

# Company Man

By John Cospers

Copyright 2011, 2014 by Righteous Insanity

[www.righteousinsanity.com](http://www.righteousinsanity.com)

A Few Quotes Before We Begin  
(Because every good business book has them)

“If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

- Jesus Christ

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

- The Apostle Paul

“Ooh, yeah, umm, I’m going to have to go ahead and sort of disagree with you there.”

- Bill Lumbergh  
Initech



## Chapter One

Once upon a time, there was a man who loved his job, very much.

I know that sounds like the most bizarre and far-fetched beginning for a fairy tale ever, but it's the truth. William Connor loved his job. He loved the office they had given him, and he loved the work he did as the human resource and quality assurance manager. More than anything, He loved the company that employed him.

William lived to get up in the morning, eager to start a new work day. After a quick shave and shower, William would eat a bowl of instant oatmeal and fill his coffee mug before driving into work. As soon as he arrived, he would review his daily agenda, then fire off an email to Mr. Fisher, his boss, as to what all he had planned that day. Then, he would step away from his desk to patrol the office, looking for infractions of corporate policy and office standards.

William was constantly amazed by the way his co-workers would bend and break the rules - rules put into place for their safety and comfort, many of them written by William himself. No one ever hung up their coats on the coat rack out front, despite the large sign with friendly, red letters William had posted above the rack. No one washed their own dishes immediately, re-filled the coffee pot, or stored their mugs in the cabinet, despite the signs he had posted in the break room. In every corner, William had posted rules and regulations that were simply written and easy to follow. Every day, his co-workers ignored the signs and did as they

pleased.

It broke William's heart to see that the entire office was staffed by rule benders and scofflaws. Karen, the receptionist, had to be monitored constantly for violating the dress code. Every time she came in with a new outfit, she would have to do the finger tip test; if the skirt didn't extend past her finger tips with arms down at her sides, she would be sent home to change.

Dave, the accounts payable clerk, was another character who irked William constantly. Dave was a NASCAR fan, which was not the problem in itself. The problem was that Dave's favorite driver, Bill Henson, drove a car with the company's number one competitor emblazoned across the hood. William had lectured Dave for hours about how wrong he was to cast his racing allegiance to the enemy. But no matter how many cars, photos, posters, and other doodads William confiscated, Dave persisted in his love for Bill and the hated number 42 car.

Leigh in accounts receivable was lazy, always wandering off and doing her own thing rather than working. Try as he might, William just couldn't get her to sit down and stay on task, short of stopping everything he was doing to stand over her shoulder. What's worse, Leigh had a habit of bringing in the smelliest lunches possible, stinking up the whole office for an hour or so every afternoon with whatever rancid meal she had left over from the night before.

And then there were the sales reps, a motley crew if ever there was one. Nancy, Molly, and the two Bens were inefficient goof-offs who were constantly late with their paperwork - paperwork they could never fill out correctly, despite repeated training sessions William had provided for them. Their cubes were also a mess, filled with all sorts of

contraband, including airplanes, bobble-heads, toys, and on one occasion - fireworks.

It didn't thrill William to work with such a rag-tag gang of misfits, rule breakers who couldn't follow simple instructions and wouldn't be bothered with the little tasks it took to keep the office in proper shape. Every Monday, he posted a simple "housekeeping" chore list, but every Friday, he'd find that no one had even bothered to check the list - though one time he saw that someone had used the back of the memo to play a few rounds of Hangman.

Still, William believed in the company, and he believed that a good company man could whip any office into shape if he whipped hard enough. Twice a week, William put on mandatory training sessions which were regularly attended by less than half the staff. Topics ranged from proper paperwork management to dress codes to office neatness to company pride. "Show a little TLC when you fill out your TPS reports," he said, spouting acronyms with the grace of an artist working with oils. "And keep the PWW's and the GOA's clear of RTD. Don't WFS, do it ASAP. Then when the CEO makes his SIV, you be RTG."

His co-workers would stare back blankly as if they didn't know what he was talking about. (And with good reason; not a one of them did!)

Day after day, William expounded the value of the company to his co-workers, hoping to inspire them all to greater heights. Day after day, they trudged in late, did what they could to get by, and bolted for the door with energy they had not shown in the previous nine hours promptly at five.

It all left him wondering, "What else can I do?"

One Friday afternoon, William had just wrapped a very successful Powerpoint seminar on

the difference between appropriate and inappropriate decorative coffee mugs when he found a Post-It on his computer monitor. The Post-It read, in large, friendly letters:

"See Me."

William knew who "Me" was. It was the wunderkind, the owner's son, the branch manager himself, Mr. Fisher. Mr. Fisher had been with the firm from the very beginning, working side by side with the founder, Mr. Shepherd, to chart the course for the company he loved. Mr. Fisher was still very close with Mr. Shepherd, and William knew getting close to Mr. Shepherd was his ticket to moving up in the firm.

It made William beam with pride to think that Mr. Fisher wanted an audience with him. He didn't know what it was about, but considering the long hours of hard work and sacrifice William had given the company over the years, he knew he had to be positive.

William raced to the restroom to check his shirt and tie, patting down his unruly hair, before taking the long walk down the back hall to the boss's office.

Before his knuckles landed on the solid wood door, he heard his boss's voice: "Come on in, William."

William's stomach did a flip as he entered the plush, comfortable office of Mr. Fisher. His boss had his usual million dollar smile stretched across his face. He pointed to a chair across the spacious desk (surprisingly free of clutter) at a modest cushioned chair. "Have a seat."

"Thank you," said William, easing himself into the chair.

"How was your training?" Mr. Fisher asked.

"Same as always," said William. "I laid things



out in detail, as best as I could. I can't say yet if I reached any of them. You know how hard headed they are."

Mr. Fisher nodded. "I'm a bit concerned about our employees. There's not a great deal of devotion in them."

"I know," said William. "Outside of myself, I can't even say if you have a single employee who really wants to be here."

"I agree," said Mr. Fisher. "I want people to want to be here. I want them to embrace our corporate vision, make it their own."

"I couldn't agree more," said Mr. Fisher. "Things are getting worse out there too."

"Yes," said William. "Did you see Nancy's coffee mug? Way out of line. But when I told her to put it away, she just laughed at me."

"They have no respect," said Mr. Fisher.

"None at all."

"We can't go on like this."

"You're absolutely right." William smiled, sitting up in his seat. He was enjoying the conversation very much. But Mr. Fisher brought that joy to a halt with his next words.

"I'm sorry, William. You're fired."



## Chapter Two

William could not believe his ears. Fired?? Him?? After all he had done for this company? No one in this office believed in the vision of the firm more than William! Okay, maybe Mr. Fisher did. After all, he and Mr. Shepherd went way back. But after that, William was the only true company man in the building. So why was he being fired?

He wanted to let go, to unload a hundred questions and objections on his boss, but all he could squeak out was, "Why?"

"William, I know you love this company," said Mr. Fisher. "But frankly, your zeal for the company way has, well, it's kind of gone wrong."

"What do you mean wrong?" William's stomach continued to toss and turn.

"I want people to want to come here," said Mr. Fisher. "I want them to be proud to bear our company name. And I want them to do things the company way."

"That's just what I want!" William insisted.

Mr. Fisher leaned back in his chair. "So why do you think all those people out there are so miserable?"

William shrugged. "I figured it was something wrong with them."

"William, let me ask you a question." Mr. Fisher sat up, staring straight at William. "And I want you to think hard before you answer. How do you think your co-workers look at you?"

William opened his mouth, then fell silent. It was a strange question. In fact William thought the

question itself was, well, irrelevant.

"Sir, with all due respect, what does it matter how they see me? It's the company that matters most."

"You're right," said Mr. Fisher. "But as far as these people are concerned, you are the company." He let the words sink in a moment. Then he repeated the question. "How do you think your co-workers see you?"

"Well," said William, "They know where I stand on the company. And they know I expect them to do the same."

"Do you think they respect you?" he asked.

"Why wouldn't they?" said William. "I'm your appointed representative, right?"

Mr. Fisher smiled. "Are you doing anything this evening, William?"

William shook his head. "Nothing I can't move around. I have a training next week on the proper procedure for TPS reports, and I need to go over my slides. Unless..." William swallowed hard. "Unless, of course, I'm really fired."

"No, William," said Mr. Fisher. "You're not fired. But you are on probation, pending a few assignments I have for you."

"Yes," said William, a wave of relief coming over him. "Yes, anything you say."

Mr. Fisher took a scratchpad and wrote a quick note on the top sheet, then tore it off and slid it over to William. William saw two addresses written on the paper.

"I want you to put the slides off for tonight," said Mr. Fisher. "Go to the first address tonight around six, and ask for Mr. Gumer. He's an old friend, and I've asked him to do me - and you - a favor. After you see him, go to the second address below."

"What is it?" asked William.

"A little watering hole that some of your co-workers enjoy," said Mr. Fisher.

"Do you want me to spy on them?" asked William, his heart racing with the thought of adventure.

"In a way, yes," said Mr. Fisher. "Go there and observe, but do not engage with them. I want you to sit quietly and listen. If they say anything about work, or about you, listen very closely."

"I will sir," said William. He stood up, tucking the note in his pocket. "So I'm not fired?"

"I said probation," said Mr. Fisher, who stood and shook William's hand. "Good luck, William."

"Thank you, sir," said William. "I won't let you down."

"It's not me that I'm worried about," said Mr. Fisher.



## Chapter Three

When he went to the address on Straight Street that evening, William was very surprised to find himself at an old, Victorian-era house, fully restored and in remarkable condition. What surprised him even more was the sign sitting in the well-manicured front lawn: Gumer Costumiery. As he walked up the steps past two Ionic columns to the front door, he cast a glance inside the large bay window to the right of the door. The back wall of the room was covered in masks, with everything from Darth Vader to the President and beyond on proud display. The room itself was full of racks filled with costumes of every size, shape, and color. Optimistic, but confused, William shook his head, wondering aloud, "Why would Mr. Fisher send me here?"

William reached for the door handle, but paused when he saw the CLOSED sign on the door, stating that the shop was only open from noon to five. He hesitated a moment, wondering what to do. Before he could decide, the door opened, and a little man with a white head, white beard, and inch thick glasses greeted him.

"Hello, Mr. Connor."

"Mr. Gumer, I presume?"

The little old man nodded. He stepped back, allowing room for William to enter. "Mr. Fisher told me to expect you. You are quite punctual, just he told me you would be."

William stepped inside. "This is quite a place," he said. "You sell Halloween costumes?"

Gumer shut the door, then padded toward the counter. "We do costumes all year 'round. Halloween, theatre, film. All sorts of things."

"I didn't think people played dress up outside Halloween," said William.

"Oh, people dress up in masks and costumes all the time," said the old man. "The funny thing is, most of the time, people don't even know they're doing it."

Mr. Gumer took a suit in a plastic cover and held it up. "Yes, that should fit fine." He handed the suit to William and pointed a crooked finger down the hall. "You can dress in the men's fitting room down there to the right."

William looked at the drab brown coat in his hands. "This isn't really me."

The old man chuckled. "That's the whole point!" Mr. Gumer turned back to William and quickly slapped a mustache on his face. "You're not Mr. Connor tonight. Just another hard working man out for a drink on a Friday night." The mustache was quickly followed by a short wig and a pair of wire-framed glasses.

"Is this really necessary?" said William.

"You want to get close without being recognized, right?" said Mr. Gumer. "This disguise is all you need."

"But anyone who knows me will know that it's me if they look hard enough."

"Of course they will," said Gumer. "But you have to things going for you. One, you're going some place that, ordinarily, you would never go. And two, the people who do go there would never think to look for you there. That's how you will get where you need to go without being seen."

William sighed. He remembered how close he came to filing unemployment that afternoon; it was



all the motivation he needed. He went down the hall and changed into the brown suit - which fit remarkably well. Checking himself in the mirror, he had to admit the effect of the full costume was pretty good.

William gathered his things and walks back to the front room. Mr. Gumer nodded. "Nice. Very nice."

