eighteen months each. She had come in anyway, because she believed the underlying business was sound and because she was, by her own assessment, someone who knew how to wait. But eighteen months in, she was becoming less certain about the second part.

The plan she had put in place was working. Not quickly, and not in ways that showed up cleanly in the numbers that corporate watched, but working. She had rebuilt relationships with two major clients who had been close to leaving. She had restructured the sales process in a way that was already producing better leads, though the leads had not yet converted at the rate she projected. She had replaced three managers who had been in the wrong roles and promoted two people who had been overlooked for years. The division felt different than it had when she arrived. She was not sure that feeling showed up in any report that went to headquarters.

What did show up was the revenue line, which was improving but not fast enough for the people watching it. She had a call scheduled for Friday with her regional director, a man named Carl Briggs, who was not unsympathetic but who operated inside a system that measured quarters, not years. The previous two calls had been versions of the same conversation: progress noted, timeline questioned, pressure applied. She expected this one to be similar.

She had been thinking, in the days before the call, about what patience actually required of her here. It was not the same as stubbornness. She knew the difference, or believed she did. Stubbornness was holding a position because you had committed to it. Patience was holding a position because you understood something about time that the people pushing you did not. The question she kept returning to was whether she actually understood something, or whether she was telling herself a story that happened to justify staying the course. Her assistant knocked and told her Carl was on the line.

She took a breath. She had the numbers in front of her, and she had the story behind the numbers, which was harder to put in a report but which she believed was the truer account of where things stood. She was going to tell Carl both. She was going to make the case for more time, clearly and without apology, because she thought it was the right case to make. Whether he would give her that time was a different question.