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PROMISE OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

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ONE EXCITING MONDAY MEETING

OPEN DEBATE IN STRATEGY AND BUDGET MEETINGS
STRENGTHENS COMMITMENT TO THE FIRM'S PLANS.

OUR COMPANY is currently working through a budget process for the new year. John, a principal, stands up in the midst of a meeting and says, “Kit, I don’t agree with the direction of this strategy.”

It is a dull Monday morning, but his statement really gets people going. The air in the room suddenly shifts.

“Budgeting is an important process,” he says. “Define the backlog, weighted proposal, and expense. But it’s BS if we see such a huge ‘gap’ between the revenue target and expected revenue. We need some major business development actions and solid project management to make this work and to be profitable. As any engineering company, we operate in seven to eight months of backlog. We need to think deeper to understand what’s really going on.”

John adds relentlessly, “How can we fill the gap — by what? How much can we grow and how? How can we increase profitability?”

You may think he is rude. No, that’s how we roll. We challenge each other. He is challenging the status quo and how all of us can be accountable. It is coming from a good place.

Our CFO, Mike, counters somewhat calmly, “Essentially, our budget process is only as good as what we decide to do and act on it throughout the year.”

Michele, our operations director says, “Yeah, right. Our company is spread out all over the place and this makes it even more challenging. Eight offices in the U.S. and 10 international locations. How are we going to keep everyone going in one direction? Everyone has different ideas and backgrounds.”

I step in to point out, “The budget is only as good as the business plan behind it. Each business unit must have a business plan, regardless of size. The budget gives us numerical goals that need to be achievable. Then we need to have major strategies to achieve the goal, such as marketing, training, and a project-management process. Then we need to have action plans to achieve these strategies. This has components of ‘what, by whom, when.’ The plan should be simple enough that it can be almost memorized, but comprehensive enough to make each of us accountable for the actions we put in place. This is the essence of a business plan.”

I add: “I think what really helps us is that our mission — Make the world a safer, better place — unites us in the direction all of us want to go.”

JT, a long-time principal says, “You know what? I know we will be successful. We can debate with no holds barred. It seems a simple thing, but this is so critical. In this process, we can really flesh out important things, go deeper, and gain commitment from each other. This can only be accomplished if we understand and care about each other.”

I really like what’s going on in this Monday morning meeting.

Note: This is a fictional account based on a somewhat true story.

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