A Room on the Eleventh Floor (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

Marek had worked in finance for eleven years, and he could read a balance sheet faster than most people read a menu. His office was on the eleventh floor of a glass tower, and from his desk he could watch the river turn silver in the late afternoon. On Monday morning, his director called him in and asked him to assign a new client, a small design studio that had grown too quickly for its own good.

The studio belonged to a young entrepreneur named Alina, who had started it in her parents' garage with two laptops and enormous confidence. She arrived at the meeting in a leather jacket, which looked wonderfully out of place among all the grey corporate suits. Marek liked her immediately. She spoke quickly, laughed easily, and clearly had no patience for slow procedures.

Her situation, however, was less charming than her personality. The studio's only real asset was its reputation; it owned almost no equipment and rented everything else. Alina paid her six designers a generous wage every month, even in weeks when no money came in. She had also forgotten to renew the company's insurance , which meant that a single fire or flood could have destroyed everything overnight. Marek did not lecture her. Instead he opened his laptop and began drawing simple diagrams on the screen.

Over the following weeks he tried to convey two ideas to her as clearly as he could: that growth without planning is dangerous, and that a business must remain stable before it can become large. He showed her figures from three similar studios. Two of them had collapsed within a year. The third had survived by slowing down deliberately. Alina argued with almost every point, which Marek enjoyed, because her questions were sharp. Eventually she admitted that her prime mistake had been treating the company's bank account as her own pocket.

Things improved during the spring. Alina renegotiated her rent, put down a modest deposit on a second-hand printing machine instead of buying an expensive new one, and stopped signing contracts she could not deliver. She also learned to declare every euro of her earnings honestly to the tax office, something she had previously handled with alarming creativity. When a large corporation offered to buy forty percent of her studio, she read the contract three times and then refused, because it would have given the buyers control of her designs.

Marek's bank paid him a small commission for every client he brought in, but the case had become something more than business. In September, Alina invited him to the studio's fifth birthday party. A senior executive from her biggest customer stood up and made a short, warm speech about creativity and courage. Later, Alina showed Marek her new plans and asked him to demonstrate , on paper, exactly why they would work. He laughed and said that was her job now. Before he left, she announced to the room that she intended to declare the following year the best in the studio's history. Marek walked home along the river, thinking that the noisy world of trading and profit occasionally produced something genuinely worth watching. The next morning he approved her final purchase of the printing machine without a single question.

Try our 6-step method for free and make these words stick.

Listen to this episode online: https://course.interactivelessons.nl/local/podcast/episode.php?id=25433

Start this course for free: https://course.interactivelessons.nl/mod/quiz/view.php?id=1728