"Will it fool them?"

"We fool each other every day," said Mr. Gumer. "Why should it be any different when we do it on purpose?"

William sensed there was something deeper in Mr. Gumer's remark, but he didn't ask him to elaborate. Mr. Gumer gave him a box. "Put everything in here when you get home, and give this box to Mr. Fisher on Monday. He'll take it from there."

William nodded. "Thank you."

Mr. Gumer saw William to the door, waving goodbye from the porch. As William slid behind the wheel of his car, he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirrors. There was a thrill to getting behind the wheel with this new disguise. William felt as if he was on a secret mission, spying on those unworthy and ungrateful bums that populated his office. Surely that was the real purpose here, gathering evidence to determine who should really go and who could stay?

Twenty minutes later, William was parked outside Bullfinch's Pub. He had a brief moment of fear as soon as he stepped out of the car - nearly bumping into Karen. If anyone would know him on sight, it was her. But Karen hardly paid him any notice, excusing herself as she brushed past and raced inside the pub.

William stood there a moment, letting his heart slow down before entering the pub. He looked through the window and caught sight of Nancy and Big Ben (so called because, of the two Bens in the office, he was the bigger one) playing pool. This was it; no turning back now. He walked up the sidewalk, took the three steps to the front door, and went inside.

It was a busy place, full of white collar types who needed a casual atmosphere with loud music and muted colors to wash away the stress of the work week. William casually strolled past the bouncer's stand toward the bar, scanning the room. He saw Karen with a small drink in her hand headed toward one of the back rooms. William took his time following her, stopping just outside the pool room where Nancy was finishing Big Ben off in a game of eight ball. He ordered a soda from the waitress (so he could stay sharp and alert, of course), and adjusted his ears to pick up the dialogue in the back room, wondering how long it would be until he heard something of interest. He did not have to wait long.

"So, how did your sale call go today?" said Nancy.

"Just fine, Nance," said Molly.

"You had another one?" said Other Ben (so called because... well, you get the idea).

"Same company, second round," Molly answered. Her response was met with ooohs all around the room.

"So this one's looking good, then," said Nancy.

"Very good," said Molly. "They're down to three. And I think the guy likes me."

"In that skirt, who wouldn't?" said Dave, prompting a chuckle from the other guys.

"I feel like I'm missing something," said Karen. "Are we talking about a sales call?"

"Sure," said Molly. "I'm selling my services to the highest bidder."

William nearly choked over that comment. From the sound of it, so did Karen. "What do you mean your services?"

"It was a job interview, honey," said Molly. "I want out of that dump as fast as I can."

"But you said you were going to see a client!" said Karen. The others laughed again.

"I lied, Karen," said Molly. "Come on, do you really think Ben over there was seeing clients all afternoon Wednesday?"

"Hey, don't drag me into this!" said Other Ben.

"You had an interview too?" said Karen.

"No, I did not have an interview," said Other Ben. "I was at a job fair."

"How many of you are looking for other jobs?" said Karen.

"Pretty much all of us," said Leigh. "If it wasn't such a bad market right now, we'd all be long gone."

"Are you serious?"

"Come on, Karen," said Dave. "Do you really want to work there the rest of your life?"

"I don't know," said Karen. "It's a good company as a whole."

"As a whole," said Big Ben. "But we're under the watchful eye of William Connor, Company Man!" There was a sarcasm in the tone that was unmistakable. William sipped his soda, unable to fill the hole Ben's comment made in his heart.

"What a dork," said Other Ben. "Did you guys go to his training today?"

"Do I ever?" said Molly.

"It was on coffee mugs," said Other Ben. "Coffee mugs! Is he a human resources man, or my nanny?"

"You're just made because he singled out your 'Life's a Beach' mug," said Leigh.

"We're all grown ups here, Leigh," said Other Ben. "Are any of us offended by bad language? Or dirty jokes on coffee mugs? No!"

"You know what gets me," said Dave. "The chore list."

"Oh, I hate the chore list," said Nancy.

"Is he still making that up?" said Molly. "I haven't paid attention."

"Too hard to see it, with all the other signs he posts around the office," said Big Ben.

"Hang up your coat. Wash your dishes. Stand on your right foot in the conference room very Tuesday, but not during a Leap Year," added Other Ben.

"So you guys don't do your chores?" said Karen.

"I told you this a long time ago," said Dave. "Just ignore it. Besides, you know what happens if you actually do something."

"He follows up with you to tell you everything you did wrong. Then he makes you do it over," added Nancy.

William's head was reeling. Hearing his co-workers describe the man they knew from work, he felt as if he were listening to a stranger. Was he really that big of a jerk?

"I didn't realize you all hated your jobs so much," said Karen.

"It's not the job," said Other Ben. "It's just certain people at the job who make it less than enjoyable."

"It would be a little more tolerable if he was gone," said Leigh.

"Or if he minded his own business and quit trying to tell me who I can root for on Sundays," said Dave.

"Or if he followed the rules himself," said Leigh. "Every day he screams at someone over their stinky lunch. Then what does he eat?"

"Tuna!" came a unison reply from the others.

"Which stinks like crazy the next day, unless someone takes the trash out," said Other Ben. "Which he never does!"

"It's the only way he can get any of us to take it out," said Dave.

"What do you think, Molly?" said Big Ben. "Should we all stay and just get rid of William?"

"They're not going to fire William," said Molly. "He's the one true company man in that office. He's the man Mr. Fisher put in place to keep us in line. That's all I need to know when it comes to staying or going."

"What are you saying?" said Nancy.

Molly sipped her drink, then answered, "I'm saying, how far does the apple fall from the tree? If Connor's this bad, how bad is Mr. Fisher?"

"Forget Fisher," said Big Ben. "How much of a pain is Mr. Shepherd?"

"Come on, Ben," said Karen. "You can't judge the whole company based on one guy."

"Why not?" Big Ben shrugged. "If William doesn't represent the desires of management, why hasn't management done anything to stop him?"

They almost did, William thought to himself. William's face burned with humiliation. Hating him was one thing, but to think these people hated Mr. Fisher and even Mr. Shepherd because of his actions, it was too much to bear.

"I'd love to think that office is one lay off away from being a great place to work," said Molly. "But I don't. I'm getting out as fast as I can."

"Right behind you," said Nancy.

The gang went on and on dissecting everything about William and the company. They hated the signs, the rules, and the training sessions. They hated how William spoke in acronyms and the hypocrisy he had shown in breaking his own rules. Two rounds of beers later, Other Ben got up on the pool table and ad-libbed a training session, mocking William as he taught his friends the proper way - the company way - to open and close a ballpoint pen.

William didn't stay for the full training seminar. He finished his soda and left the bar. He sat in his car for another fifteen minutes, watching his co-workers laugh and joke. He couldn't tell if it was still about him. He didn't matter. In their eyes, he was a joke. And that meant he was no good to the company.

He went home, he crawled in bed, and he went to sleep.

## Chapter Four

It was just after 9:30 on Saturday morning when William heard the phone ring. Having just spent a fitful night full of unpleasant dreams, he wondered if perhaps the visit to Bullfinch's was all a dream as well. A quick down at his pillow brought him back to reality; his fake mustache was still there, staring up at him with the same disdain his co-workers had shown the night before.

The phone went silent before William could pick it up. He grabbed the receiver and checked his caller ID. The display said the number was "Unavailable," but he knew who it was. William sat up, rubbing his eyes, and waited for it to ring again.

"Hello?"

"Good morning, William."

"Good morning, Mr. Fisher."

"Throw some clothes on," said Mr. Fisher. "I'm on your front porch, and I brought breakfast."

William hung up the phone, shaking himself awake. He grabbed a pair of sweat pants and a T-shirt, tossing them on as he dashed down the stairs. He opened the front door to see Mr. Fisher waiting patiently on the front step with a box of donuts and a half gallon of chocolate milk.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," said William, ushering his boss inside.

"Must have been a long night," said Mr. Fisher. "Did you drink too much?"

"All I had was a soda," William defended himself.

Mr. Fisher smiled. He reached up and pulled the wig from the costume shop off William's head. "I think you can get rid of this now." He tossed the wig aside, as he walked into the TV room.

"I suppose you want to hear about last night," William said, taking a seat on the couch as Mr. Fisher helped himself to William's favorite chair.

"William, I make it a point never to talk business when bass is on."

"Bass, sir?" Mr. Fisher grabbed the TV remote and clicked it on, flipping right to the morning fishing program on the sports network. William was a bit taken aback. "I didn't realize you were into fishing."

"It's not just my name, it's a lifestyle," said Mr. Fisher. "It's a lot like business, you know. Save for the fact we're not fishing for bass, but men."

"Fishing for men?"

"Customers, of course," Mr. Fisher said with a wink. "Grab us a couple of mugs, will you? This chocolate milk's gonna get cold."

William grabbed some mugs and plates, and the two men enjoyed a quiet breakfast along with an hour of the finest in competitive bass fishing. William had never stopped to watch fishing on a Saturday morning, but he found the whole process intriguing. It was a lot like business in that the fishermen had to do things just right if they wanted to make a big catch. It was a wonderful metaphor, one he knew he could spin into a training session... if he ever found the nerve to teach one again.

When the fishing ended, the television went off. William felt as if someone had turned on a hot burner beneath his seat. "So how did it go?"

William thought for a moment about where to begin. There were so many things said, so many



insults and barbs thrown his way. But what did it matter?

"Sir, all due respect, I'm sure you know how it went. Otherwise, you wouldn't have sent me."

Mr. Fisher nodded. "It's not a good feeling, is it?"

"No, sir."

"You know, leadership will always bring criticism," said Mr. Fisher. "And anyone with an important message will have critics. That's unavoidable. But there's wisdom in knowing the difference between mere grumbling and genuine criticism."

William nodded. "I guess I have kind of shoved corporate policy down their throats. But this is a professional office. Someone has to stand up for what's right!"

"It takes guts to stand up for what you believe," said Mr. Fisher. "You have more than enough guts. What you lack is heart."

William sat up. "Sir, my heart is totally devoted to this company."

"But where is your heart when it comes to your co-workers?"

William fell silent. Truth was he didn't have much compassion for those slackers, especially after last night. "It's kinda hard to care someone when you know they don't like you."

"You know what Mr. Shepherd said when he first started the company?" said Mr. Fisher. "He told us, 'You're not going to win everyone. Some folks you will win. Some will hate you, not because of you, but because of me.' It sounds strange, but it's true. I don't expect you to win over every employee, William. What I do expect is that you'll learn to love them as much as you love the company."

"How do I do that?"

"Go get that costume for me," said Mr. Fisher. "Then we'll talk."

William ran upstairs and gathered the costume pieces together, placing the wig, glasses, and mustache in the box the old man gave him. He brought them back downstairs, where he was stunned to find Mr. Fisher washing the breakfast dishes.

"That wasn't necessary," said William. "I was going to get them."

"Just say thank you," said Mr. Fisher. "Then show your thanks by finding your Employee Guidebook."

"You mean the binder?" said William.

Mr. Fisher shook his head. "No, no, not that monstrosity you keep on your office table. The little book. The one Mr. Shepherd wrote himself specifically for our human resources and quality assurance managers."

William shook his head. "I don't remember receiving a book when I was hired."

Mr. Fisher smiled. "It was originally given to your predecessor. When I hired you, I told you to search through his files and find it."

A light went in inside William's memory. "I remember now! You told me to dig it up and, and..." He flushed with embarrassment. "And not ignore it like my predecessor had."

Mr. Fisher patted William on the shoulder with a wet, soapy hand. "You're not the first - sorry about that - and you won't be the last." He turned back to the sink and began putting the dishes back into cabinets. "Go to the office today and find it. My guess is it's probably in the back of a drawer some where."

"Back of a drawer," said William. "Got it."

“There are seven chapters to that little book,” said Mr. Fisher. “I want you to read a chapter a day, starting tomorrow.”

“I can do that.”

“But don't just read it,” said Mr. Fisher. “Whatever it tells you, you need to do it right away.”

William nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“I'm serious about this,” said Mr. Fisher. “Mr. Shepherd is a bit quirky, and some of what he tells you will seem counterintuitive. But it works.”

William nodded. “He's the boss, right?”

“Right.” Mr. Fisher dried his hands on a dish towel. “I'll be back a week from today. Donuts good for you next week too?” William nodded again. “We'll debrief, and then, we'll see if you're ready to get off probation.”

“I won't let you down, sir!” said William.

He led Mr. Fisher back to the front door, then grabbed his keys and drove straight to the office.



## Chapter Five

William Connor spent the better part of Saturday in the office searching for the prize Mr. Fisher had set before him. The trouble was William's office was literally jammed with training manuals, handbooks, rule books, guide books, and other important documentation for turning new hires into good corporate citizens. William started with the file cabinets - eight in all! - then turned his attention to the bookshelves. When he failed to find the book among the others on the shelf, he began taking down binders, one by one, flipping through pages and digging in the side pockets.

Nothing.

William searched his desk, giving the whole unit a much needed, thorough cleaning in the process. He found all sorts of things long forgotten, including the corporate cornerstone paper weight (a rock with the company mission statement carved into it) they had all been given at the annual training conference last July as well as an unused gift card for the Main Street Fish House. He set the rock on his desk (in preparation for a training session he had planned but put off because the rock had gone missing), and tucked the gift card in his pocket. There were a few other surprises, but alas, no book.

William ran down to Main Street around noon to get a fish sandwich. Then he went back to the office and headed for the archives room. For ten hours, William searched through accounts receivable, accounts payable, employee records, sales orders, invoices, disciplinary records, training

records, and thousands of other documents. Around eleven o'clock that night, he gave up and went home.

The next morning, William was surprised to find himself locked out of the building. The keyless entry system was on, but every time William entered the access code, the word "DENIED" flashed on the screen. William searched for another way in, but it was no use. The office was completely locked up.

He went home and sulked for an hour or so, wondering what else he could do. He had to start the book today. He had to! But even if he had been able to get into the office, what are the odds he'd find the book? He'd searched the office and the archives thoroughly. If it wasn't in either place, where was it?

William jumped up on his feet. He raced upstairs and pulled down the door leading to the attic. How had he forgotten about this? It was almost two years ago that he had packed a bunch of old "useless" materials up and brought them home for safe storage. It wasn't important material; most of it was headed to the dumpster anyway. Old training manuals and catalogs and the like. But maybe, just maybe...

William dumped the entire box on the floor of the attic. There on top of the pile, seeing light for the first time in years, was the book.

He let out a cry of joy and exultation as he grabbed the book and held it aloft. The words *Handbook for Human Resources and Quality Assurance Managers* was written in large, block letters on the cover. It was worn, and a bit wrinkled from the moisture in the attic. But as he flipped through the pages, he saw that it was still complete. He opened to the beginning of the book, chapter one.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### Your Name Is Not On My Sign

Dear friend, as I sit down to write this manual, I imagine you are sitting in an attic, or a basement, or a storage closet, having turned your office and several others upside down in pursuit of this tiny little volume.

William looked around instinctively. It was a strange beginning for any book, much less an employee manual, and William really wondered how Mr. Shepherd knew where he was.

I can sense your puzzlement with the fact that I said you are in a closet, or attic, or basement. "How did he know?" The answer is simple: after so many years running this company, I know my people well. When you came into this company, you were advised to pick up the manual and read it, but you never bothered. You bought into the company and our core values, and you genuinely believed that was enough to help you make true believers out of everyone who walked in the door. But the one thing you were not ready for was the complete culture change required of every employee in my firm.

Once again, William felt the sting of pride at reading those words. But with all he had witnessed the last few days, he was learning that pride was an obstacle to becoming who the company wanted him to be.

I have no doubt that road that led you here was paved with good intentions. The trouble is,

they were not my intentions. And as this is my company, not yours, I expect you to adopt my intentions, and not try to enforce your will in my office.

Let me say that again very clearly: This is my company. Not yours. You will do things my way, or you will be cut off and replaced with someone who will.

It was a harsh statement, but William had no doubt the promise behind it was very real.

Please don't take this to mean that your first mistake will be your last with my firm. If it were, you wouldn't be reading this. You'd be reading the job postings on your favorite career website. I believe in second chances. That is why I am writing this handbook.

You may not like what I tell you to do. You may not understand why either. But you have to trust me when I tell you, this way works.

Take time to think over what I've said. Can you live within my rules? Will you lay down your desires to carry out mine? If so, meet me in these pages at chapter two, first thing Monday morning. We have much to do.

William set the book aside. Part of him wanted to read on, but he knew better. This was going to be a difficult process, and if the founder of the company he loved wanted him to take it a step at a time, who was he to argue?

He carried the book downstairs and set it in his briefcase. He spent the rest of the day in silence, meditating on what he read, wondering just how difficult the week ahead would be, and trying



to shake the nagging question in his mind: "Am I really cut out to do this job?"



## Chapter Six

William was at his desk by 7:30 AM Monday morning, eager to begin the reformation process promised by the little book he had found in the attic. He wasn't the first one in; Mr. Fisher, as usual, was already there, hidden behind his office door. William didn't bother to disturb him. The curiosity at what Mr. Shepherd had planned for him that day was too much to wait on.

### Chapter Two: Break Your Rules

Good morning! I am so happy you chose to continue on this journey of re-discovery with me. Make no mistake: this is an act of will. You have the choice to put this book down and walk out the door at any time. I sincerely hope you'll stay with me. The rewards far outweigh the costs.

No doubt you are at your desk in your finest business formal attire. And no doubt you are surrounded by binders and booklets and files jammed with rules, regulations, documents, and paperwork handed down to you from previous employees. You have been entrusted with years of documentation thought necessary to the success of this business. I need you to do me a favor: destroy it all.

"What?" William couldn't help but yelp aloud as he read the end of the first paragraph. There was no way Mr. Shepherd could mean what he said.

Oh yes, I mean it. I want every binder, every booklet, everything not written by me personally taken to the dumpster by noon. Not only that, any signs or postings that you or other supervisors have posted must come down immediately.

It made no sense. Destroy all the rules? That would mean total chaos and anarchy. These people need structure. Clearly Mr. Shepherd never dealt with employees like this.

I know you think you have the worst employees in the history of, well, business, but trust me, you have overburdened them with your rules and regulations. Is that the reason they rebel? No. Is it the reason they hate this company? No, and yes. Some people would not be happy even if you tossed out every single rule. That's human nature, and you can do nothing to change it. What you can change is the person in the mirror - and that is the purpose of this book.

In the beginning, I laid out a simple set of rules to govern all branches of our firm. These are the guidelines I expect you and all employees to follow, regardless of rank, position, or status:

1. You will not work another full-time job while you are employed here.
2. You will be on time every day and stay until the work day ends.

3. You will not work on Sundays.

"Hmm." Rule number three took William back to the day before, when he found the electronic lock on the office would not let him in the door. It made the gravity of the rules all the more serious.

4. Obey your supervisors and managers.

5. Do not steal.

6. Do not take gifts or payments from vendors or customers.

7. Do not disclose private company information to any outside party.

8. Do nothing to harm your co-workers.

This is the sum total of the rules at my company.

William shook his head. It wasn't enough! There was nothing about filling out paperwork, attending training seminars, or even a dress code! Mr. Fisher had warned him about Mr. Shepherd's oddness, but never in a million years would he dream a company would institute such a bare bones rule book.

You have until noon to clear the office of all rule books written by you and your predecessors. This should be easy, since you spent the weekend rifling through them all anyway. Once your office is clear, confiscate all rule books from the employees, and take down all signs and postings that you have created. In their place, post the simple rules listed above. Don't hold a meeting. Don't make a PowerPoint out of it. Just post it.

William closed the book. If Mr. Shepherd was here, he'd have a lot to answer for, William thought. But he wasn't here. Maybe there's a reason for that. William knew the instructions he had been given were a recipe for anarchy. But he was resolved to keep the job he loved, so he went to work.

William cleared all of the binders and booklets off his bookshelf. He took seven trips from his office to the dumpster outside before the bookshelf was clear of everything, save a copy of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Garfield at Large*. He grabbed a large trash bag from the storage room and began emptying the file cabinets of all the slide presentations and procedure manuals and other paperwork - the product of at least a decade's work by men who had occupied this same office. It took a total of seven trash bags to clean out the files, then seven more trips to the dumpster as he removed all of the contraband from the archive room. Last, but not least, he took down every sign in the office. Everything from where to hang up coats to doing your own dishes and even "Wash Hands Before Returning to Work" went into a garbage bag and then to the dumpster.

It was mid-morning by the time the office and the archive room had been cleared, and those employees who had made it in (all but Nancy, who allegedly had a sales call) had noticed William's efforts. Around 10:30, William drug a large garbage can into the center of the office.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said William. "I suppose you're wondering what I've been doing all morning."

"Are you leaving?" said Other Ben. "'Cause, I woulda got an ice cream cake."

"No ice cream cakes," said Molly. "Don't you remember last month's training on appropriate and inappropriate celebrations for an office setting? If

one of your co-workers happens to be lactose intolerant--"

"Ice cream cake is fine," said William. "But I am not leaving. I'd like all of you to go into your cabinets and pull out all training materials and employee rule books that you have been given since you became employed here."

Silent confusion flooded the room. Leigh spoke for everyone. "Say that again, please?"

William asked, "Does everyone have their employee instructional binders?"

Two people raised their hands; this part of the process might not be as hard as he thought.

"Did any of you keep anything I ever gave you in a training session or seminar?" Same two hands; this was going to be pretty simple. "Ben, Karen, please bring whatever you have and deposit them in this garbage can."

Karen began to gather all the training manuals in her possession. Big Ben moved a little slowly. He had a few items out on the desk, then he stopped.

"Are you sure, man? I mean, when I become a stand-up comic, this stuff... well... no offense."

William nodded. He knew what he was thinking. "Okay, Ben. You can keep it. But I want it out of the office, now."

"Now?" said Ben.

"Right now," said William.

William collected the materials from Karen as Big Ben made his way to the car. William was seething on the inside, knowing this goofball of a salesman intended to turn his hard work into comedy. But what of it? Mr. Shepherd had rendered it all meaningless anyway.

William deposited Karen's books in the dumpster. Then he returned to the office. He took a printed copy of Mr. Shepherd's list of rules and posted them by Karen's desk. Then he turned to address the office.

"From now on, these are the rules that will govern this office. Nothing else you have been given or is relevant. This is it." William walked back to his own office. Soon as he was in the door, the hoi polloi moved in to read the list.

"That's it?" he heard Big Ben snort.

"Gotta be a trick," said Molly.

"There's no dress code!" said Other Ben. He raced over to William's office. "Are you serious? No dress code?"

"What does the list say?" asked William.

Other Ben chuckled, then moved aside as Leigh entered William's office.

"I want my radio back," she demanded.

William walked to his closet and got the radio he had confiscated months ago. Leigh snatched it without a word and left the office. Soon, William could hear Leigh's dance grooves pulsating in the office. Soon after that, both of the Bens had stripped down to their boxer shorts, T-shirts, and black dress socks, just in time for Nancy's arrival in the office.

"What's going on?" she asked. The Bens pointed to the list of rules posted on the wall. Nancy glanced over them quickly, then kicked off her heels and headed to her desk. "Is this for real?"

"Apparently so," said Other Ben.

"We should order Indian food!" said Nancy.

Her proposal was greeted with unanimous approval. Nancy took orders and called the India Palace up the road, placing an enormous carry out



order. William, who had never liked Indian food, kept quiet. It was his rule that stinky food be banished from the office premises. This was going to be bad, but what could he do? Rules are rules, and there was no longer a rule prohibiting offensive smells in the lunch room.

Lunch turned into a party. With a lavish selection of Indian food in the room, a radio, and a new sense of freedom, the entire office erupted into a party mode. There was dancing, singing, and enough curry in the air to drop a full-grown elephant. Through it all, William kept his mouth shut. He didn't like the noise or the smell, and he certainly didn't approve of the lax dress code that now had everyone in various forms of undress. (Leigh had even changed into her gym clothes, which she kept in her car.) But he did appreciate the fact that his co-workers seemed, for the first time, happy.

