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*“Buddy, would you come downstairs for a minute?”*

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Buddy looks up from his computer screen. His slight startlement turns to slight anxiety as he sees my serious face.

He gets up and follows me down the hall of our small proposal-and-communications group office space. Out the door, past the men’s washroom, hang a left just before the water fountain, and down one flight of stairs to the main offices.

I say nothing. I can feel his anxiety building but he says nothing.

Exiting the stairwell we use the back door to the office, moving past the copier and the shelves full of old-proposal binders to the marketing executive’s secretary’s work area, a space set off with little half-walls at one end of a large open area.

Still not speaking, I wink at her and walk past her desk to her shelf. I take down a long-handled bell, reminiscent of an old-fashioned school bell, careful to muffle it as I do.

I turn back to Buddy and hold out the bell. He looks at me blankly.

*“We won that airport contract.  
I thought you might want to be  
the one to ring the bell.”*

His blank look turns to excitement as he whoops, grabs the bell from my hand, and runs off down the hall, flushing accountants from offices as he goes. Everyone knows what that bell means and it’s been an unusually long dry spell. Buddy’s been with us for almost a year and has worked on several proposals. This is his first win.

I smile a bit ruefully at his excitement and at the babble of voices now rising in the office at large. Of course we have to win some proposals: We won’t have a business if we don’t. But just as surely, we also have to find ways to do our intense and deadline-driven work while knowing that, usually, we won’t win.

But boy, that bell sounds good, don’t it?