

An Excerpt From



A LEADERSHIP CAROL

A CLASSIC TALE FOR MODERN LEADERS

JIM DITTMAR AND JOHN W. STANKO

A Leadership Carol: A Classic Tale for Modern Leaders

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ACT ONE

Ben looked at his watch and thought, *It can't be just two minutes since I last looked! When's this session going to end? This is absurd!*

Ben was in a conference room with his management team, and they were participating in what was supposed to be a team-building session with a consultant he had been coerced to hire to put some fire under his underperforming team. This was the fourth of five days that the consultant was at the company, and Ben's patience, not something he was noted for in the first place, had just about expired.

Francis Johnson, the consultant, was using an old-fashioned overhead projector with transparencies to plot the personality styles of each team member. *Who still uses an overhead projector?* Ben thought to himself. Yet Ben was the only one who seemed to notice or mind that fact. What's more, the team seemed to be engrossed in Francis' presentation, much to Ben's amazement—and annoyance.

"You see here," Francis explained. "Cheryl's the most relational of the team. She never met a stranger and loves to talk to everyone." Francis paused to allow the laughter to subside as the rest of the team looked at one another

and nodded in agreement.

This is so ridiculous, Ben thought, as Francis continued to analyze Cheryl, the office manager. Also in the room were Jimmy, Ben's nephew, who was the vice-president for business development; Jeff Collins, the CFO; Abdul Mohammed, the CIO; and Charlene Harkins, the COO.

"And then there's Jeff," Francis continued. "Don't approach Jeff without an appointment two days in advance. Cheryl never met a detail she liked, and Jeff never met one that wasn't his friend." Again, the team affirmed what Francis was saying through laughter and shouts of, "That's so true!" Ben did not participate in the frivolity. *We're going down the tubes, and this is how we spend our time?* Ben thought to himself.

"That's why Jeff and Cheryl make a great team, because they're so different and can complement one another in the work they do," Francis explained. He paused to replace the transparency on the projector, "And Charlene's the perfect fit for Jeff and Cheryl because she's both organized and relational. She can work with either, and round out the office team." Charlene was obviously pleased and took it all in, taking notes as Francis spoke.

Ben, who was CEO of his family's fourth-generation security firm, was not pleased. He sat at the head of the table and did a slow boil. Ben was perturbed that people were buying into this concept, and he didn't like it one bit. Then Francis crossed the line.

"Let's look at Ben," Francis continued, and the room fell eerily quiet. "Ben's the boss in all things. He believes his ideas are better than everyone else's ideas combined!" The team shot nervous glances toward Ben, who had a cold, fake half-smile on his face as he stared straight at Francis, never looking at anyone else.

"It's pretty much impossible for Ben to say he's sorry, for he seldom is," Francis continued. "Ben believes

that would make him look weak, and his style doesn't ever want to look weak." Ben chimed in, "Yep, that's pretty much like me," but his intent was not to agree, but rather to bring the session to an end.

What's more, Ben didn't simply intend to end this session. He had every intention of ending Francis' work with Ben's company the first chance he had. It didn't matter that the people seemed to relate to what was going on, Ben thought it was a lot of psycho-babble, and it was about to come to end before tomorrow's planned wrap up meeting.

"Jeff, have you cut Francis' check for services rendered yet?" Ben asked his CFO as the participants filed out of the conference room.

"Why, no, I had not. I thought I would mail it to him as I always do," Jeff responded.

"Let's write it now before the end of the year and give it to Francis to take home with him," Ben suggested. "Give it to me today so I can have it for tomorrow." Jeff thought the request a bit unusual, but he complied, dropping off the check before he left for the evening.



Ben's company was Always Watching Security Systems (AWSS). It had been founded by Ben's great-grandfather, who had come to the United States from England right before the turn of the century. Eventually, his great-grandfather had started a security company at a time when America needed protection for its expanding banking, railroad, and corporate sectors.

AWSS started small, but found its niche in New Jersey where Ben's family lived, focusing on providing security for banks and other financial institutions. Eventually, the company provided services for many of the seaports in northern New Jersey.

