



Group: Holiday Rationalizations

Rationalization: No Christmas Bonus

State It: Sometimes a sudden change at the holidays causes a person to make a decision they would not ordinarily make.

Story It: Let me give you an example. I know a person who, years ago, worked for a long time at one of the big national video store chains. He had worked his way up from the video stores into a good job at the corporate office. One of the things he loved was that the corporate office had the best holiday parties. There was always a full dinner with open bar at a hotel ballroom somewhere. Spouses were invited, and the executives gave everyone great gifts, including free DVDs, a meet and greet with some A-list movie star, and there was always a bonus check handed out at this party. It wasn't anything too crazy, but it was \$500. The evening of the party would come around in December, and the boss would make the rounds with checks in envelopes, give them to each person, and it was a great night for celebrating a year of hard work. Year after year that check came in so handy for buying gifts for family, maybe making an extra car payment, or a plane ticket for a vacation. After a few years, this employee and most of his coworkers came to rely on that bonus, not so much for extra luxury items, but for regular monthly expenses. It always seemed like inflation and the bills increased faster than his salary raises could catch up...to the point that after several years of attending these holiday parties, he and other employees were really coming to expect the checks. It didn't seem so much like a bonus, more like an extra paycheck, and they were counting on it. And with all of his obligations and expenses, by his tenth year on the job, by the time that check was put in his hand, he knew that he had already spent that money three different ways. Well as you know, all good things come to an end, and the video rental industry was no different. It crashed hard. One year December came around and it was announced that there would be no holiday party due to financial hardship the company was facing. This guy knew he was counting on the bonus money to get some overdue bills paid. He worked up the nerve to ask his boss if there was any information about possible Christmas bonus checks. As you can imagine, no check was coming, at least not for the people at his level. You can imagine that the executives walked away with a holiday bonus, but not the rest of the professional staff. And so, while in a million years, he would never have made this decision otherwise, he knew he was in a tough spot because he was counting on that \$500. He needed it. He had no other way to get it. So he made a decision that was completely outside of his nature as a person, and he decided that since he had access to his boss' office, and since he knew where his boss kept a little extra cash, he made the decision to take some of that money after hours to pay for what he had been counting on the bonus check for. His thought was that his boss, this company executive, was certainly getting a holiday bonus, and it wasn't fair. It just wasn't right that the most highly paid employees were being rewarded, when he and the rest of his colleagues doing most of the work were walking away with nothing but bills. So, he snuck into the desk, took the money, paid his bills, and hoped that no one would ever find out or that if they did, maybe they would blame it on the cleaning crew that came through at night.

Moral It: It doesn't mean he was a bad person. He was just in a hard spot and made the decision that you or me or any of us could probably understand.

Link It: But that's why people like me come around in these kinds of situations, because we really want to understand why something played out the way it did. And we would not know the true financial situation a person is in unless they share that information with us.