

The email read: Mr. Raibert Thorburn requests your presence at headquarters, two days from now, on Wednesday, at Noon sharp. Professional attire only.

Mr. Thorburn's company recently purchased their leading competitor, and three smaller companies were thrown in the deal. I am Walt Conifer, CEO of one of those three companies, a chainlink manufacturer.

The other two companies are a fresh vegetable chopping and packing outfit that supply grocery stores, deli's, schools, retirement homes, and hospitals.

The third is a tack shop that was originally set up for the owner's daughter, a horse lover.

The three of us were ushered into Mr. Thorburn's office at one minute before Noon, introduced, and given our financial and budget statements. Mr. Thorburn wasted no time. He was a very direct, stern man. Your sales have dropped and you are barely breaking even. I have given each of you a slight increase in your budgets to allow for changes to be made in order to increase and sustain sales growth. You have nine months, no more, to show a

respectable profit, or the companies will be shut down.
Good day.

It was a grim trip home on the plane. Bob Collier of the vegetable firm, looked forlorn. His business was located fairly close to our fabrication yard. Frank Newday, the CFO of the tack shop, headed home, two states over.

I shared the news with my employees. Folks, desperate times call for desperate measures. As of today, you are all salesmen. Look at this map for your assigned areas. Visit builders, farmers, co-ops, small businesses, homes, anyone you can find in your area. You will be reimbursed for mileage. All detailed reports are due this Thursday, and we will meet together Friday morning.

The rain outside matched the mood inside on Friday morning. Hundreds of visits to ranches, sheep farms, and goat farms yielded the same answer; We can't afford to fence our large pastures.

Head on home folks, and rest up this weekend. We have to move our stock from the yard into the warehouse on Monday. Everyone come prepared to work, it's a big job.

I stood watching the rain. Lord, what can we do to become profitable? Two words that I had just said came out of my mouth again; move stock. That's it! I danced around the office praising and thanking the Lord. Yeeha! I called out the front door for Tom Jacobs, our fabrication engineer, to come back in. Tom, we have it, we have it! Sit down.

Stock was not moved into the warehouse on Monday. I introduced our new product line, and Tom showed the fabricators how to produce it. We had the money from our budget increase to use for patent expenses and marketing. Fencing for large acreage is not affordable, but now we can provide affordable, moveable, interlocking fence panels on all terrain wheels! Goats, sheep, and cows can now easily be moved from pasture to pasture with secure, moveable corrals. Easy to snap together panels, with stabilizing corner stakes included. Other

options include a shed or shade top. We even branched out to portable chicken coops for homeowners.

Running morning ads on the farm report brought in many requests for quotes. Sales from our booth at the Co-op Expo skyrocketed. Production was in full swing and we had even had to take on extra trucks for deliveries. It looked like our products might go nationwide! Glory be to God for His direction!

Bob Collier, over at the food processing plant was bleary eyed from continually reviewing each item in their budget. We can't cut costs and still meet production. So many people are counting on their jobs here. It seemed impossible. Maybe a change of scenery might do me good. A drive through the countryside sounds appealing.

With the car windows down, the breeze made it seem as if I were leisurely sailing on a lake. Feeling hungry, I unwrapped my sandwich, and just as it reached my lips, I nearly ran off the road from the stench that filled the car. Gagging, I ran from the car, but I could not escape the putrid smell that made me want to throw up. I quickly turned the car around and sped away. What is that

horrible smell? Then I saw the faded red sign; McKenzie Brothers Pig Production. A pig farm! Not just a pig farm, it appeared to cover several acres. No wonder there are no houses nearby. Should such a stinky place even be allowed to exist?

Upon reaching cleaner air, I thought about how much upkeep there must be with a pig farm that size. Wait a minute! We are paying a small fortune for trucks to haul away the food trimmings and unusable food scraps to the dump. If we could sell the scraps at a bare bone price to McKenzie brothers, we would save a fortune and earn a small profit too.

Walt and Bob talked to each other weekly, rejoicing in their much improved profits. Looking for other ways to increase income, they collaborated on a plan to purchase goats and use the movable corrals to clean out undergrowth and keep the grass in shape around their businesses. They began leasing goats out to other businesses as well. Lawn service bills soon disappeared. Surprisingly, it became quite a profitable business.

Right on time, the email arrived; Mr. Raibert Thorburn requests your presence at headquarters, three days from now, on Thursday, at Noon sharp. Professional attire only.

Walt and Bob could hardly wait. They ran into Frank Newday in the hallway, and all three were promptly shown into Mr. Thorburn's office. Mr. Thorburn said nothing, he just sat looking us over. Gentlemen, here are your profit and loss reports, as he slid them down the table.

Frank seemed pleased at his report. Bob and I may have appeared to be calm, but we were jumping up and down on the inside. With a clearing of his throat, Mr. Thorburn addressed me first. Mr. Conifer, you have used your skills to increase your profits sevenfold. Very good leadership and initiative. Please stay afterward to speak with me. Mr. Collier, your profits have increased eightfold. Kudos to you as well. I see that you ventured into a joint business together. Sales seem to be soaring. Where are you funneling those profits? Into the community sir, the 4-H club. Very good.

Mr. Newday, I see your situation is unchanged. To what do you attribute this? Well, sir, the equestrian community is tight knit and very fickle. Every year, there are tack shop newcomers that cater to niche markets. We are a small player in the horsey set, so it seemed best to save our funds to tide us over in rough times. Mr. Newday, isn't it true that your shop only exists to keep family members supplied with all they need? Well sir, we do seem to be the most frequent clients. Get out, get out now! Consider your shop sold, Mr. Newday. It has been secured and the locks have been changed, so that no inventory will disappear before the sale. Good day.

Turns out Mr. Thorburn asked us to stay behind to discuss opportunities for us to take over struggling businesses and help make them profitable.

Say Bob, you know what this whirlwind of events reminds me of? Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus' parable of the talents. You remember, a businessman left his affairs in the hands of three men. He gave them each some of his money to invest for a profit. Two men worked hard and increased the money given to them. They were able to present the

master with more than he had left with them. The third man had been lazy and just buried his money in the ground. When the master returned, two of the men were rewarded for increasing his holdings, and the third man was cast out with no reward. It's really a picture of how we are to use what Jesus has given us for His Kingdom - skills and talents, the use of our time in prayer, teaching and reaching out to others. I can't wait for us to share our story next week at the Gospel Men's Fellowship. You know Bob, Jesus sure showed you how to sniff out a good deal with those pigs.

Bob and I enjoyed a dinner with all the trimmings, and with our coffee, we toasted King Jesus and His wonderful grace and goodness. All glory and honor are His. He works in mysterious ways. Bob still takes the long way around that pig farm.