"Hey, Will!" It was Other Ben at the door to his little office. "There's plenty of food left if you want some."

"That's quite all right," said William. "I'm not much on Indian food."

"Suit yourself!" said Other Ben, dancing back into the action. William decided now was as good a time as any to skip out and get some food himself. He ran down the block for a quick deli sandwich, taking his time on a walk around the block before returning to what he believed would be a mad house.

Surprisingly, things died down a bit in the afternoon. The dancing ended, the music was turned down, and a few people at least tried to do some work. Around 3:30 Karen took it upon herself to clean the break room and try to get the lingering smell of Indian food to dissipate.

The awkward moment of the day came just after four, when Big Ben's prize customer walked in the door. William learned of it when Big Ben came crashing into his office, suit in hand, needing a place to make a quick change.

"I thought you wanted to work in your underwear," William quipped.

"You playing games or something?" Big Ben grunted. "You know, none of us are buying this. I don't know what you're up to, but we know the swerve is coming."

"Is that so?"

"You're too much of a company man to let this go on." Ben tied his tie quickly. William helped him into his coat. "Just remember, it was you who told us we could do all we did."

"I didn't say you could," said William. "You were given the liberty, and I didn't stop you."

"You will though," said Big Ben. "You always do."

Big Ben bolted out the door, greeting his customer with apologies at being held in a meeting as he escorted him into the conference room. William thought about Ben's accusations, the idea that he was too much of a "company man." While William's definition of the phrase was evolving, he saw he had a long way to go to show his co-workers that around here, "company man" was not what they had long believed it to be.

He wanted to be a company man, a true company man. He wanted them to see the difference. As he saw them all slip out the door (all before five), William hoped that as he continued to change, he might bring along his co-workers too.

## Chapter Seven

When William walked into the office on Tuesday morning, he was hit in the face by the toxic fumes emanating from the break room garbage cans. The Indian food discarded the day before hung heavy in the air, and it made William's blood boil. In an instant, he forgot himself and the book. He went to his desk and pulled up the blank office chores template he used every week to assign the jobs that nobody did. Big Ben's name went down next to trash removal. Nancy would get dishes, since it was her idea. Dave was on vacuum, Molly would clean the ladies room, Other Ben the men's room, Leigh the lobby area and Karen would dust. He printed the list and walked out into the main office to post the list.

Then, he saw the rules.

The simple list of rules he had posted the day before was still there. Did this mean he could not assign simple house cleaning activities to the staff? Rule four did require them to obey office managers, and he fell into that category... sort of. He decided to wait, and returned to his desk to see what Mr. Shepherd had to say.

William pulled the book from his briefcase, propped his feet on the desk, and began to read.

### Chapter Three

#### Going to Work

If you are reading this, no doubt you have survived the chaos and disorder of day one. I'm sure once you took down all the office

signs and dumped all the old rule books, some form of rebellion arose among your co-workers. You probably spent the day cowering in your office, worried that at any moment, the building would catch on fire. Clearly that was not the case. Otherwise, we would not be resuming our discussion.

It's time for the next step in your journey, and this step includes something that will likely terrify you. As of this moment, you are not to set foot in your personal office for anything the rest of the day. The walls and doors that have divided you from your co-workers are just one of the many reasons they have come to view you as unapproachable and unlikable. So right now, get up from your desk, exit the office, and lock your door.

William looked up at the open door. Was he serious? He knew it was a rhetorical question, but the idea of spending a day outside his office was, well, terrifying. Where would he sit? What would he do?

He stood up and walked around the desk, taking the chore list and the book with him. His heart raced. Why was he so nervous? He didn't spend ALL day in his office. Never had. But the idea of shutting it off completely, no sanctuary, no place to hide...

Leigh was at her desk already, making phone calls. Karen was at the front desk, no doubt updating her status on some silly website. She looked up at him and smiled. He smiled back. He took a deep breath. Then, in an act of sheer bravery, he turned around, locked his door, and closed it.

The door slammed hard. Leigh and Karen both looked up at William, who could feel his face

flushing red. He turned his eyes toward the break room and raced in

The smell of stale Indian food making his eyes water. He wiped his eyes vigorously, tried to read the next paragraph, but it was no good. Defeated, tears streaming down his face, he left the security of the break room.

There was only one other place he could find any privacy to read. He headed for the men's room. William slipped into the back stall. He put the lid and seat down, then sat down to read.

Good! Now that you're in the office proper (or more likely, hiding the back stall of the bathroom), you are no doubt wondering what to do. Today's exercise is not merely one about being with the people. It's about serving the people. A good leader will never ask those under him or her to do something they themselves would not do. And avid followers are people who know this about their leaders.

Let me give you an example: any member of my corporate staff would gladly scrub the bathroom toilets if I asked them. Why? Because that's my job! Every Tuesday and Thursday, I scrub the bathrooms. Doesn't matter how expensive a suit I have on, or what meetings I have scheduled, this routine is unchanging. My people know this because they see it every week. They'd do it if asked because I have set the example for them. But in all honesty, this will never happen while I am the boss. Why? Because it's my job.

William cast a glance around him. It wasn't the worst bathroom he'd ever seen, but months of half-hearted cleanings had not left it in the best condition. He

sighed, wondering once again if he was really cut out for this.

Perhaps you've heard the phrase, "The last will be first, and the first will be last." Your next step in becoming the kind of company man is just that: today, and every day from now on, you will serve your fellow employees.

William pulled the chore list from the back of the book. He opened it, read the names and he jobs assigned to them. So this was Tuesday - cleaning day. Service day. It wasn't right, he thought. He wasn't the one who made the messes. Not like them! But if this was the company way, he would try it.

William walked out of the restroom. Most of the staff was in now, save for Molly and Other Ben. Dave had made it a casual Tuesday in jeans and a sweatshirt. Big Ben was showing off his favorite tie, a gaudy monstrosity that William had once banned from the office. They all fell silent as William walked across the room to the office rules. He used a piece of tape from Karen's desk to post the chore list. Then, with a red pen, he marked out all the names of his co-workers and wrote just one name over them: "William." He then went straight to the break room, gathered the remnants of the Indian feast, and carried them out to the dumpster.

William could hear the buzz from the office as he walked back inside. He distinctly heard a very worried Dave saying, "We are so in for it..." before Karen cleared her throat, shushing the room. William felt the weight of every eyeball in the room upon him as he crossed to the supply closet, took out the cleaning supplies, and then made his way toward the men's room.

William started with the sinks and mirrors, giving them a luster they had not known in years.

Then he worked on the toilets one at a time. He decided to go ahead from there and give the floors a good scrubbing. This proved to be quite a task, as the floors had clearly not been touched in years. William worked up a good sweat scrubbing the mildewed tile floors.

He was amused to see each one of the guys take turns coming in to use the facilities; he knew they had to see the sight of their hated co-worker cleaning the toilet themselves. William kept his head down and focused on the task at hand, finally emerging after an hour and a half of hard labor before heading to the ladies' room.

The ladies' room was in noticeably better shape than the men's, and had obviously been well-cared for. William started with the sinks and mirrors, but was shortly interrupted by Karen.

"Mr. Connor?"

"It's William," he said.

"If you don't mind - and I know this is totally not your job - could you look at the toilet in the first stall? It hasn't worked for a long time."

William smiled. "My pleasure."

"If it's too much trouble--"

"Not at all."

"I just thought since you were in here--"

"I'll take a look," said William. Karen did not say thanks, but she gave him a sweet smile before leaving him to his work.

William finished with the sink, then scrubbed the toilets, leaving the broken one for last. When he got there, he noticed it would not flush. He opened the tank, and sure enough, the parts inside had rusted and broken apart. A whole new apparatus was needed.

William looked down at his \$100 dress shirt and \$60 tie, both already flecked by bleach and toilet cleaner. If he had known today was servant day, he'd have dressed differently. Too late now.

William left the office to go to the hardware store, where he bought what he needed to fix the toilet. He grabbed a deli sandwich to throw in the fridge, then headed back to work. It was a filthy job that took over an hour. But soon it was done, and the bathroom was restored to full service. Leigh, Nancy, and Molly said nothing, but Karen thanked him profusely.

William ate his sandwich the same time Dave, Leigh, and Other Ben ate in the break room. They sat apart from him, talking amongst themselves as if William were not even there. William did not try to intrude, though he very much wanted to jump in when Other Ben started talking ice hockey. It was William's favorite sport, and he was excited to know someone else shared that passion. Maybe some day, Other Ben would talk with him and they'd have a real conversation about hockey.

The afternoon was fairly quiet, with most of the sales staff out on calls. William ticked off the items on the chore list one by one. He cleaned the dishes, then went the extra mile and cleaned out the fridge. He straightened the lobby area. Then he ran the vacuum. About four o'clock he was prepared to finish the day by dusting. That's when he noticed Karen had already started.

"Why don't you let me?" said William.

"It's no trouble, really," said Karen. "You usually ask me to do it anyway."

"I didn't ask today, did I?" said William.

"You've done plenty today," said Karen. "Just taking out that trash was a big thing."



William nodded. "It was pretty foul."

"I see why you made that rule," said Karen. "No stinky food."

"That rule's history, you know," said William.

"If you say so," said Karen. She moved on to the next desk, continuing to do her weekly duty. He walked back to the break room and fixed himself a cup of ice water, then treated himself to a break at one of the tables, reading the sports page and doing a crossword.

At the day's end, the place was a mess. One day of slaving away to keep the place clean himself was no match for two days without rules. William stayed around until six PM, running the vacuum a second time and making two more rounds with taking out trash. He grabbed some Chinese food on his way home and crashed in his favorite chair. He didn't wake up until 6 AM.



## Chapter Eight

William came in on Wednesday morning with a bagel and coffee, just before eight o'clock. He started to unlock his office door, but then thought better of it. Instead, he took his breakfast and the handbook to the break room where he sat down with his book to read.

### Chapter Four

#### PEBBAC

Today, we're going to talk about communication. Communication is vital to the day to day operation of any organization, but it only works when both parties in the communication are speaking the same language. For example, have you ever seen the term "PEBBAC" before? I know what it means, but if you don't know what it means, it's pretty silly for me to use it in communication with you, isn't it?

PEBBAC is an acronym, one of the favorite tools of business people everywhere. Every company has their own unique set of acronyms that get batted around on a daily basis. I'd be willing to wager there are at least three dozen that you use on a daily basis. Right now, I'd like you to get a piece of paper and write down the acronyms you use on a weekly basis. Don't worry about their definitions or extended meanings now. Just make your list. I'll wait right here in the book.

William smiled to himself, popped his knuckles, then got up to grab a legal pad that was sitting up top of the microwave. No one had better mastery of the office acronyms than William. He began to make his list on the left margin. When that was full, he proceeded to fill two more columns on the front side of the page. He wrote down words like DIRTFoot, FOIL, FACE, SOTIFIC, FIFO, LIFO, FIDO, and his personal favorite, SPELUNK. He wrote down word jumbles like PWW, GOA, TPS, RTD, WFS, NDR, 4Q2, and HWK. He even listed more than a dozen number/letter combos, from ISO9000 to 5S.

So many acronyms, William thought to himself. It was far past time for another training seminar on their meanings and uses. And yet after three day in Mr. Shepherd's book, he knew that somehow, the training seminar on company acronyms would never happen - especially since he had been instructed to pitch the acronym training manual with all the others two days prior.

Now that you have your list, you can see plainly why you have a hard time communicating with your staff. It's not that they are stubborn or giving you a hard time. They simply don't know what you're saying.

Naturally, your first response is to want to pull out that old company acronym training book that you threw away two days ago and give your co-workers a refresher course. But once again, the problem does not lie with your co-workers. It's PEBBAC: Problem Exists Between Book and Chair.

William looked down and noted the thing between the book in his hands and the chair upon which he sat was William Connor. He sighed.

