SMALL STORIES.
BIG LESSONS.

Easy to read. Hard to forget.

AHMED SAMY

22 stories

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Introduction

I have always remembered stories better than advice.

A sentence from a manager. A mistake I made at seven years old. A meeting that went in a completely different direction. A small decision that became more important years later.

This book is a collection of those moments.

My journey has taken me through very different places. I started as a pharmacist, worked in healthcare, taught at a university, joined the World Health Organization, and eventually became an entrepreneur and built a digital agency.

Along the way, I met many people, made mistakes, took risks, changed direction, and learned lessons I still carry with me today.

Some came from big decisions. Others came from very small moments that I didn't think much about at the time.

Some stories are about business. Others are about work, family, friendship, the military, or simply people I met along the way.

Every story here happened. I kept them short on purpose. Each one left me with something, and I hope some of them leave something with you too.

Read one story at a time. Take what helps you. Leave the rest.

And if one of these small stories changes the way you look at one decision, one person, or one problem, then the book has done its job.

STORY 01

You Have 10 Minutes


YOU HAVE
10 MINUTES.
BE DONE BY THEN.
WHAT WORKS
WHAT DOES NOT
COMMON MISTAKES
BEST PRACTICES
COMPANY PROFILE

—When we first started my digital agency “Eureka Digital”, nobody knew who we were.

We were starting from zero.

During a visit to Saudi Arabia, a friend arranged a meeting for me with his manager, who could potentially become a client.

I went to meet him in his office.

From the beginning, his attitude felt arrogant.

He asked me:

"How much time do you need?"

I said I usually needed around 30 minutes to go through the company profile, plus maybe another 15 minutes for questions.

He looked at me and said:

"You have 10 minutes. Be done by then."

I was annoyed.

Very annoyed.

That feeling quickly turned into a challenge.

I wanted to change the way he saw me.

So I started talking.

I did not try to sell him anything.

I showed him some of the work we had done and started explaining what we had learned.

What works. What does not. The common mistakes. The best practices.

I approached it more like a learning session than a sales meeting.

Ten minutes passed.

He did not stop me.

I kept going.

The meeting in his office lasted around 30 minutes.

Then he stopped and said:

"Wait."

He picked up the phone and started calling the managers who reported to him, one after another.

There were around twelve of them.

"Come to the big meeting room now. There is someone here with something important I want you to hear."

A few minutes later, we moved to the larger meeting room.

The man who had given me ten minutes was now introducing me to his entire team.

His attitude had completely changed.

He was welcoming, respectful, and genuinely interested in what I had to say.

That second meeting lasted around two hours.

Later, they became a client and gave us a lot of work.

I walked into that office with ten minutes.

I walked out a few hours later with a completely different relationship.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Don't argue with someone's first impression. Give them a reason to change it.

2. Show your expertise. Don't announce it.

3. When nobody knows your name, let your work speak for you.

STORY 02

God Will Compensate You, Son.


MAGAZINES

— I was seven years old when I started my first business.

I had a small collection of Mickey magazines. Each magazine cost 50 piasters.

Most kids would have sold them. I had another idea: rent them.

I would charge 10 piasters per magazine. After five rentals, I would recover the price of the magazine and still own it.

The plan looked brilliant in my head.

My first customers were two boys. They rented five magazines, and I took their address so I could collect them at the end of the day.

I went to the address and knocked on the door.

A woman opened it.

"Those boys are not here. God will compensate you, son."

That was the moment I understood I had been tricked.

I lost all five magazines at once.

And the day was still not over.

Two twin boys from my neighborhood had been helping me carry the small table where I displayed the magazines.

At the end of the day, they asked for their payment.

"Twenty piasters each."

So I paid 40 piasters in wages.

My total revenue for the day was 50 piasters.

Net profit: 10 piasters.

Five magazines gone. Forty piasters paid. Ten piasters left.

At seven years old, I was upset about the magazines.

Looking back, I had just received my first practical lesson in business.

