TREASON OR REASON

***Ben is at a turning point. He has worked selflessly at a startup, but office politics and a***

***lack of pay has led him to a place where he must choose between staying the course or***

***quitting. A large multinational has been wooing him because he has the company’s***

***intellectual secrets in his head.***

***If he stays the course, he may be part of something great. He will likely gain fame and***

***fortune as a pioneer in the field. It is likely that he will become president of the organization***

***someday. But none of this is guaranteed.***

***If he leaves, he will be turning on those with whom he has worked for all of these years.***

***He can have everything he wants now if he is willing to turn his back on his colleagues.***

***Should he stay or should he go? Who are his allies he can work with for success?***

**INTRODUCTION**

Ben is conflicted. He joined a revolutionary east-coast startup after seven years of working

in the industry. It was all he knew other than a short stint as a pharmacy assistant. He truly

believed in the company and its mission. He was all in, but organizational politics have

brought him to a difficult decision.

**MAKING A NAME**

Ben was a rising star in the company. He moved from one success to another, but the

powers that be didn’t seem to appreciate him.

His first assignment was a raging success. He volunteered to work with Ethan on a project

in New York. This was one of the company’s first big wins. It was not the biggest; the

project at Boston was the biggest. But everyone agreed that the New York project was just

as significant and Ben had shown himself to be an effective leader.

When he sought to take on a new project, he was passed over, but that did not stop him.

He lobbied his boss, George, for the opportunity to work on the project, and eventually

George granted his request and gave him a promotion.

He briefly worked with Richard on a joint-venture in Canada. It did not go as planned.

Richard quit and Ben’s health was affected, but he earned the respect of his colleagues and

another promotion.

His next project did not go well, either. The competitive environment was such that success

was unlikely. Against all odds he salvaged a bad situation without losing his shirt.

Nevertheless, this project felt like a major setback.

He was then assigned to David’s failing project in Ridgefield, Connecticut. David was

badly understaffed and he left the company. The project was only saved due to Ben’s

superb leadership. Ben wouldn’t have classified it as a win, but he again averted disaster.

These experiences were frustrating, but it was nothing compared to what happened next.

**PROVING HIS WORTH**

He was assigned to work with H. L. Gates in New York. H. L. was a retired executive in

the industry, and arguably the most experienced member of the company. He was openly

contemptuous of the president. He felt that he could do a better job, and in some ways, he

was right. He was an excellent administrator and he had created much of the company’s

infrastructure, so Ben was pleased when he found out that he was to work with H.L. on one

of the company’s most important projects. But pleasure soon turned to disappointment.

After disagreements over the direction of the project, H. L. demoted Ben. H. L. then made

a series of terrible decisions that nearly destroyed the project. Ben acted quickly to recover

the project when all appeared to be lost, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat, but

again, it cost him terribly as his health declined further.

All those who were witnesses knew that Ben was the hero, but H.L. took all of the credit.

To add insult to injury, the board even gave H. L. a bonus, while Ben was ignored.

Moreover, this project was critically important because success here brought in a new

round of investors that saved the company.

**CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES**

Ben was a bit of a polarizing figure, and he knew it. People either loved him or hated him.

Some thought he was a true believer; others thought he was corrupt. Ben found the latter

charge preposterous. How could he be corrupt when he had sacrificed so much? He had

worked tirelessly for years for the company, and he had yet to be paid beyond his expenses.

His boss promised that one day he would be paid in full, but that day was far off in the

future.

Over time, Ben’s circumstances changed. First, he was reassigned to a desk job in the

Philadelphia office. He hated the administrative post. He wanted to be where the action

was, and he knew it was not in Philadelphia.

Shortly after arriving, he found out that he was passed over for promotion by the board. He

could handle being passed over by better men, but Ben was upset because promotion was

a purely political process. He argued that he should be promoted, and eventually he was,

but at that point, he would be the least senior of the executives. Many of the others were,

at least by Ben’s account, far less capable than he.

The only good part of the assignment in Philadelphia was that he met and married Peggy.

Three months later Peggy was pregnant, and now he had to think about supporting his

family. Dissatisfaction with the company rose as did his expenses.

**TENDERING THE OFFER**

Peggy introduced Ben to an old friend, John, an executive who worked for the largest

international conglomerate in the industry. Peggy urged Ben to consider the offer,

appealing to his pride and his circumstances. Ben had a lot to offer, but the company did

not seem to value him. Besides, he had bills to pay and a family to feed.

Ben believed in his company, but if he stayed with his company, he was not guaranteed

anything. It could all vanish. On the other hand, if he joined the multinational, all of his

expenses would be paid now. He would have an equivalent position immediately, and his

prospects of personal and professional success were all but guaranteed. The only difficulty

was that Ben knew that he was only valuable to the multinational because he carried the

company’s intellectual property in his head.

Ben reasoned that this would be a good move. His company would certainly go out of

business, but perhaps it would be bought out by the multinational. At any rate, Ben thought

that he had to do what was best for him.

Just before John made the offer, Ben got into some trouble at work. Some of his rivals

accused him of mishandling company funds. His boss, George, reluctantly rebuked him for

these incidents. These were minor violations, and George felt that Ben should be applauded

for his successes rather than chastised for the petty violations. But the board got involved

and politics prevailed. Ben was charged with negligence as he could not account for

roughly $37,000 of the company’s funds. He had not stolen anything. He was just sloppy

with the paperwork while he delivered on the company’s major accounts.

He resigned, but George, recognizing his talent, urged him to stay. Ben asked to be

reassigned to a different project in New York and he was granted the opportunity. A native

of Connecticut, he wanted to be closer to home. It was one of the company’s most important

projects. George knew that the company was lacking capable leaders and he believed he

could rest comfortably knowing that Ben was in charge. Moreover, it would keep him in

the company.

**A FINAL DECISION**

As his role in the company became increasingly unstable, Ben was hedging his bets. He

continued to negotiate with the multinational. After he was put in charge of the New York

project, the multinational agreed to double what he was owed by his company if only he

would come to work for them. His new appointment had increased his value and their

prospects of dominating the market. They needed what he knew in order to wipe out their

competition.

Now, Ben has to make a decision.

If he goes, he will metaphorically stab everyone in the back—everyone he has worked with,

everyone he has led, everyone that has trusted him. He will trade his personal success for

the success of the company. But why should he care? The board overlooked him and rivals

have undermined him. The work itself has overwhelmed him and the company has

underpaid him.

If he stays, he has a good chance of becoming the president of the company someday—but

someday may never come