Today, you're not only going to spend time with your co-workers, you're going to listen to them. No, they're not going to tell you all their problems. They don't trust you, remember? But you are going to learn about them, and in doing so, you are going to learn to speak *their* language so that you no longer need to force your language on them.

“But aren't we all speaking English?”

I hear you ask. Yes, but even within the confines of English, language varies greatly depending on who you are, where you are, and whom you are with. A good politician knows he cannot give the same speech to an auto union that he gives to a group of entrepreneurs. You have to know your audience in order to connect with them. Who are they? Where are they from? What is their opinion of you? Of the company? Unless you can see the world - and yourself - through their eyes, you have no hope of connecting them.

Keep your ears open today. Actively listen to the conversations around you. Ask questions if you like, but do not offer comment or judgment on what you hear. Accept the fact that you're not going to like everything you hear, but realize that unless you hear it, you'll never fully understand the people you need to reach. When you're comfortable, try engaging them in their own terms. But be careful not to lapse into old habits, or to make judgments. We'll discuss that more tomorrow.

William closed the book. He wasn't so sure this was such a good idea. He'd heard more than enough unfiltered comments from his co-workers the other

night at the bar. He also knew they'd never be that candid if they saw him snooping around. Still, William trusted the old man, and he was willing to go along - especially with the promise that he would be able to make judgments in the morning.

William spent the morning hovering about the office in a vain attempt to listen in to office chatter. As he suspected, people were not exactly loose-lipped around William. Matter of fact, his mere presence acted to disburse almost every conversation he tried to hear. The Bens had some funny discourse near the copy machine around nine that ended when William stepped over to check the toner and paper. Nancy and Leigh went from a hundred words a second to zero soon as William came around a corner in their direction. Dave avoided William like the plague, and Molly, noticing William's movements, kept huddled over the phone in her cubicle.

It was a fruitless endeavor, but William decided he'd try another tactic. Around eleven he ordered pizza for the entire office, knowing nothing draws his co-workers together quite like free food. When the pizzas arrived at noon, the two Bens were on it before William could get the bill paid. William chased them down into the break room. Finally, William got to hear some real dialogue.

"So Crusher and Dozer are tagging up. Crusher's getting the beating of a lifetime from the Million Dollar Twins, and Helena runs down to the ring, begging Dozer to do something. But the ref won't let Dozer in, right?"

"Right."

"Finally, Crusher gets Rex in a Mississippi Masher, Dozer gets the hot tag, and he's wiping the walls with both of them. Then he comes to the nearside to hit the ropes - and Helena grabs his ankle."

"I knew it!"

"Dex gets the pin, grabs Rex and the belts, and they're out of there. Helena jumps in, accusing Dozer of throwing the match. Crusher falls for it and just goes ballistic on Dozer!"

"Which sets up their feud for the pay-per-view next month."

"Just like I said."

"Just like you said."

William nodded. He could do this. "Wrestling, huh?"

The Bens looked up at him like teenagers whose parents had violated the sanctuary of their room. "That's right," said Other Ben.

"Always enjoyed wrestling," said William. "You know it's fake, right?"

"Staged," said Big Ben, defensively. "Staged is a better word. The outcomes are pre-determined, but there's a lot of pain in that ring."

"Is there really?" said William.

"Trust me," said Ben. "This is the voice of experience."

"You were a wrestler?" William was impressed, and quite surprised.

"I did it for a few years," said Big Ben. "Until my back gave out. I got to fight the King once. Jerry Lawler. He was cool."

"You know who I always loved?" said William. "The 1-2-3- Kid. Man, that guy could fly. Whatever happened to him?"

Silence. Awkward, painful silence. William didn't know what he had said wrong; only that he had laid a major egg. Other Ben and Big Ben quietly excused themselves.

William took a seat, his book and his legal pad beside him, and had a piece of pizza. The rest

of the staff filed in one by one to help themselves to pizza, with only Molly bothering to say thank you. William re-read the chapter for the day, trying to see where he went wrong.

"Working on a new training seminar?"

William looked up. It was Karen, a plate of pizza in hand, looking over the legal pad. William set the book aside. "Uh, no. Not training seminar."

"Good. That stuff always confuses me," said Karen.

"My trainings?" asked William.

"No, those abbreviations," she said. "I mean yeah, sometimes I get lost in training sessions too. But when you use these big words and these terms no one's ever heard of. Like this one. DIRTFOOT. What does that mean?"

"Do it right the first time," said William.

"But that doesn't make sense! How do you get..." He could see Karen going through the letters and words in her head. "Oh, you mean foot like 'ft.'"

"Yes, they just say 'foot' to make it easier."

"But it's not," said Karen. "I mean it would be. But you have all these others. FIFO, LIFO, SOTIFIC... Those aren't even real words."

William saw an opportunity to learn. "May I ask you something?"

"Okay," said Karen, a little bashful. William pulled out a chair for her, and she sat down.

"I want to do a better job communicating with all you guys," said William. "But I've been learning some things--"

"In that book?" asked Karen.

"Yes, in the book," said William. "You noticed?"

"Everyone has," said Karen. "They think you're up to something."



"Do you?"

Karen chewed a bite of pizza. "Honestly?"

"Yes, honestly."

"You've never been nice," said Karen. "Not this long anyway. It makes you think something's wrong. Or something's about to happen."

"Nothing's wrong," said William. "Well, there is, but I'm working on it. The something wrong around here was me. That's why I'm reading this book. I want to fix things."

"So to fix things, you threw out the rules and cleaned the bathrooms?"

"It's all part of the process," said William.

"And now, you want to teach us company-speak."

"No, no," said William. "I want to learn you speak. Office speak. Can you help me?"

Karen glanced out into the main office. He sensed some peer pressure holding her back. It was a risk for her, but one he wanted her to take. He NEEDED her to take.

"Okay," she said. "Let's go through your list. You tell me what things mean, and I'll tell you what we call it. Or if we say it at all."

"Sounds good," said William.

"And if we find any we don't need," said Karen, "We lose it. Okay?"

"No." William winced. It was instinct that said "no," the mark of a man who had been in power too long defending the status quo. William shook his head. "I mean, we'll see."

Karen was patient with him. "William, if there's something here we don't use, there's no point in us learning it. Right?"

It was a valid point. "Okay then. Let's do it."

Karen spent an hour going over acronyms with William, an exercise that proved as educational as any chapter in Mr. Shepherd's handbook. There were several sets of acronyms that were redundant. "No reason to keep three terms for the same concept, right?" said Karen. William reluctantly agreed each time, and they chose the best and simplest term for each. They found acronyms for outdated processes and paperwork that no longer existed. They even identified more than a dozen that William himself didn't know. By rule, they were all cut from the list.

William and Karen soon found themselves staring at a legal pad with twenty acronyms that were deemed acceptable and necessary. "But I have to be honest: I think you should just ask for things by their long names for a while."

"You think so?"

Karen nodded. "You know how every Wednesday you get the sales reports?"

"I always collect the SOFT forms, along with their TEPs and their CCL forms."

"See, that's what I mean. Today, just ask for the sales funnels, the expense reports, and the cold call lists."

"But they know what that stuff is," said William. "Right?"

"Every week you ask for them," said Karen. "Every week, they come up to me and ask what's due on Wednesday. And I only know because I'm the one who compiles them on Thursday."

"I see," said William. "So simpler, right?"

"Exactly." Karen threw away her garbage and washed her hands. "I better get back up front. Leigh gets a little surly if she has to answer the main line for more than an hour."

William nodded. "Hey, thanks for your help."

She smiled, "You're welcome," and went out to her desk.

William followed her out of the break room and made his way out into the office toward the sales desks. Once again, all peripheral conversation halted as he approached.

"Afternoon, guys and gals," said William.

"You need something?" asked Big Ben.

"Yes," said William. "I need your sales funnels."

The sales gang looked around, puzzled. "The sales funnels?"

"And the expense reports, and the cold call sheets."

Another round of glances was exchanged. Other Ben gave William a nod. "Okay, chief."

"Thank you," said William. He walked back toward the kitchen, intending to clean up the pizza mess, when he had another thought. He walked over to Dave and Leigh's area.

"Hello, Dave," he said.

"William," came the terse reply.

"You think you and Leigh can have the monthly reports to me by Friday morning?"

Dave scrunched his face, a little puzzled. "The monthly reports?"

"Yeah," said William. "I know they have a bunch of crazy nicknames."

"Down here we just call them BS1, BS2, and BS3."

"What's the BS..." William stopped. "Never mind, I get it. But yeah, let's just call them monthly reports from now on."

Dave gave a polite nod. "Whatever you say."

William struggled the rest of the afternoon with this new way of speaking, but after an hour or so of puzzled looks, he found he was able to communicate with the staff with a lot less eye rolling and groaning. What's more, about four o'clock, he had all of the sales reports in his inbox - something that had not occurred in months.

That evening, William made his way to the lobby to say goodbye to everyone on their way out the door. Other Ben paused on the way to have a quick word with him.

"The 1-2-3 Kid is Shaun Waltman, also known as X-Pac and a few other crazy names," he said.

"Is that so?" said William.

"People hate him," said Other Ben. "And I don't mean in a Bobby Heenan, love-to-hate way. I mean people really, really hate him."

William nodded. "Like I said, I haven't watched in a while. But I do watch a lot of hockey."

Other Ben's eye widened, and a smile crept up the corners of his mouth. "We'll have to see about that." He gave William a pat on the arm, then left.

William made a quick trip around the office to pick up some stray trash here and there. There was still too much chaos for his liking, but he was looking forward to tomorrow. Judgment day was upon them.

## Chapter Nine

William awoke Thursday morning with a renewed sense of energy. For three days, he had worked his tail off, retraining himself to be a servant to the company and his co-workers. He had learned the value of communicating with his people on their terms, and he had gained some ground with a few of them. But there was more ground to gain - and in his mind, territory to re-take. People were still treating every day like way-too-casual Friday. No one was cleaning up after themselves, and their workspaces were looking more like college dormitories than a serious office.

The end of Wednesday's chapter had indicated that today would be a day when he finally got to speak out and end the nonsense. William was ready to do just that. He stopped off at the local bakery for bagels and cream cheese, his personal preferred refreshment for a serious meeting. Light meetings got donuts. Heavy ones called for something a little more sober. He expected today to be a sobering day.

William got to work about quarter 'til and set up the bagels in the break room. He then went to his office to read his morning chapter.

### Chapter Five Judgment Day

It is day four of your re-training and I am sure the state of your office is still in some sort of disarray. It's not as bad as it was Monday,

when you first simplified the rules, but it hasn't returned to the order and structure you prefer. I'm sure you have a laundry list of things to address with your staff, and you're ready, willing, and able to communicate with them - on their terms - what needs to be corrected. You may even have a written list or a PowerPoint ready to go.

Contrary to what you may have come to believe this week, I do believe in discipline. There is a standard for employees at this firm, and while grace is granted to those who are true company men and women, sometimes I do deem it necessary to cut away the branches that are not producing fruit. A judgment day will come to everyone who thinks they can get by without submitting to my authority. But today is not that day, and you are not that judge.

**William let out a disappointed sigh. He should have seen it coming. Disappointed, he read on.**

If you will look at the front cover of this handbook, you will see these are guidelines for the office Human Resource/Quality Assurance Manager. As the HR/QA representative, you are to set the example for the office. You are to establish the rules and regulations for your branch. But while it is your job to lead the way, it is not your job to take disciplinary action.

If someone refuses to tow the line, you will not force them back in line. You may remind them gently where the line is, but do not for a minute assume it is your place to put them back in theirs.

If someone says or does something offensive to the company, it is not your place to correct them. Stand firm in your faith in the company, but leave the discipline to the one whom you serve.

If someone directly attacks you for your faith in the company, do not strike back. You will only sink to their level.

This new way of dealing with your co-workers will be much easier if you learn to let go of unimportant things. No two people on this planet are alike, and people are allowed to have different opinions. Do not stir up trouble over things that are trivial and really don't matter. Be a peace maker, and live at peace with your co-workers.