WHAT I LEARNED

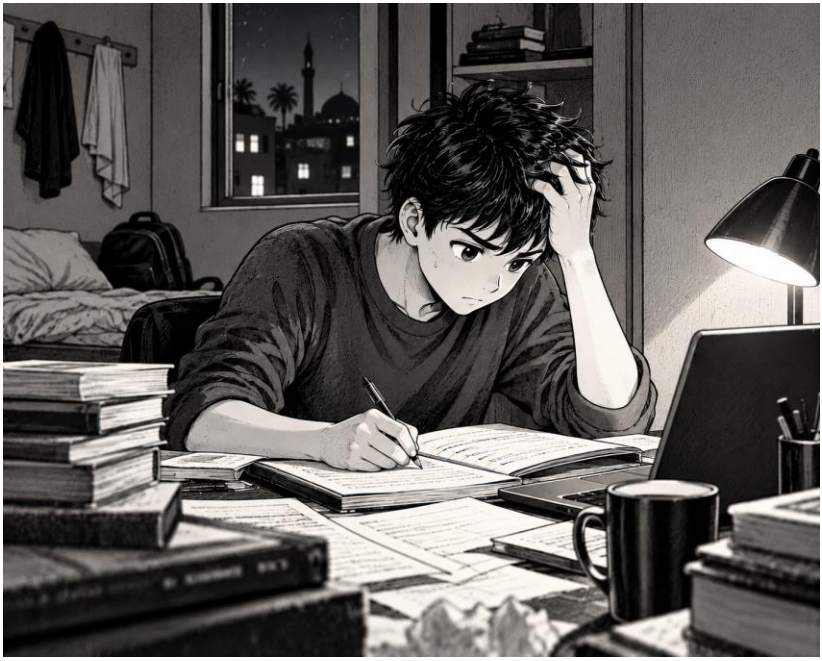
1. Know who you are dealing with before you take the risk.

2. Revenue means very little until you understand the costs behind it.

3. A bad first business can still give you a very good first lesson.

STORY 03

Hard Times



— When I was in high school, I studied in an Egyptian public school.

Most of my education was in Arabic, and my English was not very strong.

I did not take private lessons either.

My father had spent some time living in the US, and his English was very good.

And in general, we did not take private lessons in other subjects because they were expensive.

So when I reached my final year of high school and had to study an English novel, I thought I knew exactly who would help me.

The novel was Charles Dickens' Hard Times.

And for me, it really was hard times.

The English was difficult.

Very difficult.

I thought my father would go through the book with me and help me understand it..

Instead, he told me:

"Ahmed, I am not going to read the whole book with you. Read it yourself. Use the dictionary. Try to understand it. And when you find something you are really stuck on, come to me."

I was shocked.

At the time, I genuinely felt like he had left me on my own.

But I did what he said.

I read.

I searched.

I used the dictionary.

And when I really needed his help, I went to him.

Looking back, that was probably one of the first times my father pushed me to stand on my own.

He was still there when I needed him.

But I had to take the first step myself.

His lesson went far beyond that novel.

He was teaching me to take responsibility for my own problems.

That lesson became much more valuable years later, when I started building a company of my own.

And today, my father and I still laugh about Hard Times.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Good support helps you become more independent, not more dependent.

2. A lesson can feel tough before you understand its value.

STORY 04

The Most Valuable 50 Pounds


A Healthier Community Together
Pharmacy
More Than Medicine

—My first job after university was at a pharmacy.

My salary was 600 Egyptian pounds a month.

At the time, graduating from university and actually receiving the graduation certificate were two different things. The certificate took some time to be issued.

My manager and I had an agreement.

Until I received my certificate, my salary would be 600 pounds.

Once I received it, it would become 650.

About a month later, I got my certificate.

But when my next salary came, it was still 600 pounds.

I was really upset.

I went to my manager and said:

"But you promised me."

He listened to me and asked me to wait.

A little later, he came back with 50 pounds.

He handed it to me and told me he had sorted it out with management.

Problem solved.

Or at least that is what I thought.

The next month, I received another 50 pounds.

And the month after that, another 50.

I only worked there for around four months, so this continued for most of the time I had left.

A few months later, I discovered the truth.

He had never convinced management to give me the extra money.

They had not agreed to it.

Those 50 pounds had been coming from his own pocket.

Every month.

And he never told me.

He had made me a promise, and when the company would not honor it, he decided to honor it himself.

Almost 20 years have passed.

I do not think about the amount anymore.

I think about the man who quietly kept his word to a young employee earning his first salary.

If he ever asked me for something today, I would find it very difficult to say no.

That is how much those 50 pounds ended up being worth to me.

