

not 'are we going to miss?' The question is 'when are we going to miss?' And remember, we cannot afford to miss even once."

They sit silently, digesting what has been said. Finally Levy speaks up. "Your mission is to find a way that will enable us to drastically cut our development time. For years we have been looking everywhere for the answer, and have not found it. You are what we have left. You are the ones who must find the answer."

"But, how?" Mark's face is red.

"That's the whole point, Mark. We don't know how! You'll have to tell us."

"What help can we expect?" he desperately asks.

"You will continue to be in charge of the A226. You will use that project as your test ground. You can choose anyone you like as your backup. Ruth and Fred, you are released now from all your other duties. If you need to visit other places, to attend conferences, or even to register for a formal Executive MBA program, just ask. No budget restrictions."

"To whom do we report?"

"Directly to me, and I do expect periodic progress reports."

"How much time do we have?"

"The A226 is scheduled to be ready in sixteen months. I expect it to be completed on or before time. By the way, think tank, if you come up with a good answer, there are a lot of shares waiting for you."

"How many are a lot?" Fred can't hold himself from asking.

"Ten thousand shares each," Levy answers. "Good luck."

After they leave, Mark says, "Good luck is appropriate. I guess we have about as much chance as winning the lottery."

"The reward is like the lottery, too," Ruth comments. "Ten thousand shares is a fortune. We are going to be millionaires."

"Fat chance."

## Chapter 2

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I pick up the memo and read it again, for the hundredth time.

Dear Rick,

You have been assigned to teach a course in the Executive MBA program.

We need to determine which course it will be.

Does Monday at 2 P.M. suit you?

Jim.

Only three sentences, but the implications . . . The implications . . .

I teach at a business school. But I am no longer at the bottom of the academic hierarchy. A year ago I was promoted from the doormat level of assistant professor to the semi-respectable position of associate professor. Frankly, it was a miracle, considering the abysmal number of academic papers I have had published. On the other hand, it wasn't, not if one takes into account the name I've built for myself as an exceptional teacher. It's no small effort turning each session into a learning experience, but it pays off; my courses are always the first ones to fill up.



Here, in black and white, is the latest proof. Just three sentences. This time I read the memo aloud.

"You have been assigned to teach a course in the Executive MBA program."

The words sound like a symphony. No wonder. Being assigned to teach in the Executive MBA program is a sure sign that next year I will be recommended for tenure. And tenure is Shangri-La. It's having a permanent position. Whatever you do, or don't do, you can't be gotten rid of. It's being in; it's security.

And security is what I need. And so does my wife. Like everybody else who wants a place in academia I was, listen to this, I was "accepted on probation." I think that only paroled criminals and young professors are formally on "probation." The difference is that professors are on probation for a longer period. Five years to prove myself as a good teacher. Five years to prove myself, to the other faculty members, as a team player.

"Does Monday at 2 P.M. suit you?"

Jim, buddy, it definitely suits me.

Two o'clock seems an eternity away. I decide to take a walk. It's cold outside. There's over a foot of new snow on the ground, but the sky is clear and the sun is high. It's almost one o'clock.

The first time I tried for tenure I blew it. Five years down the drain. It was a good university, bigger and more prestigious than this one. But I had to open my mouth. It's one thing to criticize the inadequacy of our textbooks, or to highlight that we are supposed to teach our students not just make them memorize. But it's a different ball game to criticize the publications of my fellow professors. Especially the senior ones.

They say that smart people learn from their mistakes while wise people learn from others' mistakes. Well, I'm not wise. I have never wise, but I am smart. All it takes is to be hit on the head, five to ten times, and I immediately learn my lesson. The details are ugly. It doesn't matter. What matters is that this time it's different. This time I'm making it. Big.

Almost nobody is outside. Or more accurately, no one except

for me is idly strolling. In spite of the patches of ice almost everyone is running. It's simply too windy. But I'm not cold.

Life is beautiful. I'm already an associate professor. Tenure is in the bag. The next step is getting full professorship, and then a chair. That's the ultimate. A chair means more time for research. It's being one of the big boys. It's a salary of over one hundred thousand dollars a year.

Such a salary is beyond my comprehension. Give me half of it and I'll be happy. After years of being a doctoral student living on a grant of twelve thousand a year, and too many years of living on the salary of an assistant professor . . . Hell, even a high school teacher seemed rich.

I rub my icy nose. I'll never get promoted to full professor if I keep neglecting the need to publish articles. One might get tenure by being a good teacher and a nice guy, but full professor is another story. "Publish or perish." That's the name of the game.

I hate this game. Maybe I hate it because I don't have the kind of ideas that can be converted into acceptable articles. I don't know how they do it. How they find those small examples that with enough mathematical modeling they can turn into another publication. I need something more tangible, more connected to the real world, real problems. Besides, now I am getting cold. I'd better head back.

I wonder what course Jim is planning to land on me. He wrote that we need to determine it, but it really doesn't matter. Whatever it is I'll have to spend a lot of time preparing. You can't compare teaching an Executive MBA course with teaching a regular MBA course, not to mention an undergraduate course. In the Executive MBA program the students are not full-time students. Actually, they are full-time managers spending one Saturday in class every two weeks.

My strides become longer. It's not just the flush of adrenaline, I'm half frozen. Teaching managers, that will be a new experience for me. They're not going to accept everything I say just because I'm quoting from a textbook. They will force me to deal with the real life situations they face. This may actually be a



good thing. It might even give me some new ideas for research . . . and articles.