Rest assured, for those who flaunt the rules and think I will let it slide, a time is coming when they will be shown the door. Until that day, stand strong. Be the example. Watch your own actions, and be careful that you do not become a hypocrite. In this way, you will win more people over to the company way than you will by force.

One more thing: before the day is over, call a meeting for tomorrow at nine o'clock. Make sure your staff knows this is an invitation, not a demand.

William couldn't believe it. He knew he was not the office manager. But how can he be expected to lead the way when he has no authority to discipline those who break the rules?

It didn't take long for William to find himself in a position to hold his tongue. After finding the bagels in the break room, Big Ben came storming into his office.

"So who's getting fired?"

"Excuse me?"

"You brought bagels," said Big Ben. "Bagels mean bad news."

William flinched. Once again, he had failed to take into account how his own staff viewed things. To William bagels meant a serious chat. To Big Ben and the others, it meant bad news.

He'd have to do something about the bagel stigma. Sometimes, William just liked to have a bagel. But he didn't want to frighten his staff every time he needed his fix.

"Look, you've been acting nuts this week," said Big Ben. "I don't know what your scheme is, but you're not fooling anyone. You're a bully and a hypocrite. And whatever you're planning--"

Big Ben stopped as Molly walked into the office.

"Can I have a word with you, William?"

William looked at Molly, then at Big Ben. "Ben, I'm sorry if I made you worry. But I promise, there's no bad news. Not today."

Ben's attitude as he left the room indicated that he didn't trust William. William wondered if he'd ever break through his hardened exterior. He could see Big Ben being the first to go when the axe fell. Molly closed the door behind Big Ben and sat down.

"Is something wrong?" asked William.

Molly handed him an envelope. He didn't need to open it; he knew what it was as soon as he saw it. Still, he opened the envelope and read the letter inside.

"You're leaving?"

Molly nodded.



"I'm sorry to hear that," said William. "If this is about me, or the culture of the office--"

"This has been a long time coming," said Molly. "And no, it's not about you. I don't want to be here. And I don't want to work for this company. I'm ready to go."

William felt a burn in his chest. He couldn't help feeling he was responsible, no matter what she said. He knew he was the face of the firm - and he knew he had done a lot of damage. "Molly, things are changing here. If you give it a chance--"

"I've given it three years," said Molly. "I'm done."

William wanted to argue further, but the words of Mr. Shepherd came back to mind. He had to let her go. "I'll give your letter to Mr. Fisher. I'm sure he'll want to speak with you."

"I'm willing to give you two weeks," said Molly.

"Good," said William. He walked to the door and opened it. Molly followed William down the hall toward Mr. Fisher's office.

"It's open."

William handed the letter back to Molly and opened the door for her. William waited. A few minutes later, Molly walked out. She shook hands with William. Then she walked down the hall.

"Come on in, William," said Mr. Fisher.

William walked inside, closing the door behind him. He sat down opposite Mr. Fisher.

"Interesting week?" asked Mr. Fisher.

"Exhausting," said William.

"Molly just quit," said Mr. Fisher.

"I know."

"She offered two weeks notice. I told her we'd let her go today, with two weeks severance pay."

William raised an eyebrow.

"Mr. Shepherd wants people here who want to be here. No use keeping someone who's decided to move on."

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?"

"Sorry I couldn't talk her into staying," said William. "She was our top sales rep."

"There are more important things in Mr. Shepherd's eyes," said Mr. Fisher.

"I wonder about that," said William.

"You do?" asked Mr. Fisher.

"Yes!" said William, letting some emotion out. "I'm supposed to be grooming myself into this perfect company man. But the things he's asked me to do are so counter to everything I ever learned in business school. I've got no authority, no power. I've been told to lead by example and keep my mouth shut. And I've been working all by myself to keep this office clean with no help!"

Mr. Fisher smiled. "It is radically different than what they taught in business school. But trust me when I say it's the right way."

William sighed. "I haven't lost my faith in this company. I'm just frustrated. I can't change them!"

"No one can," said Mr. Fisher. "Only they can change themselves. The one person you can control is you."

"So what do we do?" said William. "About Molly, I mean."

"You should probably address the troops," said Mr. Fisher. "They're going to be discouraged by this. Some others will want to quit. And the sales

team will freak out, because they're going to have to pick up her slack until she's replaced."

William thought about the bagels. Bagels meant bad news. Big Ben would suspect he had known about Molly all along. This was not going to be easy.

"You don't think they should hear this from you, sir?" asked William.

Mr. Fisher smiled. "If I didn't think you were capable, I wouldn't ask you to do it."

William sat silently for another moment. Then with an "Okay," he got up and left the office.

He could hear the turmoil before he reached the main office. Molly was already gone, her stuff cleared off her desk. The Bens and Nancy were in an uproar, and all three of them jumped him the moment he was in sight.

"You let her go?" Nancy howled.

"Mr. Fisher made the decision," said William. "It was not my call."

"Do we still have to make full office quota?" said Other Ben.

"Yes."

"I knew it!" said Big Ben. "I knew you were lying about bad news."

"I was just as surprised as you, Ben," said William. "I know there's no way to make you believe that because I've never given you reason to trust me before this week. But I assure you, this was a surprise to everyone."

"Is that so?" It was Leigh, shaking her head as she walked over to join the fray. "You really have no clue how people feel about this place, do you?"

"I'm learning," said William. "And I'm doing everything in my power to change the things I can."

"Too little too late," said Nancy. "We've lost Molly. And if this quota nonsense isn't fixed, you're going to lose me."

"And me!" said Big Ben.

"Just wait a minute, guys."

"You think we're bluffing?" bellowed Big Ben.

Other Ben jumped in: "We can't do it without Molly!"

"Will you all let him talk?"

Everyone fell silent. It was Karen who spoke, standing up at her desk. The quiet girl had never spoken so boldly in the office before. It caught everyone off guard, most of all William.

"Well, you've got the floor," said Nancy. "Say something."

William looked around and saw he had everyone's attention. "I know all of you are probably waiting for me to tell you to shut up and get back to work and quit complaining. Any other office in this country, I guess that's what would happen. Until this week, that would have been me. But not any more. I can't make you all do anything you don't want to do. And I'm not going to try. It's not because I don't want you to do it. It's just not the company we work for.

"This place is different. I've learned that now. And I want all of you to see it as well."

William walked back into his office. A few moments later, he emerged with a large brown box. He set the box on Dave's desk.

"What's all this?" asked Dave.

"It's your stuff," said William.

Dave opened the box. It was full of cars and posters and other memorabilia for the #42 car and Bill Henson.

"I had no right to take this from you," said William. "You cheer for whomever you want on Sundays."

Dave looked over the contents of the box and smiled. "You know, I only collected this stuff because it made you mad."

The Bens started to giggle. So did Leigh and Nancy. William looked around, seeing they were all in on some sort of joke. "Are you serious?"

"My kid got an extra prize in his Happy Meal one time. When you got so mad at me for having it on my desk, I had to run with it."

The giggling turned to open laughter. William's face burned red, but even he had to crack a smile. "Dave, I had it coming."

"You did," said Leigh. "You really did."

William turned back to the group. "Let's get together in the morning. Nine o'clock. I'll bring donuts."

"Is that an order?" asked Nancy.

"It's an invitation," said William.

"What are we discussing?" asked Dave.

"Honestly," said William. "I have no idea."

The day passed quickly. William cleaned the break room and bathrooms, all of which sorely needed it once more. The rest of the staff worked quietly. He didn't see much of the sales crew at all; Nancy was gone by noon, either out on calls or prospecting for jobs. William tried not to dwell on the matter too much. The Bens both left for end of day meetings by three, and the remaining staff was gone before five.

William locked up at five after five and headed for home. He left the handbook in his office and spent the entire evening wondering what the morning meeting would be all about.





## Chapter Ten

The donut shop was closed.

Had he woken up at the normal time and turned on the news, he might have seen the footage of the four alarm fire that took down the donut shop while he slept. He would have seen the firefighters and police officers, tears in their eyes, describing the blaze and how they were powerless to stop it. But he woke up late and rushed out the door, blissfully ignorant of the sad, sad fate of the donut shop until he turned the corner on Lake Drive and saw the ashes that remained.

Thus William's Friday morning drive into work became a mad scramble to find another place to get donuts. He couldn't show up without them, and he couldn't just walk in with some cheap donuts from the grocery store. The staff would KNOW he copped out soon as they saw the box. In the back of his mind, he imagined the enigmatic Mr. Shepherd setting fire to the donut shop as one more test of his mettle. He knew it probably wasn't true, but he just had to wonder.

William found another shop fifteen minutes out of his way. Thankfully, they were well stocked with the variety of yeast, cake, and filled donuts that his people loved and lived for, allowing him to get everything he needed.

He got into the office around 8:30. Not surprisingly, two very hungry Bens were waiting by Karen's desk with their coffee.

"Doesn't work start at eight o'clock, Ben?" said the big one.



"Why yes, Ben, I believe it does," said the other.

"The donut shop burned down," said William.

"A likely story," said Big Ben, relieving the human resources and quality assurance manager of his burden.

"Take them to the conference room," said William. "I'll be in there in thirty minutes."

William hurried to his office as the donut binge began in earnest in the conference room. He sat down and pulled out the handbook, then read the chapter for Friday.

## Chapter Six

### The Open Door

Congratulations! You have nearly made it through your week as a newly re-born company man. Now that you have learned what it really means to be an employee in the firm, it is time for you to invite others to join you.

Notice I use the word "invite." You are not to compel, order, badger, bully, harass, conscript, demand, or force your co-workers in any way. Employment here is at-will, meaning at the will of the people. A true company man or woman is one who chooses to become one. That is how you got here. That is how your co-workers got here.

If you remembered yesterday's lesson and followed it fully, you have a meeting scheduled for nine o'clock this morning. That gives you an hour to prepare your pitch - unless the donut shop burned down, in which case you had better hurry. Again, you are to make it clear to your co-workers it is their

choice to go from mere employees to men and women of the company. If someone rejects your call, do not go after them. Do not threaten them. Continue on the new path you have started, leading those who choose to follow.

William was once again startled and distracted by the clairvoyance of Mr. Shepherd. Who was this guy, and how could he even anticipate the burning down of a donut shop?

He quickly forgot the donut dilemma as he began to wonder what he would say to his co-workers. He had spoken to them hundreds of times before on all sorts of matters, from company annual reports to coffee mugs. He'd been giving speeches since seventh grade speech class, and not once in the years since had he ever felt nervous.

Now, he was really nervous.

He saw Big Ben through the window talking to Karen. Karen had been the only person to step up and help him all week. She had even stood up for him somewhat after Molly left. Of all his co-workers, he felt like he had a real chance of reaching her.

Big Ben was just waiting for the other shoe to drop. He would see this morning's talk as that other shoe. There was nothing William could do to change his mind. But he wanted to. He liked Big Ben, and didn't want to see him get the axe.

He looked at Nancy. She had played things close to the vest all week, preferring to do her job and go home. Was she looking elsewhere? Of course she was. But would she be open to stay? Had she noticed any changes that might make her want to stay?

Leigh had been pretty blunt with him the day before. Would she even attend the meeting, William

wondered? She was already into her morning calls. And once she was started, it was impossible to pull her away.

William had thought he had done an act of kindness for Dave returning his NASCAR paraphernalia. But it turned out the whole thing was a ruse, a gag on William. Still, Dave seemed to be touched at the change in William. Maybe he saw it was real change. Maybe he'd listen.

Then there was Other Ben. The two men had discovered common interests this week. But was that enough to bring the salesman around and into the fold?

Each of these people had their weaknesses. William could have written volumes on all the reasons why the company should fire the whole lot and replace them. But right now, seeing them through different eyes, William felt a desperate sense of urgency. He did not want to lose a single one of them!

Ten 'til nine. William left his office. He walked toward the conference room, surveying the scene. Nancy and the Bens were all in there. So was Dave. Karen was at her desk, and Leigh was buried in her calls.