WHAT I LEARNED

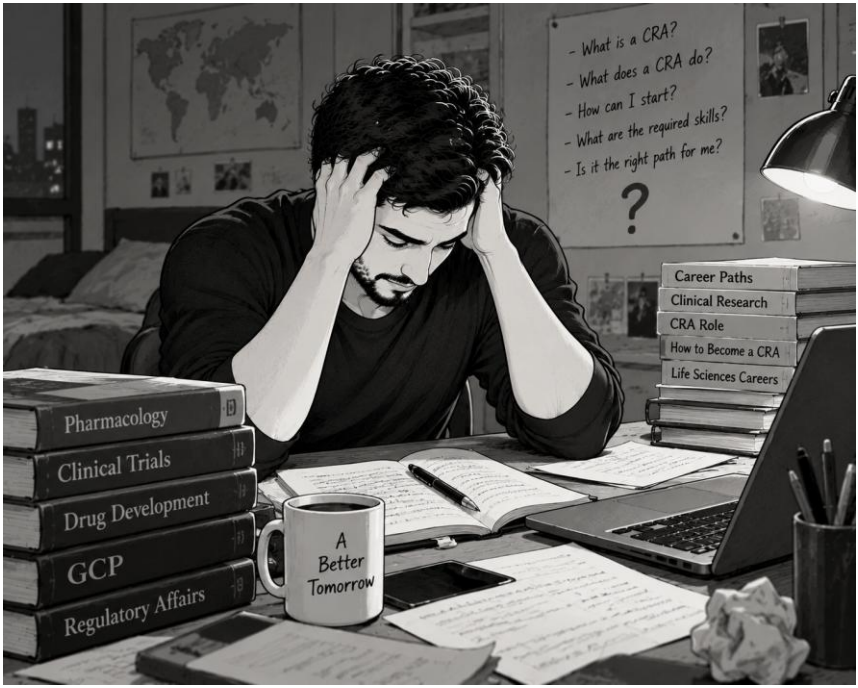
1. Doing good means more when you do not need credit for it.

2. People may forget what you gave them. They remember what it meant to them.

3. Your word is your responsibility, even when keeping it costs you.

STORY 05

It Was Just a Question


- What is a CRA?
- What does a CRA do?
- How can I start?
- What are the required skills?
- Is it the right path for me?
?
Career Paths
Clinical Research
CRA Role
How to Become a CRA
Life Sciences Careers
Pharmacology
Clinical Trials
Drug Development
GCP
Regulatory Affairs
A Better Tomorrow

—When I graduated from pharmacy school in 2007, I was still trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my career.

One of the jobs I became curious about was Clinical Research Associate, or CRA.

I knew almost nothing about it.

What does a CRA actually do? What does the career path look like? Is it something I should consider?

Today, finding answers to questions like these takes a few minutes.

Back then, it was much harder.

So I called a close friend of mine who worked for a multinational pharmaceutical company.

I was not asking him for a job.

I was not asking for a recommendation.

I just wanted information.

Anything that could help me understand the field.

I asked him if he could find out a little about it for me.

Then I waited.

A couple of days passed.

No answer.

I called him.

No response.

I tried again.

Still nothing.

This continued for more than a week.

At the time, every day felt important to me.

I had just graduated.

I was not working yet.

I was trying to figure out what to do with my life.

To him, maybe it was just a question.

To me, the answer could help me decide where to go next.

Eventually, he answered.

I asked him why he had not been responding.

He told me he had been traveling for a company cycle meeting in Greece.

I asked why he had not simply answered while his phone was ringing.

He explained that the company had asked them not to tell people where they were traveling.

The explanation did not make much sense to me.

He had been a very close friend.

After that experience, something changed in the way I saw our friendship.

More importantly, something changed in the way I treated other people.

I remembered what it felt like to be at the beginning of my career, looking for one small piece of information that might help me find my way.

So whenever someone at the beginning of their career asks me a question today, I try to help whenever I can.

What feels like a small question to you can be a very big question to the person asking it.

WHAT I LEARNED

Never underestimate how much a small piece of help can mean to someone at the beginning of their journey.

STORY 06

I Could Barely See the Target



—About 20 years ago, during my military service, we went to the shooting range.

The target was so far away that I could barely see it.

At the time, I was still wearing glasses, before my LASIK surgery, so my vision was not perfect.

I took my position.

Fired three shots.

Then stood up.

Honestly, I had no idea where the bullets had gone.

I could not even tell if I had hit the target.

The only thing I knew was that I had followed the technique exactly as I had been taught.

A few moments later, the sergeant looked at me and said:

"You hit all three shots in the center."

I looked at him and asked:

"Really?"

I was also wondering how he could even see the bullet holes from that distance.

Then he turned to the officer and said:

"He is the best shooter today."

I never walked over to check the target myself.