Ideas are not enough. I can't do research in a vacuum, at least not the type I'm willing to do. But maybe, if I play my cards right I can use these students as bridges to companies. It's possible.

I reach my building. A cup of hot chocolate will help me defrost. I stop near the machine; it's ten 'till two. I'd better hurry.

"Yes, thank you," I accept Jim's offer of coffee, and following his gesture, lower myself into one of his squeaky, uncomfortable upholstered chairs.

"Make it two," he says to Miriam, his colossal secretary, and chooses the sofa.

Status symbols are important in universities and Jim has a room that matches his position. A big room, a corner room. I should rephrase that. I don't know if status symbols are important in every university, but they sure are for the dean of our business school. Our dean will not let anyone forget which is the most important school. And he has a point. The business school has grown, by now, to over six thousand students—almost half the student population. Full professor Jim Wilson heads the most prestigious program of the school, the Executive MBA program. It's no wonder Jim was assigned such premises. I only wish he had better taste in furniture. On second thought, knowing the extent to which Jim is oblivious to anything materialistic, it's probably Miriam's choice. Yeah, that figures.

"Thank you for the opportunity," I earnestly say. "I will not let you down."

"I hope not," he smiles. And then, without a smile, "Richard, that's one of the things I wanted to discuss with you."

I lean forward. When Jim calls me Richard it is serious.

"Richard, as you know, there is no lack of more senior candidates who want to teach in the program. Do you know why I insisted on you?"

I don't. I only know that Jim liked me even before I was his doctoral student. I'll never forget that when I was struggling to get a second chance in academia he was the one who arranged for me to come here.

"I chose you because of your unique style of teaching," he surprises me.

"Teaching through open discussion?" I'm astonished.

"Yes," he says categorically. "For this program I'm more and more convinced that that is the only prudent way. The students have the relevant day-to-day experience. Open debate, steering a group of people to develop the know-how themselves, is how we should teach them. And I don't have many instructors who are both willing and know how to do it."

Now I understand, but it scares me. "Jim," I start to protest, "it's one thing to do it with regular students, but I'm not sure I can do it with actual managers."

"Why not? What's the difference?"

"What I'm actually afraid of is that I won't be able to steer them. That my theoretical knowledge will be insufficient relative to their practical knowledge," I answer frankly.

"Don't." Jim is firm.

"But . . ."

"Listen Rick. With these students, the most important thing is not to pretend to know when you don't. They pay a lot of money for tuition—much more than regular students, and they have an open door to the dean and even the president, and they don't tolerate garbage."

I start to wonder if I'm up to it. Maybe it will be my downfall.

My thoughts must be written all over my face because Jim starts to cheer me up. "How many years have we known each other? Huh? I know that I can trust you to be open with the students. And over and over you've proven to me that you know much more than you think you do. Don't be afraid to use your regular style. I'm sure it will work with them."

Not having much choice, I promise, "I'll do my best."

"Good." Jim is pleased. "Now all we have to do is decide



which course you'll teach." Heading toward the door he casually adds, "Have you given it a thought? Miriam, what happened to our coffee?"

He disappears into her room. A minute later he reappears with a tray.

"Jim, when I started my doctoral thesis, do you remember the warning you gave me?"

"I gave you so many," he grins, handing me a cup. "Which one are you alluding to?"

"Not to bite off too much," I remind him. "To forget the dreams about changing the world and take on a subject I could finish."

"Yes, I do. Good advice. Especially to a Ph.D. student."

I take a sip of coffee. "When is the right time to dream?" I ask.

He looks at me for a little while. "The middle age crisis!" he announces his diagnosis. "What does that have to do with which course you want to teach?"

I decide to answer his question with a question. "Isn't the course I'm going to teach in the Executive MBA program going to affect what research I'll be concentrating on?"

He thinks about it. "It might," he admits. When I don't reply, he grins, "So you want to make a difference. You want your research to be a yardstick for an entire field."

I nod.

He examines me for a little while longer. "I guess that the only way to flush it out of your system is to give it a try. So in which field do you contemplate making your contribution, Dr. Silver?"

"I don't know," I admit, ignoring the sarcasm. "A field in which the existing know-how is not enough."

"That's true for every field in business," he dryly says.

"What I mean is . . ." I'm searching for the words. "A field where it's apparent that the existing know-how is not giving satisfactory answers."

"What satisfactory answers are is a matter of opinion." Jim is

thoughtful. "Try to specify what you don't want; maybe that will lead somewhere."

"I don't want to chase fads," I firmly say. "And I don't want a field that is overcrowded with research."

"That makes sense. Go on."

"I want a field that is in real need," I repeat myself. "A field in which no real progress has occurred for quite some time."

"Fine," he says, waiting for me to at last specify which course I do want to give. The problem is, I don't know. It's very embarrassing.

"Project management," Jim slowly says, "fits your description like a glove. If you are looking for a field in need, project management is a prime candidate. And in the last forty years or so, at least in my opinion, nothing new has been suggested."

"But, Jim, you teach that course."

"True, true." He starts talking to the ceiling. "And besides, I have used the course to start some interesting research. Quite interesting research."

"I could help you finish it. You know that I'm good at doing the library digging, and my writing abilities are decent."

"Yes, they are." He still stares upward.

"Jim, let me teach this course for one year. One year only. I'll do my best to help you finish your research. I'll do all the dirty work."

He shifts his eyes to the table and starts to talk, more to himself than to me. "I would like to concentrate on my production systems course. So much has happened in that field lately. It will be good preparation for a nice textbook." He looks me straight in the eyes. "So, about the project management course and the related research, what exactly do you suggest?"