

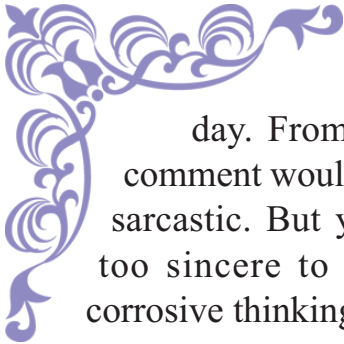


A Fiscal Fairy Tale

The Piety Piper

By Tom Brown

Pollo Piper had worked in the King's factory for only a few short years, but soon he had become a favorite of everyone else. Even the old-timers said that young Piper had the hustle, the drive, and the good sense needed to succeed. More than that, everyone noticed that Pollo had a perky, even jubilant, attitude. "There's not a better place to work than right here in the kingdom," he said



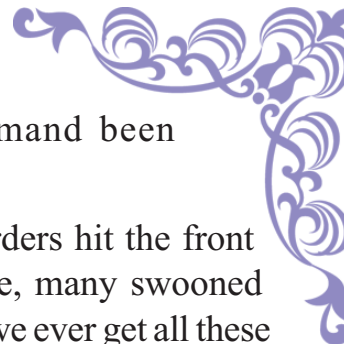
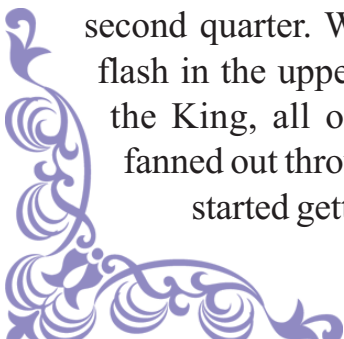
countless times each day. From someone else, such a comment would seem cynical, perhaps sarcastic. But young Piper was much too sincere to be suspected of such corrosive thinking.

Piper seemed to stay upbeat during reversals and setbacks that would have set others to moaning or, worse, to heavy imbibing. Once, an entire shipment of products for the week was lost in a train accident. Pollo's work team heard the news and instantly went into shock; they knew they would have to make up for the lost production — and meet the current week's quota.

During another small debacle, the sales force somehow sloughed off for most of the second quarter.

Yet Pollo Piper, with arms folded and a determined look upon his brow, said with guttural fortitude, "There's not a better place to work than right here in the kingdom." Soon, everyone followed the young man, doubled their efforts, and, by week's end, doubled their output.

During another small debacle, the sales force somehow sloughed off for most of the second quarter. When tempers started to flash in the upper ranks leading right to the King, all of Sales and Marketing fanned out throughout the kingdom and started getting production orders at a furious rate. In fact,

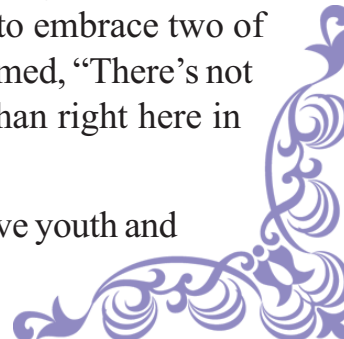


in no other quarter — ever — had such demand been placed on the factory.

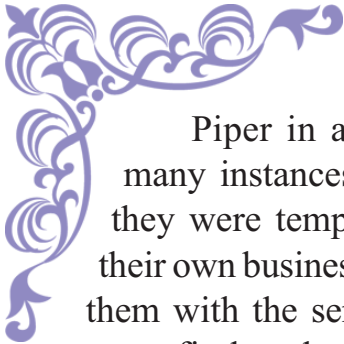
When this flood of orders hit the front of the production queue, many swooned at the flurry. "How will we ever get all these orders done?" asked one old hand of the foreman. Pollo Piper interceded before the boss could respond. "There's not a better place to work than right here in the kingdom." His youth and his charm carried the moment. Men and women lined up behind him and went back to their respective production posts.

Late one afternoon just before the end of the day shift, a few disgruntled workers yanked Pollo into a makeshift meeting next to some loud turbines, which camouflaged their purpose. "We want everyone to band together and start fighting for better work hours, production rules, and increased pay," they insisted, as Piper stared in disbelief. "The workers in other kingdoms have much better working conditions than we do here!"

With that, young Pollo lost his patience. Citing the many times when good things came to the factory folks because of their loyalty and productivity, the dissatisfied workers soon relented. Maybe, just maybe, what they'd been hearing about "better conditions" at other factories might be a myth. The turmoil at the turbine ended without another word being spoken. Pollo, with arms outstretched to embrace two of his fellow workers, affirmed, "There's not a better place to work than right here in the kingdom."



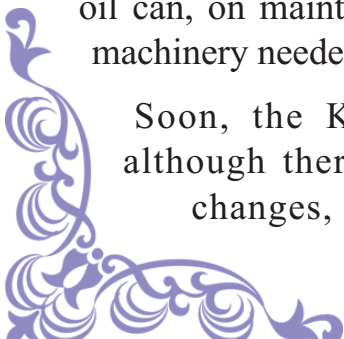
Thus, despite his relative youth and inexperience, people in



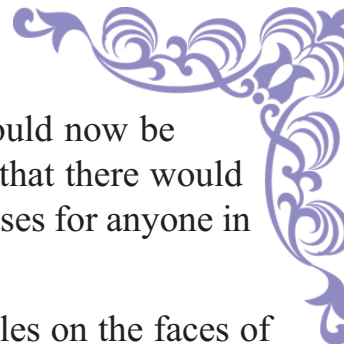
the factory followed Piper in all matters. There were many instances when his friends said they were tempted to go out and start their own businesses, but Piper dissuaded them with the sentiment that they could never find or build an organization as supportive as this one. In time, his oft-repeated saying became a kind of toast; workers could be seen finishing their lunches by holding their coffee mugs high in the air, clanging them together, and saying in unison, “There’s not a better place to work than right here in the kingdom.”