I simply never forgot that moment.

I thought seeing the target clearly was the most important part.

Doing the fundamentals well turned out to be even more important.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. You do not always need a perfect view to move in the right direction.

2. Master the fundamentals. They can carry you through imperfect conditions.

STORY 07

The Most Loved Sergeant



—During my military service, I noticed something.

Every soldier had a favorite sergeant.

And almost every soldier had one they tried to avoid.

One day, I suggested a simple idea.

"Who is the most loved sergeant?"

That was it.

No money. No promotion. No special reward.

Just recognition.

Word spread quickly, and the sergeants knew the voting had started.

Many of them became more patient, more approachable, and more respectful.

Then came the results.

The winner was Sergeant Sayed.

Nobody was surprised.

He had always treated the soldiers with respect.

He did not become kind because of the voting. He won because he had always been that way.

The soldiers did not get distracted by a short-term change in behavior.

They chose the person they had trusted all along.

The more interesting part came after the voting.

Many of the other sergeants kept treating the soldiers differently.

The vote had made one thing visible: the kind of behavior people genuinely respected.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. If you want better behavior, recognize and reward it.

2. Real respect is built over time. People know who treats them well consistently.

STORY 08

The Interview Answer I Didn't Expect



—One day, I was interviewing a candidate.

I asked him to tell me about a difficult problem he had handled at work.

He told me about an angry customer.

The customer insulted him badly and insulted the company too.

I asked what he did.

He said he stayed calm, handled the customer, and got through the situation.

His manager later thanked him for the way he had handled it.

He was proud of that story.

I left the interview thinking about something completely different.

I was not questioning him.

I was questioning the company that taught him this was something to be proud of.

Handling a difficult customer is part of many jobs.

Accepting humiliation should never become part of the job description.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Staying calm is a strength. Accepting humiliation is not.

2. Company culture is reflected in the behavior people are taught to celebrate.

3. Professionalism should never require giving up your dignity.

STORY 09

You Know How Much I Like You, Right?



—At one of my previous jobs, I worked for a healthcare company where doctors were our customers.

One day, I was sitting in my manager's office while he was talking to a doctor on the phone.

She had recently won an award.

He sounded genuinely happy for her.

"You really deserve this award. You deserve it more than anyone. I am really, really happy for you."

Then the call ended.

Within seconds, he started saying terrible things about her.

I just stared at him.

I could not believe the change.

I stayed quiet.

He changed the subject and continued talking as if nothing had happened.

That moment changed the way I saw him.

He had always told me how much he liked and valued me.

Now I had a question I had never asked myself before:

"What does he say about me when I am not in the room?"

From that moment, I could not hear his words the same way.

Some time later, I decided to leave the company.

He was trying to convince me to stay.

At one point, he wanted to speak to me in a more personal way.

"Ahmed, you know how much I like you, right?"

He was expecting me to say yes.

"No."

He looked surprised.

"God forgive you."

I eventually left the company.

But I never forgot what that first phone call taught me.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. One moment of inconsistency can make people question years of words.

2. How you talk about people when they are absent says a lot about who you are.

STORY 10

They Loved the Chair



—Years ago, I worked directly with a very senior manager.

He was powerful.

People were intimidated by him, and almost everyone wanted to stay on his good side.

I saw it every day.

He would say something that was not particularly funny.

Everyone laughed.

He would give an opinion that was clearly questionable.

Almost no one challenged him.

When he walked into a room, people wanted to sit next to him.

They wanted his attention.

They wanted him to like them.

He was constantly surrounded by people.

And when you live with that kind of attention every day, it is easy to believe that all those people genuinely like you.

Then he retired.

Within a few weeks, everything changed.

The phone became quieter.

The crowds disappeared.

Many of the people who had always wanted to be around him were suddenly nowhere to be seen.

Someone who remained in contact with him told me that the change affected him deeply.

For years, he had been surrounded by people.

Then the position disappeared, and many of those relationships disappeared with it.

I stayed in touch with him.

I was not working for him anymore.

There was nothing I needed from him.

No approval.

No promotion.

No favor.

Just a relationship with someone I had known and worked closely with for years.

And I noticed something interesting.

He became much warmer with me.

I think he could see our relationship differently now.

There was no longer a position between us.

Watching all of this taught me something I do not want to forget.

A title can attract a lot of people.

It just cannot tell you why they are there.