The company had weathered several depressions,

the proliferation of other security companies, two world wars, and numerous cultural and technological changes to become a multi-million-dollar entity. Their distinctive green uniforms with the corporate logo—an eye within the map of the U.S.—had strong brand recognition, especially on the East Coast.

Ben's great-grandfather's name was Fred Holiday. He had settled in the northern Jersey area after emigrating from England. The only job he could find at first was as a warehouse night security guard. He saw an opportunity to start something of his own to care for his wife and three sons, so he founded AWSS in 1902. One of those three sons was Ben's grandfather, also named Ben Holiday, who when it was his turn, went into the business, climbing to the top of the company through his ability to find new clients and sources for AWSS guards. Great-grandfather Fred had a good understanding of branding, even back in the early 1900s, and was the one who introduced the green uniforms at a time when everything in the world of uniforms seemed to be either black or navy blue.

The company benefitted from the outbreak of World War I, partnering with the Department of Defense to provide security at the New Jersey ports, which saw increased ship traffic as more and more war equipment and troops were sent off to the European front. AWSS used its extensive New Jersey contacts and clients to be the eyes and ears for the U.S. Government, actually getting involved in some spying activities on Americans of German descent. This aspect of the business would prove to be lucrative, but in time would cause the problems with which Ben was grappling at the moment.

After World War I, boom times came in the U.S., and AWSS was in on the action. America's manufacturing prowess continued to expand, which led to more and more exports, and more and more companies that needed

reliable security services to protect themselves from thievery and, at times, from their own employees, who filed false injury claims and pilfered company property and goods. That is when AWSS branched out to provide private investigation services, and they became known as the company, like the Canadian Mounties, who “always got their man” (or woman). Speaking of Canada, AWSS did some work in Ontario for the U.S. Government, which was the start of their international service division.

The boom times ended, as they always do, and the U.S. growth of the ‘20s ended in the Great Depression of the ‘30s. AWSS saws its business plummet as some of their clients went out of business since the New York and New Jersey areas were hit hardest. Some companies brought their security in-house and others had nothing to secure—they were bankrupt. AWSS fell back on its core business upon which it was founded—private security guards—and they slashed prices and costs to stay alive. Great-grandfather Fred brought the entire family into the business where his sons served as guards and his daughters worked in the office. Somehow, the company made it through, and the boom times returned when Word War II approached.

At that time, the Federal Government needed AWSS’ services again, and by the late ‘30s into the ‘40s, Defense Department money helped turn the tide in AWSS’ favor, and the company was able to expand and thrive once again. As espionage and the business of war became more sophisticated, so did AWSS. Grandfather Ben brought his youthful zeal and ideas to the company, and they began to branch out beyond the traditional security guard core into things like installing security alarm systems and conducting background checks for companies that needed high security screening services. There were rumors that AWSS had also cooperated in what would become illegal

wire-tapping services for the government, but there was never any proof or charges filed. Eventually, AWSS got into drug testing and background checks for more routine hires.

Grandfather Ben Holiday and his wife had four children, three girls and one boy. The boy, Albert Holiday, was third in the birth order. Born in 1942, Ben's father, Albert, at first had little interest in AWSS. He loved sports and had an artistic side that his father, Ben's grandfather, did not understand—or appreciate. Albert wanted to be an artist and pursued art in school, even into university. Albert did not do well in school, however, and dropped out in 1960. At that point, he had no choice but to go into the family business. At first, Albert gravitated toward marketing where he could at least design some advertising campaigns, but eventually got pulled into other parts of the business that involved computers, since everyone else was frightened by the thought of the computer age.

Ben's father got into computers, even though they were not widely used except for some government defense work and in university research. Albert saw their possible use in security work and their potential for the company. Albert spent more and more time in Washington, D.C. courting government military officials, learning what he could about the future, and understanding sophisticated surveillance equipment and practices. Eventually, this would become the core of the company, but still they employed security guards who wore the company green uniforms. In fact, green was the company color, even as it went increasingly digital.

