

Are you Elfing Nuts?

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Striking Elves?

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“Are you elfing nuts? You can’t go on strike!” hollered Santa. Yes, there were times when the ‘Big Guy’ bellowed, or even screamed. Like the time Blitzen accidentally stepped on his big toe – the one with the bulging bunion, or when Mrs. Claus accidentally spilled a mug of hot chocolate on his lap. “We’re in prime toy-making season fellas.” Santa Claus pleaded; he’d never experienced something like this before. “Don’t they like their jobs?” asked Santa, rhetorically. “Like the song goes, ‘we work hard all day, but our work is play.’ “What’s not to like about being an elf?” But apparently having a fun job was not enough. All the elves were striking, and if the situation wasn’t rectified soon, Christmas would be in doubt for the first time since . . . forever. So how did this absurdity get started? Apparently, an elf named Ralph was watching the financial news report on television one night when the money expert stressed the importance of saving, 401Ks, investment portfolios -- you get the picture. After some serious thinking, Ralph discovered none of the elves had any savings accounts, or money to speak of. Although Santa provided everything for his staff of thousands, Ralph joked with his fellow elves about the need to become more ‘elf sufficient.’ “And for every joke there is a half-truth, my friends,” said Ralph. “And the truth is we need to have a serious discussion with the Big Guy.” After dinner, Ralph held an “elf only” meeting, excluding everyone, even the reindeer. “Everyone, attention, attention,” said Ralph, as he pounded his little balled-up fist on the makeshift podium. “We are here tonight because we need to – and should be, compensated for our exceptional hard-working and dedicated skills.” His fellow co-workers erupted in vigorous applause. Everyone was on board, except his wife, Emma, who saw the scenario as half empty. “What if Santa gets upset and does something drastic,” she asked. Ralph shrugged, pooh- poohing his wife’s concerns. “We are doing the right thing, my dear; you watch and see,” said Ralph, a bit too confident for his own good, Emma thought. “Besides, we got Santa by the ornaments, if you know what I mean. You’ve never read Roger Fisher’s Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In ? It’s the perfect blueprint.” Emma shook her head in disagreement. “You better not blow it,” said Emma.” With this economy, we can’t afford to lose our jobs!” So it was, on the first of August, with Christmas looming on the horizon, that Ralph broached the subject to Santa Claus. Ralph made an appointment with the secretary for two in the afternoon, knowing the man in the red suit with white trim would be in a jolly mood after consuming his lunchtime meal – this was the time of year where Santa needed to

seriously chow down. The middle-aged looking elf, sporting scruffy black hair and deep brown eyes, knocked on the door to Santa's office and entered. "Hi Santa, may I have a word with you?" "Oh that blasted Kong Pow chicken," said Santa, as he thumped his chest, grasping for a burp. "Santa loves his Kong Pow, but not when it's too spicy. Sorry Ralph, please sit down. Now what can I do for you?" "Well, it's . . . "I'm sorry, could you please give me that bottle of Tums on the table behind you?" asked Santa, his stomach gurgling. Ralph hopped down from the big, comfortable black leather chair, retrieving the plastic container. Santa popped it open and poured two round tablets into his hand, shoving them into his mouth. As he chewed, Ralph posed the question as professionally as possible, but got the answer he expected. Santa spat out the finely chewed antacid tablets everywhere following it up with a hefty belch. "You what?" asked Santa, taking a quick gulp of water. "Strike? I thought you were happy here?" Santa started to turn a 'less than rosy' pinkish hue. "We are Santa, but my fellow elves firmly believe we should be compensated for what we do," said Ralph, with firmness in his voice. "And what we do do, we do extremely well, do you think not?" "Of course I do," said Santa, raising his bushy white brows a bit. He stood up, arms behind his back and peered outside the huge window overlooking Santa, Inc. "You know Ralph, we have a good thing going here up in the North Pole, a monopoly of fun you could surmise; why do you want to potentially mess things up?" "I don't see it as a liability, sir," said Ralph, armed with his iPad just in case he had to site any articles pertaining to worker/employee relations. He was armed with knowledge. "I mean, we work hard all day, and yes, our work is – or can be play, except for the time I nearly sawed off my index finger building that blasted . . . " Ralph refocused. "To be perfectly honest Santa, we should be earning a decent salary; just like anybody else, so we can afford things. I could use a week or two in beautiful Barbados, maybe Key West. I heard the Hogs Breath Saloon is a fun place to down a cold one." "Ah, Key West," said Santa, pondering the moment with fondness. "I remember delivering deep-sea fishing equipment to Hemingway one year; great writer you know. Had all those seven-toed cats roaming his property – polydactyls I think you call 'em." Santa made walking movements with his chubby fingers. "You know a few years ago I won the Hemingway lookalike contest at the Hogs Breath. Almost blew my cover with excitement when I started belting out my patented Ho, Ho, Ho's." "Santa?" waved Ralph, trying to get his attention. "We get tired of the cold year 'round too. You've got the dough to travel. Shave the beard off, lose a few pounds, put on a Hawaiian shirt, incognito, and you're off to somewhere warm and sunny." "This is true," Santa replied, stroking his bushy white beard, still needing it to grow out a couple more inches. "And if I decide not to pay you, then what?" "I've been doing a lot of reading on the subject, but I believe we would have to put the kibosh on the toy making process," posed Ralph. "That's serious business, and quite bold on your part," said Santa. "Are you sure that's what you want to do?" "We do," replied Ralph. "You're the best boss in the world, no question, but then again, we've never been paid. I mean, my parents, grandparents, you get the picture sir." "Well, times are tough my friend, especially these last few years, and I'm not sure I have the resources to pay you all. Throw in the cost of healthcare, sick days, vacation days – that stuff doesn't grow on trees you know." "I understand that sir, but . . . " "Sir? Please Ralph, don't call me sir; it's Santa 24/7, 365 days a year." "Sorry Santa," said the elf. "It's just that . . . I hate being a

freeloader.” “Freeloader?” replied Santa, his voice rising. “Never have I thought of you and the other elves as freeloaders. You’re the best at what you do!” “I know Santa, which is why I think we should be paid. Look, we don’t need to break the bank on this, but a signed, long term deal would go a long way.” Santa put his hand on his chin and pondered the situation. He turned around, gazing through the panoramic window facing the beautiful North Pole landscape. “Outsourcing,” he mumbled under his breath. “What was that Santa?” Ralph asked. “Outsourcing,” replied Santa. “It’s something companies do to save money. I heard there are elves in China who would be quite happy to have a job such as yours.” “Excuse me for a moment Santa,” said Ralph, who quickly Googled the word and began reading up on the subject. He mouthed the words as he scrolled down using his little fingers. His eyes widened, realizing this could be a problem. Santa sat back down in this comfy leather chair and folded his arms, peering at his watch. “As you were saying?” Ralph looked up at Santa. “Maybe we can discuss this matter next year?” “We’ll start negotiations right after Christmas; you have my word on it,” replied Santa. “Now get back to work.”