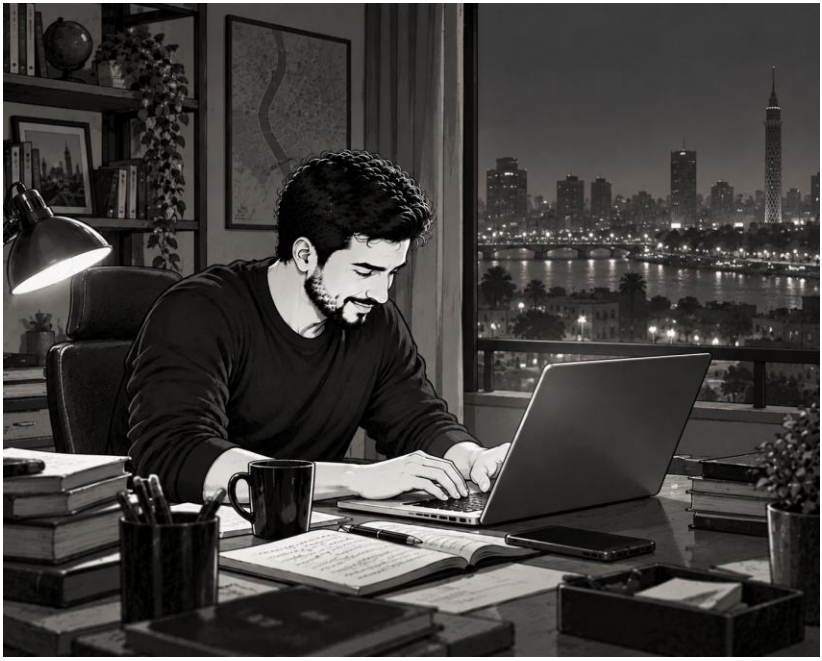
WHAT I LEARNED

1. Power can make it difficult to tell who respects you and who respects your position.

2. Build relationships that can survive your title.

STORY 11

I Was Playing a Different Game



—At one of my previous jobs, many people spent a lot of time comparing themselves to each other.

Who got promoted.

Who had a better title.

Who got a higher salary.

Most of the differences they talked about were small.

Ten percent. Twenty percent. Maybe thirty.

There was one colleague who seemed especially interested in everyone's salary. He would make a serious effort to collect information from different sources.

The conversations happened around the office all the time.

One day, someone asked me:

"Don't you care how much everyone else makes?"

Honestly, I did not.

I was too busy building something of my own.

Every evening after work, and through many weekends, I was freelancing.

Then the day came when my freelance income became higher than my salary.

I stopped wondering if I could build a company one day.

I started believing I could.

Looking back, we were spending our time differently.

The results were different too.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Where you invest your energy shapes your future.

2. Stop comparing yourself to others. Focus on your own path.

3. Confidence often comes from proof, not motivation.

STORY 12

We Chose Ahmed Because...



—The first time I traveled to Geneva to start my job at WHO, I was excited to meet my new team.

I still remember our first meeting.

My manager was introducing me to everyone.

Then he said something I will never forget.

"We chose Ahmed because he combines different skills. He is a pharmacist, so he understands our work. And he is good at digital, so he can help us there too."

I was surprised.

I had never thought that combining different skills was one of the main reasons they chose me.

There had been a time when I wondered whether the years I had spent in pharmacy were slowing me down.

The more I enjoyed digital, the more I wondered if I should have started there from the beginning.

That meeting changed the way I looked at those years.

Without my pharmacy background, I probably would not have been sitting in that room.

I spent years thinking I should have specialized earlier.

My manager made me realize the opposite.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Different skills can become more valuable when they work together.

2. Other people may see a strength in your background before you see it yourself.

3. A path that looks unfocused today may make perfect sense later.

STORY 13

Stay With Us Part-Time.


SOMETIMES
YOU HAVE TO
GO ALONE
TO GROW
Departures
PASSPORT

—There was a point in my career when I decided to leave WHO.

It was not a casual decision. WHO was a place I respected, and the work had become an important part of my career.

When I told my manager that I was leaving, I expected a normal resignation conversation.

Instead, he tried to find a way to keep me.

"Stay with us part-time."

That sentence stayed with me.

I had already made my decision, but his reaction gave me something I did not expect from that meeting.

It showed me that the work I had done had created real value for the people around me.

Titles and job descriptions can tell you what your role is.

The reaction people have when you leave can tell you something different: what your presence was actually worth.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Your value becomes clearer when people genuinely want you to stay.

2. Do work that makes your absence noticeable.

STORY 14

I'll Transfer Half Today.