Albert married Louise in 1964 and they had three children: Ben was the oldest and was named after his Grandfather Ben. Then his sister Miriam was born, and finally his little brother, Thomas. Ben was born in 1967 and his other two siblings were born two years apart in 1969

and 1971. His family lived in Englewood, New Jersey, and his father could almost walk to the AWSS offices that were also located in Englewood. Ben was not that interested in the company when he was growing up—just like his father—but eventually he became intrigued with the possibilities of him being the fourth generation of Holidays to work for and lead the company.

In 1988, after graduating from Dartmouth with a degree in accounting and business management, Ben came right into the company as director of business development. His sister also went to an Ivy League school, attending Princeton, where she majored in business with a focus on marketing and public relations. She went on to get her MBA and, after working for McKinsey and Company, she founded her own consulting firm. In fact, Francis, who was doing the team building at AWSS, came from Miriam's company.

Unfortunately, Ben's sister Miriam had died at a young age of breast cancer, and two of her children continued their mother's consulting business. Miriam's third child, Jimmy, was part of the AWSS team, representing yet another generation of Holidays at AWSS. Ben, who had never married, was not as impressed as he once was with the family tradition of hiring family, and was more interested in running a successful business.

He was an accountant and the numbers didn't lie. The truth was that AWSS was in some trouble. The fact that Francis came from his sister's company made what Ben was going to do in the morning all the more difficult, but he didn't care. He wasn't going to surrender control of his company or his management style to someone telling him he needed to understand his people in order to build a better team. He knew what he needed to do to improve his team, and that was going to start before the planned debriefing meeting with Francis the next morning at 10 AM.



As Ben made his way to his Manhattan office the next morning, he used the train ride from his home in Stamford, Connecticut to outline in his mind what he was going to say to Francis. When he arrived, Francis was already in the office conference room, setting up some props for his presentation, which included the projector and some things he had already written on the white board.

“Good morning, Mr. Holiday,” Francis said as Ben entered the room.

“Hello, Francis,” responded Ben. “You’re here bright and early.”

“Yes sir. We have a lot of ground to cover today,” Francis responded enthusiastically.

“Uh, yes, Francis, I’d like to talk to you in my office about the day’s proceedings,” Ben said in a cold, foreboding tone. “May I see you there now?”

Francis was fairly young and inexperienced, so he didn’t read the signs present in Ben’s voice, body language, or demeanor. Like a lamb being led to the slaughter, Francis followed Ben into his corner office. It was the same office where Francis had interviewed Ben as part of his week-long visit to get to the bottom of what was wrong at AWSS.

Francis suddenly had a flashback of how difficult that interview had been. He had included that fact in his report, which he had stayed up to finish until 1:45 AM. He was tired but excited about what he had found. He was confident he was on the right track to help get AWSS out of its rut and back in the black.

Francis naively and nervously blurted out, “I’m excited about today, Mr. Holiday. I think you’ll be pleased with the results. I also think AWSS has some difficult issues to face, but I don’t see why they can’t be addressed.”

Ben responded, “Well, Francis, I’m not pleased with

the results and I haven't even seen the results. I decided during yesterday's team meeting that I had to do something that you're probably not going to like very much."

"What's that?" asked Francis.

"I've decided that AWSS no longer needs the services of you or your company," Ben said coldly, watching Francis closely for his reaction.

Francis sat in stunned silence, his face showing the shock from the words he had just heard. Ben was enjoying what he saw, mostly because he had the upper hand.

"When you came in, it was at the suggestion of my nephew, Jimmy, who really insisted that the problem here was our culture that lacked trust, exercised poor communication, and employed sloppy hiring practices," Ben explained.

"I wasn't that excited about it, but I thought, 'Hey, my father gave me a chance to make a difference in AWSS, so I needed to do that for Jimmy,'" Ben continued. "I also thought I could help my sister's firm as I kept my nephew happy. But when you started in with all that personality stuff yesterday, I made up my mind. There's no need for you to continue today."

Francis was by then flushed and could feel himself begin to perspire under his dress shirt. "But Mr. Holiday, I have this report for you and your team, and I really think it's going to help you . . ."

Ben interrupted him before Francis could finish. "I don't need that report, Francis. You're going to tell me about my people and how I need to build a better team. You'll tell me I need to communicate more effectively and listen more intently," Ben said, trying to show Francis that he already understood some of the principles that Francis was going to share.

