

## **‘Briefcase Essentials’ Excerpt: Where’s the Beef?**

*In her new book, Briefcase Essentials: Discover Your 12 Natural Talents for Achieving Success in a Male-Dominated Workplace, Susan Tose Spencer offers advice for women trying to succeed in male-dominated industries. As a woman who started a clothing manufacturing company, acted as general manager for the Philadelphia Eagles, and ran food distribution and processing businesses, she knows the challenges first-hand. Below is an excerpt from a chapter in her book.*

My first big challenge as the owner of Allied Steaks was a bloody one....

About two weeks after I bought Allied, I received a shipment of 5,000 pounds of raw meat from a large, international distributor who had been Allied’s supplier for many years. I’d observed the inadequate receiving process long enough and was determined on that day to check out the consistency of the meat and confirm the weights . . . one way or another.

“How do we know that all the meat in the barrel is good without inspecting the meat under the top pieces?” I questioned Burt [the former owner who had stayed on as a salesperson].

“We’ve never had a problem, so why should we check it?” he replied.

Questioning him further, I asked, “Why is it that we never spot-check the barrels to make sure we’re receiving the weight that’s on the invoice?”

“I trust the suppliers,” he replied. “They’re big companies. They wouldn’t short-weight us.”

“Well, I’m just gonna weigh some meat and see if the weight matches my receiving ticket,” I said.

Burt turned to me as if to dare me. “It’s impossible, Susan,” he said. “We only have small scales. You’ll never be able to weigh a whole barrel.”

*Impossible!?* I’d heard that before.

As I headed toward the first thousand-pound barrel, I turned back to Burt and shouted to him, “Watch me.”

After washing my hands, I grabbed a large plastic bag, stuck my hands into the barrel, and started pulling out pieces of raw meat and stuffing them into the bag. I weighed the bag on a small scale in the processing room and recorded the weight. I continued this process for another four or five bags before asking two plant employees who had helped me weigh the initial bags to follow my lead and finish the barrel.

When all the meat in the barrel was weighed, we discovered that the barrel content was short by seventy-five pounds. Burt merely rolled his eyes as I instructed the workers to weigh the other four barrels the same way.

It took two hours, but in the end, my suspicion had been confirmed: the weight of each barrel was off, some by as much as 100 pounds. Altogether, the barrels held 4,625 pounds of meat, which meant I was paying for 375 pounds of product I never received.

Burt walked over to me and issued an ultimatum of sorts. “Let it go, Susan,” he said. “If you take a claim, these guys will never want to sell to you again.”

“If I don’t take a claim, I’ll be out of business in no time,” I said.

When Burt finally realized I wasn’t going to back down, he took a deep breath and sighed.

“Okay . . . okay,” he said. “I’ll call the supplier to tell the salesman about the short weights and see if I can smooth things over for you.”

“That’s alright, Burt. I think I’ll call, tell our sales rep I’m the new owner, and let him know we have a problem.”

“Careful, Susan,” Burt cautioned, “it’s a huge company and we need them.”

“If they charge us for meat we never received, we’re better off without them,” I said....

### **She Said, He Said**

So, I called the sales rep from my supplier and introduced myself.

“Mike,” I said, “I weighed the combos of fresh meat that arrived today at the plant, and found the net weight 375 pounds short.”

“That’s impossible,” he said. “You’re new to the business and you don’t know what you’re doing.”

“Mike,” I said, “I’ve been around the block a few times, and where I come from, I only pay for something I receive. I’ll be taking a \$500 deduction from the invoice to account for the weight discrepancy.”

“If you do that without authorization, we’ll cut you off and never sell to you again,” he said angrily.

“Do what you feel you have to do, but I’m sending your company the weight sheets we recorded on this shipment. As my salesman, you’ll need to come to the plant today to verify the weights, even if your company never sells us another piece of meat.”

This was true and the salesman knew it. Fresh meat in combos (meaning the meat is “naked,” that is, the pieces are not individually encased in plastic) lasts only about four days before the product becomes too contaminated to use. And every day it sits, it loses more and more moisture as the blood drains out, reducing the weight of the meat. Therefore, if a customer makes a claim, in writing, on fresh meat shipped in combos, and the salesperson doesn’t show up the same day, there’d be no way for the customer to prove the claim.

“Well, it’s already 2:30, and my office is over an hour away from your plant,” Mike said, hoping to wriggle out of the trip.

I knew that when Mike verified the short weights, I’d have a chance to connect personally with him, gain credibility, and get a \$500-credit for that invoice. I also knew that, if he did not show up, I’d be billed in full for the shipment, with little recourse.

“Not a problem, Mike. I’ll be happy to wait for you here with donuts and a fresh pot of coffee,” I cheerfully responded....

Allied’s plant was old and dingy, with cement floors that were always wet and slippery. And, even though it was worlds away from the beautifully appointed offices of the Eagles, I dressed every day in high heels and a tailored suit.

When Mike arrived, he took one look at me and said, “You look like you’re in the cosmetics business, not the meat business.”

I snickered slightly, grasped his hand, and, giving it a firm shake, looked him in the eyes.

“Mike,” I said, “I’m just another meathead. If you decide to work with me, you’ll find out how much we have in common.”

Mike laughed out loud. Turning to Burt, he said, “How far did you have to chase this gal before convincing her to buy your business?”

Burt smiled. Turning on his charm, he replied: “Mike, you better watch out. Susan is about to give your company a run for its money. She’s a stickler for details.”

Holding onto a remaining bit of skepticism, Mike checked out the short weights by looking at a few barrels and reviewing the weight sheets I’d recorded. Then he agreed to sign off on the claim....

Mike continued to sell me fresh meat for another fifteen years. With the \$500 I saved on my initial claim, I bought a large pre-owned scale, which allowed me to weigh a whole barrel at a time. And, with Burt as my constant source of both moral support and facts about the meat business, Allied Steaks continued to grow and prosper.

*Excerpt from Briefcase Essentials: Discover Your 12 Natural Talents for Achieving Success in a Male-Dominated Workplace, Copyright © 2011 Susan T. Spencer*

ISBN: 9781608320806