22,000 USD

—

One of my first big clients did not come from an ad campaign.

We had connected through messages on LinkedIn.

He suggested an online meeting.

We joined the call, talked about his business, and discussed what we could do.

The total project was worth $44,000.

Then he said something I did not expect.

"I will transfer half today."

$22,000.

And he did.

There was no long history between us. No months of meetings. No complicated sales process.

He had seen enough during our conversation to feel comfortable with the experience behind what I was saying.

That meeting reminded me that a sale can happen quickly when trust has already started to form.

The transfer happened after one meeting.

The experience that made him comfortable had taken years to build.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Trust is the shortest path to a sale.

2. People rarely buy first. They trust first.

STORY 15

The CV We Almost Rejected



—A few years ago, my team was reviewing CVs for a new position at Eureka.

One CV did not look promising at all.

It was not well written.

The candidate had only worked for a short time at one small, unknown company that organized events.

And his experience was not particularly relevant to what we were looking for.

On paper, there was not much reason to move forward.

The team was ready to pass on him.

But for some reason, I had a gut feeling.

"Let us give him a try."

Not a job.

Just an interview.

When he came in, he was a little hesitant.

But there was something the CV had not shown us.

He was presentable.

He communicated well.

He seemed smart.

And most importantly, he seemed eager to learn.

That was enough for us to give him a chance.

Five years later, that candidate had become one of our best team members.

In fact, one of the best people I have ever worked with in my career.

And we almost never met him.

His CV simply did not show us what he could become.

That experience changed the way I think about hiring.

A CV can tell you a lot about someone's experience.

But it cannot tell you everything about the person behind it.

Five years later, I was very glad we decided to meet the person behind that CV.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. A CV tells you where someone has been. It does not always tell you where they can go.

2. When hiring, do not look only for experience. Look for the ability and willingness to grow.

STORY 16

Some Opportunities Aren't Worth Taking



—A few years ago, Eureka was approached by one of the world's largest tobacco companies.

We accepted the meeting because we did not know what they wanted.

Companies in that industry can work on projects that have nothing to do with encouraging smoking.

This project was different.

They wanted us to build a digital platform for smokers.

The moment we understood the idea, we declined.

The decision was easy for us. It did not match our values.

A few months later, something happened that genuinely surprised me.

We received an invitation to participate in a WHO pitch for an anti-smoking awareness campaign.

Before submitting our proposal, WHO organized an online Q&A session for the participating agencies.

I joined the meeting and started scrolling through the participant list.

It kept going.

There were so many agencies taking part.

When it was my turn to introduce Eureka, I decided to say something that was not in our presentation.

I told them we had recently turned down a project from one of the world's largest tobacco companies because it did not match our values.

Then we moved on with the meeting.

Later, we submitted our proposal.

A while after that, we were told we had won the project.

The campaign achieved results beyond our expectations.

Even after it ended, people were still contacting us because of it.

We received thank-you letters from stakeholders, and the campaign also received a global award.

We rejected the first project without knowing what would come next.

We simply did not want our name attached to that kind of work.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Values are easy to write. They are harder to protect.

2. Your reputation is built by the opportunities you refuse as much as the ones you accept.

3. Stay true to your values, even when nobody knows you are making that choice.

STORY 17

Is She Really That Important to You?


People
Before
Profit
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
BETTER
HEALTHIER
COMMUNITIES

—It was around the second year of Eureka.

We were still a young company, and every client was important.

One of our biggest clients at the time represented around 15% of our revenue.

It was a big brand with a significant budget.

But there was a problem.

The person managing the account from the client side was extremely demanding.

She was disorganized, and that usually became everyone else's problem.

She could think of something late at night and immediately call our account manager to discuss it, even when it was not urgent.

And if our account manager said she would handle it during working hours, she did not like it.

We tried to manage the situation.

I had even spoken to her manager before about the way she treated the team.

He understood the problem, but for internal reasons, he could not really change the situation.

Then one day, she called our account manager while she was in a meeting.

Our account manager could not answer, so she sent her a message saying she was in a meeting and would call her back when it ended.

And she did.

But this time, the client got angry.

She shouted at her and said:

"You work for me. I pay your salary. When I call you, you answer."

That crossed the line for me.

I called her manager.

"We do not work for anyone. We work with each other. You receive a service from us, and we get paid for that service."

Then I told him I was sorry, but we could not continue working together.

He was surprised.

"Ahmed, is it really that serious?"

Then he asked me:

"Is this employee really that important to you?"

