

NEVER CHALLENGE EACH OTHER

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After that test in Catania, we became good friends. I even had one of my sons baptized by him — Vincenzo, who carried my father's name — and our relationship stayed good, healthy, real.

But he remained a P&G man through and through, and whenever he visited a client he threw his weight around like he still ran the front line. Once they nearly threw him out of a distribution center's offices, because he'd raised his voice all the way to shouting, and it was only my intervention that brought things back under control.

He never missed a chance to criticize me, but I understood right away why: he was pulling the emotional lever — the right kind of creative provocation — to see how I'd react. But I was my father's son, and his presence always stayed with me, watching.

There was never a real rivalry between us — who was better, who was more capable — if anything, because we were both working toward the same ultimate goal, not for two different companies.

One day he had a brilliant idea: go to the Carthusian monastery in Serra San Bruno, in the province of Vibo Valentia, and sell razors to the long-bearded friars. It was his way of showing who he was.

I drove him there but stayed outside the monastery gates. He came out two hours later with an order for blades and razors worth 300 euros. Company name: ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. Foreign country: VATICAN CITY. Different shipping address: CAPUCHIN FRIARS CONVENT.

He was thrilled, deeply satisfied, and had to call Milan to enter the order manually, because our system had no way to process a foreign-state sales order. On top of everything, he'd stunned the whole company.

But he never boasted — it wasn't in his professional makeup. He'd pulled off the impossible, and it made noise: headquarters in Milan announced it to the entire Italian sales force. I said nothing. I took note of the fact and stayed silent.

Eight days later, logistics issued a stock-return notice: the convent had rejected the order, and he was furious.

When he went back to find out why, he was told the secretary had once been, in his youth, a salesman for an Italian company — always convinced of "buying at 100 and selling at 300." He said he'd applied a 3% markup, and that told them everything: he wasn't the right man for the job. They apologized.

No one spoke of it again, no official comment. What lingered in the office corridors was one line: the joke about the 3% margin.

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