Five 'til nine. Nancy came over to ask how long the meeting would last. William assured her it would be brief. She told him she had a sales call at 9:30 and would have to be out the door at 9:10.

One 'til nine. Karen put the phones on hold and made her way to the conference room. She gave William a smile as she entered, as if wishing him good luck. Had she always had that twinkle in her eye?

Nine o'clock. Everyone was seated and staring at William. It was time.

"Well, guys," he began, "I'm sure you've noticed some changes around here this week. Things were not right in this office. Haven't been for a long time ago. It wasn't until last week, when I almost got canned, that I learned the biggest part of that was me."

The others murmured a bit. "You... you really almost got fired?" asked Big Ben.

"And I would have deserved it," said William. "I've been a snob for a long time. And I'm sorry for the way I treated you all."

"Did you say that to Molly?" It was Nancy. She was challenging him, but she was polite about it.

"I did," said William. "I'm sorry to her, and sorry to you all. She said I wasn't the problem. But I know full well, I'm the reason she hated this company. I let all of you down. And I let the company down. For that, I am sorry."

"We lost an important member of our team this week. Regardless, we have jobs to do, and quotas to meet. We can make it happen, but we have to work together."

"How do you expect us to do that?" demanded Nancy.

"By becoming company men and women yourselves," said William.

"You mean by going back to your rule books," said Big Ben.

"No, I do not mean the rule books," said William. "You know what it takes to make sales. You know what it takes to run a professional business." He glanced down at the bright red Chucks on Other Ben's feet, peeking out from underneath his pants legs.

"Okay," said Other Ben. "I'll wear black shoes Monday."

"It's not just about shoes, or suits, or even how bad your lunch smells. It's about doing what you know is right."

"Do as I say, not do as I do," said Big Ben.

"Not any more," said William. "Not if I can help it."

"You really expect us to believe you've had some change of heart?" said Big Ben. "I know you're only doing all this to keep from being fired yourself!"

"I'm doing this because I believe in the company," said William. "That's why I've changed."

"And now we're supposed to change too," said Dave.

"I can't make you do anything you don't want to do," said William. "The only person I can change is myself, and that's what I've done. I know you have no reason to believe me, based on who I used to be. But it's true."

He paused for a moment, looking over his audience. Nancy had her poker face on, inscrutable as always, and Big Ben was clearly scowling. But he saw nods from Dave and Other Ben. Karen continued to smile warmly.

"I can't tell you what to do, how to think, or even what to wear. That's between you and Mr. Shepherd, and if he's okay with it, well, so am I. All I can say is, this is the way I've been told to lead you. I believe it's a good way. I hope you will too."

## Chapter Eleven

Saturday morning began with another phone call. William rolled over to his nightstand and picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Did you forget?"

William shot straight up in bed.

"No, sir," said William. "I just forgot to set my alarm."

"No harm done," said Mr. Fisher. "But if you want these donuts, you need to let me in."

"Yes, sir." William hung up. He changed into jeans and a T-shirt quickly before dashing downstairs to the front door. Mr. Fisher was there with chocolate milk and a dozen donuts.

"I thought for sure I was keeping you waiting," said Mr. Fisher. "Did you know the donut shop burned down?"

"Yes," said William. "I discovered that yesterday. I should have warned you."

"No worries," said Mr. Fisher. "Come on, we're missing the bass."

The two men took the donuts into the den and watched the remaining half hour of bass fishing in silence. When the program finally ended, Mr. Fisher turned to William. "Long night last night?"

"A little bit," said William. "Ben and I went out to watch the hockey game."

"Is that Big Ben?" asked Mr. Fisher.

"No, no, Other Ben," said William.

Mr. Fisher nodded. "That's right. Always liked him. Big Red Wings fan, right?"

"Yes he is."

"You guys watching that game tonight?"

"No," said William. "I have other plans."

"More important than hockey?" asked Mr. Fisher.

William turned a slight shade of pink. "I invited Karen to get some coffee. I hope that's okay."

Mr. Fisher laughed. "Do you know how long she's had eyes for you? I was wondering if you'd ever notice."

William was surprised. "I guess I just didn't pay any attention."

Mr. Fisher chuckled. "Makes a difference when you look up and see the world through someone else's eyes. You actually learn stuff!"

"Yeah." William smiled. He felt a little foolish, but all things considered, he was happy.

"So how did the meeting go?"

William shifted anxiously in his seat. "Karen's on board, obviously. And Dave and Other Ben seem to be on board as well."

"Good, good."

"I'm not sure about Big Ben and Nancy," said William. "Nancy left after the meeting and was on sales calls all day. Big Ben listened, but he still doesn't trust me. I guess I can't blame him."

"What about Leigh?" asked Mr. Fisher.

"She didn't even bother with the meeting," said William.

Mr. Fisher nodded. "You did well."

"I don't feel like I did," said William.

"You're not going to win them all," said Mr. Fisher. "First of all, it's going to take some time to undo the damage that's been done. And second, even if you hadn't given them all such a bad

impression, they're not all going to fall in love with the company."

"I wish they would," said William.

"I wish they would too," said Mr. Fisher. "They're good people. But some people are going to reject it, no matter what you say and do. The difference is, you are no longer their excuse. Now if they reject the firm, it's on them."

"Will you fire them?"

Mr. Fisher poured some more chocolate milk. "That's up to Mr. Shepherd. He gives a great deal of grace to his people. But there will come a day when they will be measured. Until then..."

"I know, stay the course," said William.

Mr. Fisher looked at the handbook. "Have you read today's passage yet?"

William looked at the handbook. "No, not yet."

"Go ahead then."

William picked up the book and flipped to the last chapter.

## Chapter Seven

### The End

Congratulations. You have reached the end of your journey. Now that you are there, one thing is certain: you are going to relapse into old habits. Whether it's an incident at work, a new employee, or just a bad day on your part, you're going to fall back into who you once were. Therefore, keep this book on your desk, and re-visit it once a day. Only constant vigilance will keep you from falling away for good.



William looked up at Mr. Fisher. "I'm going to fail?"

Mr. Fisher laughed. "Kind of discouraging, isn't it?"

"Why would he say that?"

"Because it's true," said Mr. Fisher. "Because you're human. It's inevitable you're going to slip back into the old habits. That's why you need to keep that book with you, and stay in it so you know how to act."

"But what happens when I screw up?" cried William. "Will my day come too?"

"William, you're not the first person to go through this book," said Mr. Fisher. "When I first started with the firm, there was no more rigid, by-the-book authoritarian than me. The turnover in my first office was just terrible. And it was all because of me.

"Mr. Shepherd called me in and had a talk with me, the same as I did with you. He had me go out and listen in to my co-workers, just as you did. Let me tell you, I didn't take it well at all. I called Mr. Shepherd the next day ready to resign. But before I could tell him, Mr. Shepherd said, 'Let's go fishing.'"

"Fishing?" William glanced at the TV.

"We were out on the lake, pulling bass in on both sides that morning. Mr. Shepherd asked me, 'Do you love your job?' Three times he asked me this. Each time I told him, 'Yes, you know I do!' It was his way of giving me another chance."

"You've obviously done well with it," said William.

"Only by constant vigilance," said Mr. Fisher. "Stay close to the book, you stay close to Mr. Shepherd. That's the way you turn common employees into company men and women. You got me?"

"Loud and clear, sir."

Mr. Fisher got up and did the dishes again, despite William's protests. The men shook hands in the kitchen, then Mr. Fisher headed for the door. William followed behind him, a whiff of inspiration striking as he did.

"You know, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Shepherd's book would be a great asset for other businesses, don't you think?"

Mr. Fisher shrugged. "It's a little cut and dry. Hard to reach people that way."

"What if you turned it into one of those pithy business books that's a business lesson wrapped in a story? You know, like a parable."

Mr. Fisher thought a moment. "You have one in mind?"

"Well, I know it's a little stretch," said William. "But what if the story was about a Christian who was so wrapped up in rules and legalism that he was turning away the very people who needed to hear and receive the gospel?"

Mr. Fisher shook his head. "I don't know. You start talking about people's religion, people get all bent out of shape."

"Exactly!" William smiled. "Can you think of a better metaphor than that?"





# Company Man

A Six Week Companion Bible Study



## LESSON 1 - Welcome One and All

Prior reading: Chapters 1-2

Scripture: Matthew 9:9-13

### ICE BREAKERS

What are some of the things that make your office culture unique?

What kind of person wouldn't fit in with your office?

What happens when someone different comes into that office environment? Do they ever last long?

### INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons why people ignore the call to Christ today. Many of these reasons are beyond our control, but one very important reason is - our attitude toward unbelievers. We have a choice, to be welcoming like Christ, or to behave like Pharisees. If we are honest, far more of us choose the latter than we would like to admit!

Businesses recruit people who fit their culture. They do interviews, check references, scrutinize social media, and perform all sorts of checks to make sure the people coming in are a good fit for the culture they have chosen and built in their offices.

The church is not a business. Our objective is not to recruit people exactly like us. Our task is to invite

everyone, regardless of who they are or what they have done, to receive the good news of Jesus. We are not gate keepers looking to welcome the righteous and turn away the unrighteous. We are the welcoming committee, and whomever God brings us, we welcome them with open arms.

## READ AND DISCUSS

Matthew 9:9-13 - The calling of Matthew.

How did the people of Jesus's day look at tax collectors?

Why was it scandalous for Jesus to dine with a tax collector like Matthew?

If Jesus were living today, what kind of person would Matthew have to be to get the same reaction we see in Matthew 9?

What are some other things the Pharisees did that might have turned people away from God?

What does Jesus's response to the Pharisees mean?

## CHALLENGE

What are some "Pharisee-like" things you've seen people do in our church?

What other things do Christians do that turn people away?



What sort of people do you think would receive a cold shoulder if they walked into our church this Sunday? (Be brutally honest! If you can't be honest about this, you won't be able to affect real change.)

How do you think God would want us to welcome these people?

How can we become more welcoming to others as individuals and as a group?

What can we do to take the lead in making a heart change in our congregation about people who need Jesus?

## WRAP UP

If we are the only Jesus people will ever see, we need to make sure we're reflecting the Jesus who welcomed people like Matthew. Do people see Jesus in us, or do they see Pharisees? It all begins with us deciding we care more about being like Jesus than we do finding people like us.

## PRAYER

Dear God,

Forgive us for the times we fail you by ignoring or rejecting others. We know that Jesus died for everyone, and we thank you that he died for sinners like us. Teach us to see others through your eyes so

we will welcome them, no matter how different they seem.

In Jesus's name,

Amen

## LESSON 2 - Going Fishing

Prior reading: Chapters 3-4

Key Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22

### ICE BREAKERS

What was the hiring process like when you got your current job?

What is the strangest - or most ridiculous - thing you have ever been asked in a job interview?

What was the "process" like when you joined your current church?

### INTRODUCTION

When companies look for new recruits, they cast a wide net, but they are looking for a very specific type of worker. They want someone with the qualifications to do the job and the temperament to fit in with their corporate culture. Companies typically don't have time to train and mold employees, so they will not waste their time on candidates who need a little work.

Jesus wants us to cast a wide net as we reach out to a lost world, but that's where the similarities end. Our job is not to "catch 'em and clean 'em," but to catch them and bring them in. It is Jesus himself who will do the cleaning.

The people Jesus called to be his servants were not yet who God wanted them to be. They were fishermen, tax collectors, political activists. They were diamonds in the rough, waiting for the Master Jeweler to give them shape. We were the same way when we gave our lives to Christ.

It is unfair for us to ask people who have not yet made that step to change before they can join the fellowship of Christ. Instead, Jesus wants us to cast a wide net, to draw in those who will hear, and to welcome them so Christ can begin the process of remaking their lives in the same way he is remaking us.

#### READ AND DISCUSS

Read Matthew 4:18-22

What instructions did Jesus give to the men who followed him?

Why didn't Jesus hit his new disciples with a laundry list of do's and don't's?

How well did the disciples take instruction from their master? What struggles did they have with becoming leaders of the faith?