I told him:

"Everyone on my team is. An insult to any of them is an insult to the company. And it is an insult to me personally."

We ended the relationship.

At the time, that client represented around 15% of our revenue.

For a company in its second year, that was a lot of money.

And we still had work left in the contract.

We gave it up.

Around ten years later, we still remember that story.

The team knew that day that their dignity was not something we would trade for revenue.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Your values become real when they cost you something.

2. Your team believes your values when they see you act on them.

3. A client pays for your service. They do not own your people.

STORY 18

More Than Money



—There was a gardener who worked around the building where I lived.

He was a simple man who worked with his hands all day.

Watering plants.

Cutting and trimming them.

Spending most of his day between the soil and the trees.

Every now and then, I would give him a little money to help.

It was not much.

He had a daughter with a severe physical disability who needed continuous care, so I knew that any extra support could help.

One day, while I was giving him some money, he said something I still remember.

"You know, Dr. Ahmed, I deal with a lot of people here. Maybe two or three hundred."

Then he said:

"Some of them give me much more money than you do. Much more."

I smiled.

That was not exactly where I expected the conversation to go.

Then he continued:

"But you are much closer to my heart than they are."

I was surprised.

"Why?"

He said:

"Because of the way you treat me. You always say good morning. You ask me how I am doing. You ask about me. You talk to me nicely. And to me, that is worth more than the money."

That stayed with me.

Money was important to him.

But he was telling me that there was something else he valued deeply.

Being seen.

Being asked how he was doing.

Being spoken to with respect.

Being treated as a person, rather than just the man who took care of the plants.

And the interesting part was that what meant the most to him cost me nothing.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. People need support, but they also need to feel seen.

2. Respect costs nothing, but it can mean more than you think.

3. People may forget what you gave them. They rarely forget how you treated them.

STORY 19

Give Me Your Bank Account



—A few years ago, I was planning a trip to Saudi Arabia.

Before the trip, someone had been messaging me for a while.

He was doing an MBA and needed to interview a business owner for one of his assignments.

He wanted to ask me about my experience, get some business insights, and use the interview for his studies.

When I arrived in Riyadh, he contacted me.

"You are here?"

"Yes."

"I will come to you."

He came to my hotel, and we went out together.

Before we even started the interview, we talked for a while.

He was funny, kind, and very easy to talk to.

By the time we were ready to start the actual interview, I already felt like I was sitting with a friend.

Then he said something I was not expecting.

"Before we start, I need to pay you for your time."

I laughed.

"Pay me for what? We are friends now. Forget about it."

He refused.

I refused.

He kept insisting.

I kept telling him there was no need.

Eventually, he said:

"If you do not give me your bank account, I am not doing the interview."

At that point, I realized he was not going to give up.

I even joked that I could give him the wrong account number.

He had an answer for that too.

"The money will come back, and we will still have the same problem."

So I finally gave him my bank details.

We did the interview.

It lasted exactly 30 minutes.

Then I received the transfer.

$500.

I was genuinely surprised.

He explained that this was how they valued the time of the speakers they normally interviewed.

Around $1,000 an hour.

We had spent 30 minutes together, so he sent me $500.

What stayed with me was the way he valued someone else's time without being asked to.

I was willing to give him that half hour for free.

He was the one who refused to take it for free.

And that moment changed the way I saw him.

Since that day, whenever his name comes up in a conversation or a meeting, I have nothing but good things to say about him.

That one gesture told me a lot about the kind of person he was.

He paid me $500 for 30 minutes of my time.

What he earned in return was something he never asked for:

My respect.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. Respect people's time, even when they are willing to give it to you for free.

2. Never underestimate the value of what you have learned over the years.

3. Small gestures can build a reputation that lasts for years.

STORY 20

A Dream Can Change


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—I have a friend who is quite a bit younger than me.

I have always seen myself as a kind of mentor to him.

For years, football was his life.

He played for a small club in Egypt called El Basateen.

It was not a famous club.

It was not even in the Premier League.

But he had a big dream.

One day, he wanted to play for Al Ahly, the most successful football club in Egypt and Africa.

He spent years playing for the same small club, believing he could eventually make it.

Then he tore his ACL, a major ligament in the knee.

His future as a football player was over.

I remember talking to him around that time.

He had spent years imagining his future in one direction, and suddenly that direction was gone.

"Maybe there is something better in this."

At the time, neither of us knew what that would be.

Then he started telling me about another idea.

Scouting.