Pollo held his course and his sunny disposition, month after month. Yet in time, even he had to concede that something seemed awry in his beloved factory. Many of his older peers seemed to be losing their vigor as challenging goals put forth in the quarter were met — only to be replaced by even higher goals for the quarter that followed.

When new machinery of every size and shape started to arrive at the factory, even Piper observed that more and more of his fellow workers seemed to be underutilized as machinery whirred their jobs into less meaningful work. Master artisans were reduced to turning knobs on control platforms far away from the equipment making the products. The closest any worker seemed to get to the real work was with an oil can, on maintenance days, when the machinery needed upkeep.



Soon, the King announced that although there would be no “big” changes, all factory personnel would have to accept



without protest that their “high salaries” would now be “red circled,” meaning that there would be no further pay increases for anyone in the factory — ever!

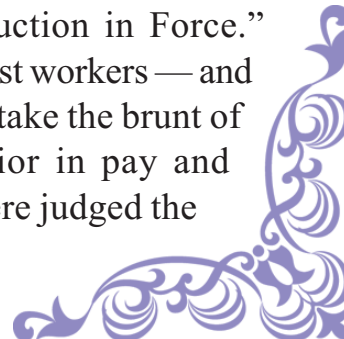
There were fewer smiles on the faces of workers as they came to their shift; no smiles during the work day; and only frowns

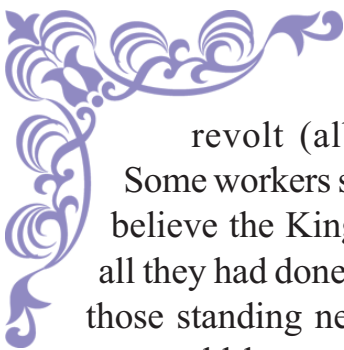
The whispers were that for the first time, people would be cut from the payroll...

as they went home. Except, of course, for Pollo Piper. “There’s not a better place to work than right here in the kingdom.”

In a short time, however, conditions worsened. Frozen pay grades became involuntary pay cuts. No workers who retired or left their jobs due to health reasons were replaced. Budgets for tools and training became tighter. There was seldom any kind of assembly, as in days of old, when the King’s ministers would applaud the workers for their tireless efforts and their boundless loyalty.

Then rumors flew that the King could not tolerate paying people when they simply were not needed. The whispers were that for the first time, people would be cut from the payroll as a “Reduction in Force.” Pollo heard that the oldest workers — and the youngest — would take the brunt of the RIF, as those senior in pay and junior in experience were judged the most expendable.





Some workers urged revolt (albeit in hushed tones).

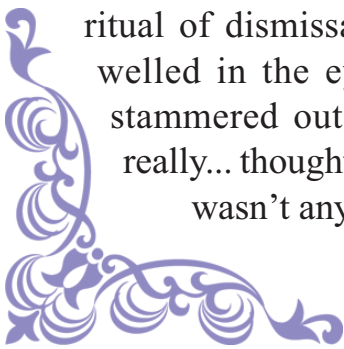
Some workers swore that they could not believe the King's lack of gratitude for all they had done over the years. Some of those standing next to Piper in his work area could be seen stealthily tiptoeing to

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the production line to dent, scratch, or gouge products as they were being conveyed by mechanical belts to waiting delivery trucks.

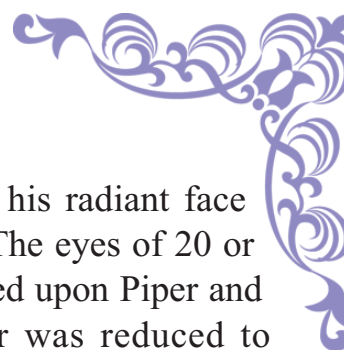
Pollo, choosing not to make difficult times even worse, pulled each miscreant aside and encouraged him or her to buck up. "There's not a better place to work than right here in the kingdom.

Then it happened. At the end of one workday, the foreman grabbed young Piper by the arm. With a sealed envelope, a few words, and a shrug, he informed Piper that his services would no longer be needed in the factory. Pollo Piper had become a Reduction in Force.



By that time, those around Piper knew the ritual of dismissal only too well. Tears welled in the eyes of many, as Piper stammered out a few words. "I... I... really... thought that there... that there... wasn't any... that there wasn't any

better place to... to... to work... than... than...."



Piper's manager saw his radiant face turn to an ashen gray. The eyes of 20 or more workers were fixed upon Piper and their supervisor. Piper was reduced to whistling as he stared about the factory that he had adored for almost four-and-a-half years. His manager realized that something more (at least a bit more) must be said.

"Piper, this *is* a darn good place to work!" Piper's manager said, pounding one fist into his other palm. "But times are changing — for the King — for everyone.

"Anyone who thinks that any job today is forever is...." The boss hesitated, surveyed the workers holding onto each and every word, and then looked into Pollo's eyes. "Anyone who thinks that any job today is forever... is, quite simply, living in a fairy tale!"



The End

Illustration and layout by Mac Thornton

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