If you need some help evaluating the disciples' job performance, look up a few of these scriptures: Look up calming storm, get behind me, all fall away, denial)

Do you think Jesus knew these men would struggle so greatly when he called them?

How would you company deal with employees that cause such problems?

How did Jesus handle his disciples' failure?

## CHALLENGE

How have we, as Christ followers, failed our master?

How has our church at large fallen short of God's commands?

Does our church put any restrictions or conditions on people to come and worship with us?

How can we do a better job of bringing people along one step at a time in their faith?

What else can we do to become a more welcoming body of Christ?

## WRAP UP

Being true disciples who are fishers of men doesn't mean we tolerate sin. It does mean we show genuine love to all sinners. We need to welcome everyone who comes in our doors. We need to share the good news of Jesus. When they accept the good news, God can use us to teach them how Christ wants to

live, but as they struggle to keep their new faith, we need to forgive as Jesus forgives us.

If anyone here has been struggling with sin lately, this is a good time to confess it. Do it publicly or privately, but do it before God. Before any of us can become the gentle leaders Christ wants us to be, we need to get our own hearts right with God!

## PRAYER

Dear God,

Forgive us for the way we have mistreated others, especially those you want us to welcome into your church. Forgive us of our sins, and help us to share that forgiveness with others. Make us fishers of men who welcome everyone and leave room for you to change lives.

In Jesus's name,  
Amen

## LESSON 3 - Who Makes the Rules?

Prior reading: Chapters 5-6

Key scripture: Speck of Dust

### ICE BREAKERS

What's the most ridiculous rule in your work place?

Is there a good reason behind that rule?

Do you have any strange rules in your household?

### INTRODUCTION

Eddie Murphy once told a story about his drunken father making up arbitrary rules and writing them on the refrigerator. It's a funny story, but it's not so funny when people become drunk with power and fall in love with their man-made rules.

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments as a guideline for how his people should live. Over the centuries, the leaders of Israel created hundreds of rules based on those commandments - rules that they enforced with an iron fist. They were so in love with the rules they lost sight of the purpose of those the rules - teaching us to love God and love others.

Obeying God's commands is essential to living a good Christian life, and the church can play a big part in keeping people on the right track. We need to remind ourselves of God's commands, but we need

to also remember the true intent behind those commands. We need to be on guard against creating arbitrary rules that suit our own prejudices. And we need to remember to make sure our own hearts are right before we pass judgment on anyone!

## READ AND DISCUSS

Read Matthew 7:1-5

Who is Jesus addressing with this story - believers or non-believers?

What is Jesus's message to the people in this story?

Read Matthew 23

What kind of "log vs. speck" comparisons does Jesus make in this passage?

Do you think the Pharisees were aware of their failures?

Why didn't the Pharisees take Jesus's word to heart?

## CHALLENGE

Think hard: what rules do we have in our church, spoken or unspoken, that don't fit the spirit of God's laws?



What reasons did we have - or are there any? - for establishing those rules?

Is there a benefit to be gained from these rules?

How can we change those rules and make it simpler for new believers to enter our fellowship?

If you really, really don't think some of these rules can change, can you justify your stance based on scripture?

## WRAP UP

God's laws were not given to restrict our lives. They were given to set boundaries so we can live a more abundant life. If we obey the Ten Commandments, we will live lives that honor God and show love to others.

It's not our place to add to those laws and add unnecessary burdens on new believers or old. If there are rules in your church that put such burdens on people, get rid of them. Get back to basics. Focus on what God wants, not what you as people want. It's a big step to becoming a church that truly shows the love of God to those who need it.

## PRAYER

Dear God,

Forgive us for making our own rules that serve our wants and not yours. Give us the wisdom to know what rules must go and which ones should stay. Make us a more loving, welcoming body of Christ.

In Jesus's name,

Amen

## LESSON 4 - Get Out of the Office

Prior reading: Chapter 7-8

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

### ICE BREAKERS

How often do the big bosses at your work come out and visit with the underlings?

What are some acronyms and terms that only someone who worked at your company might know?

How long does it usually take for a new comer to pick up on the inside language at your work?

### INTRO

Back in the 1980's a common trend in larger churches was building "Family Life Centers," large additions complete with gyms, movie rooms, play areas for kids, cafes, and other places where members and guests could hang out. The down side to this trend is, over time, fewer and fewer guests visited while members spent more and more time in church - away from the people who need Jesus.

Jesus didn't want us to create our own little Christian world, complete with its own music, movies, books, and language, but that's what we've become. If we want to reverse the trend, we need to spend less time in our Christian circles and more time in the real world. We need to be accessible to co-workers, neighbors, and even people we meet in

public. And when it comes to sharing our faith, we need to speak the language of the people around us and get rid of "church speak!"

## READ AND DISCUSS

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

What does Paul urge Christians to do so they can better share the gospel?

What do you think it mean to be "all things to all people?"

Read Acts 17:16-34

How does Paul use the altar to the unknown god to speak to the people in Athens?

Was Paul's use the unknown god more effective than just giving a straight sermon? How so?

Why was it important for Paul to go and speak to the people in Athens instead of just inviting them to hear him in church?

## CHALLENGE

What are some of the Christian "buzz words" that you hear every week at church?

How can words like those alienate people new to the gospel?

When is the last time you got a friend to come to church who doesn't know Jesus?

How many of those friends do you see on a weekly basis outside church?

What are some of the obstacles we have to sharing our faith outside church?

How can we be in the world without being worldly so we can witness to others?

Can you think of a way you could take something of the world - a movie, a song, an event - and use that to point someone to Christ?

## WRAP UP

It's easy to build a church and hope people will come. It's harder to go out among the people and speak to them where they are. God doesn't promise us an easy way, but he does promise to go with us.

It takes courage to share the gospel outside the church. It also takes imagination. Whether it's through movies, music, sports, books, or something else, find a way to connect with people. Find a way to use that connection to teach the gospel. When we speak to people in their own words instead of "church speak," you'll be amazed at how they respond.

## PRAYER

Dear God,

Give us the courage and imagination we need to share our faith outside the church walls. Forgive us for hiding inside the church. Make us a community of believers that takes the gospel to the world.

In Jesus's name,

Amen

## LESSON 5 - One By One

Prior Reading: Chapter 9-10

Key Scripture: John 4

What sort of events or activities does your company put on to promote corporate pride and spirit?

How does your company recognize individual achievement and milestones (including birthdays)?

What means more to you - a generic gift or note from corporate, or a personal thanks delivered by a superior?

### INTRODUCTION

No one likes working for a company that treats its people like a number. Companies that view their employees as cogs in a wheel and replaceable parts have low morale and high turnover. Some companies survive for years like this, but others have folded and failed, a fate they might have avoided if they invested more in their people.

Organizations that invest in people have an easier time attracting and keeping good people. They value the one on one relationships between management and front line workers. They listen to their people, regardless of their job description, and they give credit where credit is due.

This is one area where the church can learn from business. Jesus was always most successful when he

dealt with people one on one. One on one is the best way for us to succeed in growing His kingdom on Earth.

## READ AND DISCUSS

Read John 4

Where was Jesus when he met the Samaritan woman?

Who else was with him?

What sin did Jesus confront the woman with?

How do you think the woman would have responded differently if she was one person in a crowd hearing Jesus condemn adultery?

Why do you think that one on one connection made a big difference?

## CHALLENGE

What are some good places where we could meet with friends one on one to talk faith?

How can we be on the look out for those one on one opportunities every day?

How do we recognize visitors and new comers in church?



Is there a way we can make a more personal connection without being intrusive or embarrassing them?

How does our church incorporate new members and families into our community?

What could we do to better reach out to new faces in our church?

What can we do as individuals to become a more welcoming community?

## WRAP UP

A church is not just a collection of people who come together, sing songs, hear a sermon, and disburse. It is a family. It is a network of friendships intended to strengthen faith, give support to those in need, and share the love of Christ with its community.

The gospel spreads best one on one, person to person. God wants us to build a church in the same way, one connection at a time, so no one is left out and everyone has a shoulder to lean on. That means we can't just sit back and let our pastors and leaders build our church. It's up to every member - you, me, our families, our friends - to build the network, one person at a time.

People are not numbers. May it never be said our church treated people like they were!

## PRAYER

Dear God,

Forgive us for the times we've sat back and left the kingdom work to others. Use us to reach out to people in and out of the church. Speak through us, and may your church grow one connection at a time the way you intended.

In Jesus's name,  
Amen

## LESSON 6 - Review and Renew

### Chapter 11

#### Revelation 3:14-22

#### ICE BREAKERS

What is your company's mission and/or statement?

How do the mission and vision statements give your company direction?

How many of you have no idea what your company's mission statement is?

#### INTRODUCTION

Mission statements and vision statements give businesses large and small direction. Every decision that a company makes can be filtered through those statements. If a new opportunity fits the parameters of the mission and vision of the company, it is adopted. If not, a wise management team will pass on the idea or revise it to bring it in line with their mission.

Companies get into trouble when they lose sight of their mission statements. They spread themselves too thin, they enter markets they know nothing about, they invest money rashly, and they put the whole organization in jeopardy. Keeping your mission front and center and reviewing it constantly is vital to keeping any organization on track.

It would be easy to forget the lessons of the past five weeks and let ourselves and our church resume the status quo. If we want to fulfill the mission Jesus gave us - to go and make disciples - we will remind ourselves over and over how important it is to remember what we've learned and apply it to our lives. We cannot afford to become complacent if we want the kingdom of God to grow. We need to review what we've learned and renew our commitment to reaching out in love.

### READ AND DISCUSS

Read Revelation 3:14-22

What was the problem with the church in Laodicea?

Why was it worse for the church to be lukewarm than cold?

Has God given up on the Laodiceans? How do you know?

What does God want the Laodiceans to do?

### CHALLENGE

How does a church become complacent?

Are there some areas in our church where we are still lukewarm?

If you were to write a mission statement for our church, what would it be?

How could that mission statement help us to "heat up" our congregation?

What do you envision our church would look like if it were to become a "hot" church?

How can we as individuals keep from becoming lukewarm?

## WRAP UP

Jesus told the Laodiceans "I stand at the door and knock." Jesus is calling to us to open the door for him so we can, in turn, open the door wide for others.

Jesus wants us to welcome people with the same love he welcomed us. We can't do that if we become lukewarm and resume our old ways. We need to get rid of the man-made rules and obstacles we put in front of unbelievers.

Don't be the stumbling block that keeps someone out of Heaven. Be the hands and feet of Christ. Review what you've learned, and renew your commitment daily. Let's open the door for those who need to meet our Savior!

## PRAYER

Dear God,

Thank you for giving us a vision of what your church could be. Help us to continually renew our hearts and minds so that we will continue to become a more loving, welcoming church. Use us to reach the lost and draw others to your Son.

In Jesus's name,  
Amen

## Acknowledgements

As a young man in college and in my formative years in the work place, I was blessed to be surrounded at church and at work by a series of godly men who not only modeled how to be a man of character in the workplace, but how to put God and family first. Although this book is not really about the business world, this book is dedicated to them: Chuck Peterman, Jeff Crane, Doug Coffman, Kent Shortridge, Vince Garmon, Tom Parr, and my father John Cosper, Sr.

While these men provided much of the spiritual inspiration for this book, the story itself owes much to my my former co-workers at NTR.NET/ IXC/ Eclipse/ Broadwing. This book is dedicated in equal part to them - particularly the ones who were there at the bitter end when the tech bubble burst and HR came down from corporate with armed security to escort us out on that fateful day in January of 2001.

## About the Author

John Cospers is a veteran of the world of cubicles, PowerPoint presentations, and acronyms who went down with the ship when the tech bubble burst. He is also the founder of Righteous Insanity, a drama and film company providing resources to churches and ministries around the world. Other works of fiction include *Martian Queen*, *Cave World*, and *Space Monster*. He lives in Southern Indiana with his wife and children.

[www.righteousinsanity.com](http://www.righteousinsanity.com)

[www.johncosper.com](http://www.johncosper.com)