He wanted to discover talented young players and help them find opportunities to play professionally outside Egypt.

He started contacting clubs in different countries.

And they started responding.

From then on, he kept me updated.

A new club he had contacted. A response he had received. A player he believed in. A new step forward.

I kept asking him how things were going and tried to support him with whatever advice and encouragement I could.

But the work was his.

And what I loved was seeing the same energy come back.

The dream had changed.

The passion had not.

Then one day, I met him and he could barely hide his excitement.

He was about to travel with the first young player he had helped secure a professional opportunity abroad.

For years, he had dreamed of becoming a professional football player himself.

Now he was helping someone else become one.

His football career ended.

His relationship with football did not.

He simply found a different place for himself in the game.

WHAT I LEARNED

1. A dream can survive even when the original plan does not.

2. When one path closes, do not waste the passion. Redirect it.

STORY 21

It Wasn't Ours



—Some time ago, we were invited to pitch for a global campaign.

For us, this was a big deal.

We had worked on many regional projects, but this was different.

A truly global campaign.

The kind of project that could take us to a new level.

And it was a multi-million-euro project.

We wanted it badly.

The team worked incredibly hard on the pitch.

Long days.

Late nights.

Overtime.

We kept developing the proposal, refining it, and going through several meetings with the client.

Eventually, we reached the final stage.

Then we got the call.

"We're sorry. You didn't win the pitch."

Of course, we were disappointed.

After all that work, and with an opportunity that big, how could we not be?

But then they told us something else.

We had come second.

They were extremely happy with our proposal.

The agency they selected simply had one advantage over us: they had more experience working in Europe, where the campaign was going to start.

It wasn't something we could change.

We had done our best.

We had presented work we were proud of.

And we still lost.

I called my co-founder and told him the news.

His reaction was surprisingly calm.

"No problem. It wasn't meant for us."

That was it.

No blaming.

No endless discussion about what we should have done differently.

No anger.

We were disappointed, but we were also genuinely at peace with the result.

We had done everything we could.

The rest wasn't ours to control.

Then something interesting happened.

The client still wanted to work with us.

They had liked our thinking and the work we presented, even though they had chosen another agency for the main campaign.

So they gave us another part of the work.

It was smaller than the main project, of course.

But it was still a significant global project.

I liked what happened next.

But I valued what happened before it even more.

We didn't know another project was coming when we accepted the loss.

There was no guarantee that anything else would come from that pitch.

We were at peace with the outcome before we knew there would be another opportunity.

And to me, that's what made the lesson real.

WHAT I LEARNED

Do everything you can. Then make peace with what you can't control.

STORY 22

I Never Applied for It



—When I graduated, I had a passion for an academic career.

I wanted to teach at a university.

So I applied to several universities in Egypt.

The British University in Egypt.

The German University in Cairo.

Misr International University.

I was actively looking for an opportunity in academia.

But I didn't get the opportunity through any of them.

Instead, a friend recommended me to the Canadian University in Egypt.

I had never applied there.

And that was where I started teaching.

Later, I became interested in working with the World Health Organization.

This time, I did apply.

But I applied for an internship.

That was all I was asking for.

Instead, they offered me a paid job, with a salary much higher than I had expected at that stage of my career.

I worked hard and tried to make the most of the opportunity.

Then, some time later, WHO contacted me about another opportunity.

This time, in Switzerland.

I hadn't applied for it at all.

Someone had recommended me because of the work I had done during my first experience with WHO.

Then came Eureka.

My co-founder and I had actually been partners before.

We had started another company together.

That company didn't make it.

We eventually closed it and moved on.

Then, some time later, he came back to me.

He had investors interested in building a new company, and he wanted me to build it with him.

They could have started without me.

But he wanted me there.

That company became Eureka.

When I look back at my career, I see the same pattern again and again.

I applied to several universities, but ended up teaching at one where a friend had recommended me.

I applied to WHO for an internship, but they offered me a job.

I did my best there, and later an opportunity in Switzerland came to me through another recommendation.

Even Eureka came through someone I had built something with before, including something that had failed.

None of this means I didn't work hard.

I did.

I applied.

I learned.

I built new skills.

I met people.

I tried to do good work wherever I was.

And I kept moving.

But many of the biggest turns in my career didn't happen the way I had planned them.

I knocked on many doors.

Some opened.

Some didn't.

And some of the most important doors opened before I even knocked.

WHAT I LEARNED

Keep working. Keep trying. But remember: not every opportunity will come from the door you knock on.