

## Case 15 Family Ties and Business Ethics<sup>1</sup>

Lucy's father worked for years developing his ship-building business. He spent long hours away from his family, mixing with financiers, sailors, and the occasional loan shark. But the business did not bring him happiness. Tragically, his two beloved sons, Lucy's brothers, died testing a new design of one of their father's ships. After and perhaps because of this accident, he became a hardened man. While the business had sufficient size to stay afloat, his personality spilled over into his management style, which caused tension amongst employees, suppliers, and investors. The business did little more than break even most years, and some years it did considerably worse, adding to Lucy's father's sourness and resentment.

Nevertheless, it was one of the major businesses in the town where Lucy grew up and was one of her only options for making a decent income that would put her through school. Lucy's father was always overbearing and gruff with her, pushing her to cut corners and raging when she didn't. He was never physically violent. He kept food on the table in times when others didn't have any — sometimes through dubious business deals — and provided a decent standard of living. The family was tight, if somewhat competitive, and known for getting what they needed, even if they had to take it from someone else.

Lucy was always caught in the middle, recognizing her ties to her family but also desiring to get out and see the world. Working under her father gave her the money she needed to get her education in nautical engineering and the training she needed to get a great job. She left her father's business and joined an outstanding company that assembled fleets of ships. She was very successful and living quite independently of her family. She loved her job at the new company and her superiors always treated her with respect and kindness, even mentoring her to be management in the future.

One day, however, she got word that her own company had received a bid on a project from an unlikely source: her father's company. The bid was the best by far, and looked as though it would help her company meet quarterly goals in a particularly tough economy. When her company identified the connection between her father's company and Lucy, they turned to her as a natural liaison between the two companies. However, when she reunites with her father, she does not receive the welcome she was expecting from a successful daughter returning home. Instead, he seethes with contempt that she did not come to use her skills to improve his company and make it more competitive. What she thought would be a joyous reunion turned into disappointment and sorrow. "Why," she asked, "Why did you request me as a liaison if you had such antipathy towards me?"

"Because there is one thing you can do for me, Lucy," her father says. "I fed you, clothed you, and brought you up to withstand the struggles of the real world. Now you can repay me and give your family the life it has always deserved. I don't need the paltry contract I got with your company. I just need you to tell me your new company's tactics and strategy. I've spent everything, including your brothers' lives, on a new design that will allow me to build fleets of

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<sup>1</sup> Inspired by and derived from George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* series, <http://georgerrmartin.com/>; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Game\\_of\\_Thrones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Game_of_Thrones); <http://www.hbo.com/game-of-thrones/index.html>.

ships as your company does. If I know their strategies, I'll be able to take over their business and we'll live like kings. But if you don't help me, I'll be leveraged too severely, and all that I've built will waste away. All of your brothers' and father's sacrifice's will be for naught. Work with me. We'll take what's ours."

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