"The truth is, Francis, I don't need someone to tell me about my people. I know they're basically lazy and I

need someone to help me get them straight, not explain whether or not they're into details or change," Ben said, stopping to let that settle into Francis' thinking.

"I need people who won't surrender when the press gets a little hostile. I need people who will stay the course—the course that I set for the company. I need people who will do what I say, for after all, I'm the CEO. They have to adjust to me, not me to them."

Francis was frantically searching his mind for something to say, something that would convince Mr. Holiday that he was mistaken, that Francis could help. "Sir, if you would just give this a chance. I realize you know about some of these leadership practices, and applying them will require some new ways of doing things, but I . . ."

Again, Ben cut him off. "I'm not interested in your report, Francis. In fact, I won't even accept or look at it! I have your check ready to go, and please bill us for any expenses that we have not covered so far. Other than that, Francis, I think we are through here." Ben handed Francis the envelope with the check.

It was 8:30 and Francis had thought the meeting would start at 10:00. As it turned out, he would not even be in the office by then. There were no handshakes or pleasantries exchanged, and Francis stood for a few seconds, still hoping to find something that could salvage his week's work at AWSS. Ben stood behind his desk, at that point checking his smartphone for messages and looking for the daily report he received every morning of the night's activities.

Francis got up and noticed that his shirt was wet with perspiration, stuck to his back through his undershirt. He hoped Ben would not notice. Francis returned to the conference room and packed up the things he had brought. He put them all in his wheeled briefcase and started for the elevator. As he did, he passed Ben's nephew Jimmy's,

who was in his office, checking his emails.

"Hey there, Francis, this is the big day! Where are you going? Forget something?" Jimmy inquired.

"No, it isn't the big day, Jimmy," Francis said, his voice quivering.

"What do you mean?" Jimmy asked with a furrow in his brow.

"Uh, your Uncle Ben just dismissed me," Francis responded as he looked down at the floor. "He said he isn't interested in the report and had no further need for me or our services."

"That's crazy," Jimmy said with raised voice, "he can't be serious."

"Oh, I think he is, Jimmy, or I would not have packed up all my things," Francis said, his voice still a bit shaky.

Jimmy tried to make some sense of what Francis was saying. "Did he at least *look* at the report? Did you talk about any of the issues?"

"No sir. He said he didn't need a report that talked about team building or about a change to his leadership style. He needed help dealing with the lazy people he had on staff, people who would not stay the course when things got tough," Francis reported, still looking down, trying to control his emotions.

"Give me the report," Jimmy responded. "We're in trouble, and my uncle is going to face reality one way or the other!"

Francis began to recover his breath and composure, and said, "I'm sure you will be okay, Jimmy. After all, a \$100-million-dollar company has the resources to recover. And AWSS' history goes back so far, you'll make it through somehow!" Francis was trying his best to put a positive spin on the negative situation.

"\$100 million? Who told you that?" Jimmy snapped.

"Why, your uncle did?" Francis responded.

“That’s a lie and part of the problem. He’s in denial. He’s an accountant, and he knows better. We were \$100 million once but I promise you we aren’t there now,” Jimmy said with disgust. “Let me have it,” Jimmy said.

“Excuse me?” Francis didn’t quite hear understand what Jimmy was asking.

“Give *me* the report. If Uncle Ben won’t receive the report from you, then he’s going to get it from me, and he’s going to read it or else!” Jimmy said, by that time trying to control his voice and emotions.

Francis opened his briefcase and handed Jimmy the report he had prepared. Jimmy held it and said, “Francis, you represented hope to all of us here, for you were the first one who spoke some truth to Uncle Ben, the first one to do so in a long time. I’m sorry this happened, but it probably needed to happen. You may have already helped us more than you know, but I’m so very sorry. Are you all right? Can I get you a taxi?”

“No, I’ll be fine. I hope to catch an earlier flight back home. If I can’t, New York at Christmas time isn’t a bad place to be stuck for a day,” Francis said, trying to make the best of his redesigned day.

