

Part of the Family

by Donna Davis, Director, Ethics and Business Conduct

“Part of the Family” is a fictional story about a person who faced ethical choices. The story helps us to recognize ethical issues and reminds us how important one person’s actions can be in maintaining a company’s reputation for fair, honest business practices.



“You’re going to love working at Gizmo, Inc.,” his supervisor told Ishmael on his first day on the job. “We’re proud of our track record. We deliver a quality product, on time. We make our customers happy, and our employees too.” As William introduced Ishmael to people in sales, manufacturing, and accounting, he could see that there were a lot of long-time employees who seemed very dedicated to the company’s success.

The first day, Ishmael learned how to fill out his time sheet. It was a little complicated making sure his time was logged to the right job task but he was told it was important, since that was how the company tracked costs. At the end of the first week when he presented it to William for a signature, William signed it without looking at it. When Ishmael delivered the time sheet, his was the only one in the “In” box.

“Oh,” the clerk said with a shrug when he asked. “Sometimes people forget. But don’t worry, we all get paid anyway.”

Soon, Ishmael was getting the hang of his job. Some days he inspected products, signing off on a Quality Assurance checklist. Other days he filled orders, packing the items listed on the order forms and sending the paperwork through to billing. It wasn’t always exciting work, but Ishmael was thorough. If he did a good job he knew he would eventually become part of the “Gizmo Family.”

One day, Gizmo buzzed with news of a huge order for a customer who normally used a competitor. “This is a big opportunity,” William told him. “If we can deliver by Friday afternoon, this customer will be ours forever.” The whole production team pitched in and by noon on Friday the final items were rolling off the line into the inspection area.

As Ishmael prepared to run through his checklist, William came over with Tonya from sales. “Is it ready to go?” Tonya asked. “We promised delivery by 3 PM today.”

“Well,” Ishmael said, “my inspection should take another two hours. I don’t know if I’ll make 3 o’clock.”

Tonya frowned at William. “Blowing the deadline could really cost us.”

“Do what it takes,” William said, patting Ishmael on the shoulder. “We’re counting on you.”

Ishmael wasn’t sure what to do. He knew he couldn’t finish the inspections in time to ship by 3 o’clock. But he also realized that in his time at Gizmo he’d found only a few problems when inspecting products. These parts had been rolling off the line all week and there was no reason to assume that this batch was any less perfect than the others.

“Just this once,” he said to himself, and then quickly signed his inspection list without actually checking the items. Then he packed up the products for shipment. At 2 o’clock he happily joined the celebration as the truck rolled out of the warehouse. Tonya and William both thanked him for his contribution to making the deadline.