“Okay, well, thank you again. I’m so sorry for this trouble. When you see my family back in Indiana, tell them I said hello. A Merry Christmas to you and yours. And now it’s time I go talk to my uncle and enter the arena of truth with him.”



Before Francis was on the street and in a taxi, Jimmy was in Ben’s office. “I know why you’re here and nothing you can say is going to change my mind,” Ben began before Jimmy could. “It was a waste of time.”

“Waste of time?” Jimmy repeated. “You didn’t even give it a chance or give *him* a chance. You pouted and sulked all week and had your mind made up.”

"I wasn't pouting," Ben retorted. "I was sad that we had spent money at a time like this on something so frivolous, so trendy, so, so *stupid!*"

"And what's the idea of telling that guy our company had \$100 million in annual revenue?" Jimmy continued with his offensive. "That was our peak four years ago. We haven't been close to that since."

Ben snapped back, "He had no business knowing our business. What's more, he would only go back to your mother's company and tell your siblings our business, which is no longer the family's business."

"Besides," Ben continued, "that had no relevance to the issue at hand, which was supposed to be getting you and the rest of your team off the Internet and into the things that are going to save this company."

"You are stubborn and it's going to ruin this company," Jimmy countered. "You broke your word because you promised to see this through with the consultant. What's more, the decisions you made, things that are all over the papers and television, are going to be our downfall. You just won't listen," Jimmy said disgustedly.

"See it through? To what? To hear that I need to be more engaging with my team? That I need to listen more? That I need to understand you better?" Ben asked in rapid-fire succession. "Yes, there needs to be some changes around here, but it's not me who needs to change."

Jimmy shot back, "We're all hanging on by a thread. After Tommy Morris quit because of your espionage program, we've lost a lot of other good folks and clients. Lately, it's been one bad event after another. Morale's already low."

Ben responded, "Morale is not my concern. The bottom line is my concern. We are paying these people to perform and be professionals. What Tommy did is done. I never did like him anyway. I agreed to bring Francis in to

try and help us get back on track, at your recommendation, but yesterday's meeting was more than I'm ready to endure."

"Jeff, Cheryl, Abdul, Sharlene, and the others are all going to be devastated when they hear about this," Jimmy said shaking his head in disbelief. "I won't tell them anything now. It's almost Christmas and we have our holiday lunch this afternoon before the weekend. With Christmas next Tuesday, I have no intention of ruining their holiday with this news."

"I don't care what you tell them," Ben responded as he looked around his desk for something to do, signaling the conversation had come to an end, or at least that he was no longer interested in anything Jimmy had to say. Jimmy wasn't done, however, and in an uncharacteristic animated manner, he took the report and threw it down on his uncle's desk.

"There, if you're looking for something to do, instead of looking for illegal work behind our backs, you can read the man's report and see what he had to say," Jimmy said, surprising even himself with his aggressive tone and action. "You either do that, or I'm out of here, family or no family," Jimmy yelled, again surprising himself with the force of his words.

"Fine," Ben said in a detached tone, "then maybe it's time to part ways."

"You can't be serious?" Jimmy shot back.

"I am," Ben said, using his coldest stare and with the iciest tone he could muster.

"I'm not going to accept that today," Jimmy said. "I'll give you the weekend to read this report. I'll tell the staff that Francis got called back home on pressing business and left the report for us to read and process during the holidays. You *will* read this or I *will* be gone. Think it over, Ben Holiday, the ball's in your court, and let's see what you

do with it," Jimmy concluded.

"The ball has always been in my court, and it's my court and my ball," Ben answered. "And your role on the team, my dear nephew, may be coming to an end!"



The Christmas luncheon was held in the office to save some money. A Manhattan caterer brought in the usual fare—deli meat for sandwiches, all kinds of relishes, potato salad, soft drinks, chips, salsa, a veggie tray, and the like. The atmosphere was tense, and no one was in the holiday spirit.

"What do you think happened to Francis?" Abdul asked Cheryl. "Do you think he really got called back home?"

"I don't know what happened, but by the looks on Jimmy's and Ben's faces, I would say that the consultant had some things to say that didn't go over too well," Cheryl said in a hushed whisper so no one else would hear. Just then, Jeff came over with a plate of food and sat down.

"What are you guys talking about? Francis' vanishing act?" Jeff inquired.

"Yea, it's pretty strange. Do you know anything?" Abdul asked to neither of them in particular.

"I heard Ben and Jimmy in a serious, heated discussion when I came in this morning," Jeff responded. "Next thing I knew, Jimmy came out and said that Francis could not do the debrief today, but would be back, probably after the holidays, to finish it up. Ben had come in yesterday and wanted to make sure he had Francis' check, which I thought was strange, but that's the last I heard from anyone."

Cheryl chimed in, "I hope Francis will be back. We're still recovering from the debacle with Tommy. After he left, I lost hope. He was kind of the voice of reason, but was made to be the fall guy over the surveillance scandal. When it looked like we were going to address some of our

demons, I was encouraged for the first time in years. Now, I'm not so sure . . ." Cheryl let her words trail off without finishing her thought.

Ben had no appetite for food or a party, so he fixed a plate, took it into his office, and closed the door to eat. Jimmy was there in body but did not engage in much conversation. When repeatedly asked about Francis, he simply said he had a family emergency and had to return to Indiana.

"My guess is that things didn't go well, that Ben didn't like what Francis was doing." Abdul chimed in. "Did you get a look at his face, especially in yesterday's session? He wasn't a happy camper!"

"Well, we're not happy campers either," said Cheryl. "It's hard to enjoy the holidays when you may not have a job after the first of the year, or when someone may be in jail!" Everyone nodded, and continued to consume their holiday fare as if it was their last meal.



Ben could see everyone eating from his office window, which stretched from ceiling to floor. He had blinds that he kept at half mast, which enabled him to look out but prevented others from seeing in. That's the way he liked it. It galled him that the company was in such bad shape, and everyone was taking holiday time off and using up vacation before the year's end. There was work to do, reports to run, calls to make, and business to pursue.

Yet what could he or anyone do at this time of year. There was no new business to locate, no new strategies to unfold. Things were dead in the water, and if things didn't turn around quickly, AWSS would be finished. How did the business arrive at this crisis? What could he have done differently? He didn't start the practice of espionage and private investigation work. He just took it to the next level, but now all hell was breaking loose, and AWSS' clients

were jumping ship at an alarming rate.

All he knew was that he couldn't stomach the office any longer, not as long as his ingrate nephew and his co-workers were conspiring against him, right outside his door! He was done for the day, so he gathered up his papers and decided he would get a jump on the weekend and avoid holiday rush hour. He headed over to Grand Central Station for an early train ride home to Stamford. Maybe there he could clear his head and breathe.

As he gathered up his papers to go home, Ben decided to put Francis' report in his briefcase. He flipped through it and saw it was 35-pages long, complete with charts and reports, but mostly narrative. Ben didn't want anyone to see or notice, but he would at least glance through the report in the privacy of his own home, away from the office that had become his personal chamber of horrors over the last two years.



Jim Dittmar Bio

For more than 30 years, Jim Dittmar has served in the field of leadership development as a practitioner, teacher, consultant, researcher, and author. He is the founder, president, and CEO of 3Rivers Leadership Institute. Prior to this, Jim was the founder and director of the Geneva College M.S. in Organizational Leadership Program. Through the 3Rivers Leadership Institute, Jim provides training and learning experiences that include a strong grounding not only in the “what” that leaders face but also in the “how” and “so what” in terms of driving these issues to the practical, behavioral level. It is through this process of reflection and application that participants experience leadership development that is truly transformational. This is Jim’s first collaborative book project.

John W. Stanko Bio

John founded a personal and leadership development company, called *PurposeQuest*, in 2001 and today travels the world to speak, consult and inspire leaders and people everywhere. From 2001-2008, he spent six months a year in Africa and still enjoys visiting and working on that continent, while teaching for Geneva College’s Master of Science in Leadership Studies and at the Center for Urban Biblical Ministry in his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Most recently, John founded Urban Press, a publishing service designed to tell stories of the city, from the city and to the city. John is the author of 30 books.

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