

"Let's summarize what we found today." They all start writing. "We found three mechanisms to put safety in. Now it seems that we also found three mechanisms to waste that safety. One we called the student syndrome, there is no rush so start at the last minute. The second is multi-tasking. The third involves the dependencies between steps; these dependencies cause delays to accumulate and advances to be wasted."

"Which brings us to your next assignment. This time it's simple, so I don't expect any misunderstanding. I want you to submit an example for each of the three mechanisms that people use to add safety, and for each of the three mechanisms people use to waste the safety. The examples should be taken from your reality and must, I repeat, must be numerical."

Chapter 14

I'm waiting to go into the dean's office. This meeting is a formality, and in general, I hate formalities, but not this one. This one took me over nine years to reach.

Two weeks ago, the last committee approved me for tenure. Finally. Now the dean has to sign, and then the president. They are rubber stamps. Our dean has a custom of meeting with every approved candidate personally. To show interest, to give a pep talk, to . . . I don't know what. So here I am, with my best tie on.

I'm shown in. Dean Christopher Page II shakes my hand and guides me to a chair. It's the first time I've been in this office, but I've heard a lot about it. Thick carpet, beautifully framed paintings. Not exactly my taste, but here they fit. Nice furniture. Not just nice, comfortable.

Then I notice that he isn't smiling. That's not like him.

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you," I hear him say. The rest comes to me as if through a fog.

"The business school is not going to give tenure for a while. . . . Not to anybody, no exceptions."

"Yes, I know what a good teacher you are."

"What can we do? It's the global strategy."

"Jim Wilson talked to me, but you must understand, it's not in my hands."

"Sorry, but no. There will be no extensions. Not even for one year."

"The president is absolutely firm. I'm afraid it's final."

"All I can do is give you a very good reference letter. You deserve it."

Thanks a lot.

I don't see anybody as I go back to my office. Strange, but only one thought keeps booming in my head, "Will Judith leave me?"

I lock my door, sit at my desk, and try to assess my situation. I'm too upset.

Two hours later I reach for the phone and call Phil, an old buddy. We studied together. He has tenure at a private college, where the pay is much better. I must explore the alternatives.

"Phil, is there an opening at your college?"

"Sure there is. But Rick, you should have applied five years ago, when I begged you to."

"Forget the past. What do I have to do to apply now?"

"It won't help," comes the discouraging answer.

"What do you mean 'it won't help'? Do you have an opening or not?"

"Of course we have. The pressure here is immense. But Rick, listen to me. They are not hiring people like you anymore. The market is full of people who teach business."

"I'm a very good teacher."

"I know, but Rick, that's not the point. Today they either hire full professors for the image, or adjunct professors. And for those they only take people with years of field experience. You don't stand a chance."

No, I don't. Three more phone calls, to friends in state and community colleges, clarifies it for me. I missed the train. I'm

thrown out of academia with no way back. And for what? I still don't understand it.

Maybe Judith is right. Maybe it's time for me to make some money, to go into the consulting business.

Consulting for me is almost equal to prostitution. But maybe I'm just affected by people who didn't dare go out in the real world. People who prefer producing worthless articles to being judged by tangible results. I bring myself to flip through my address book once again.

"Hi, Daniel. Do you need more excellent people?"

"Like whom? Like me."

"I'm flattered. So what is my next step? When should I fly to meet with the partner in charge?"

"Send a resume, uh-huh . . . highlighting my consulting assignments? But, Daniel, I never consulted."

"I see. Grants that I solicited? Listen, Daniel, I think that you have it all wrong."

Five minutes later, smarter and furious, I put down the phone. The greedy bastards.

Since I've already started, I decide to go all the way. I call smaller partnerships. Then small ones.

It's ridiculous. I'm supposed to get my own clients. I'm supposed to do everything alone, and on top of that to pay fifteen hundred dollars a month for office and accounting services.

Forget consulting, I tell myself, I'm not cut out for it anyway. I can't sell myself. I don't like to, and I don't know how. Besides, teaching is my life.

So what is the alternative? A high school teacher. And what am I going to teach in high school?

Forget alternatives, I say to myself. I'm not giving up on teaching students. Think. There must be something that can be done. They can't throw me out like this. I've delivered on my end of the bargain, there must be a way to force them to honor their end.

I stand up and go to Jim.

One glance is enough for him. "So you heard the news. Sorry

Rick. I was trying to get ahold of you. Left you messages everywhere."

"I know," I say, and drop into a chair. "I thought that you were looking for me for the draft of the next article."

He doesn't say a word. Just looks at me sympathetically.

"Jim, I'm not going to lie down and let them do this to me."

"You never will, but what can you do?"

"I don't know. That's what I came to ask. I'm determined to fight. What are my options?"

"Options?" he repeats. "There aren't many. I wonder if there are any."

"There must be. You know the system, you must know a way."

He thinks for a while, then starts to talk, "You don't have a problem with the business school, here we are all for you. You passed all the committees, and I didn't hear even one bad comment."

"So, what is the problem?"

"It's B.J. That's what makes it so tough. You see, B.J. decided to put a freeze on all new financial commitments of the business school. Of course the first one is granting tenure. I didn't know about it, but the dean has been fighting with her for months. It got to the point where B.J. threatened that if the business school submits any candidates for tenure, she will not only reject them, but she will demand a big budget cut."

"So you are telling me that I'm being sacrificed for some political fight? That all I worked for is going down the tube because of some . . . some power struggle."

He nods. "So it seems."

"Somehow I have to reach B.J.," I say. "She is the key."

"That's easy," he surprises me. "According to the university rules, you can demand a meeting, and she must see you. But how can it help? Everybody knows what a cold-blooded efficiency machine she is. The only thing she cares about is the university."

"I'm counting on it. Thank you, Jim," I say, and leave him a little puzzled.

I know that I contribute, so there must be a way to show it to her. I just have to find that way.

Now, only three days later, I'm in B.J.'s office. She has given me a whole speech about the trends in the MBA market. As if I care. I realize what a stone wall I really face when she brutally says, "Sorry, but when you make an omelet, eggs must be broken."

So now I'm an egg. And a broken egg, no less.

Finally, I realize that there is no chance of bringing her around to see it from my side. I have to talk her language.

"What happens if I can bring more students into the executive MBA program?"

This stops her short. She thinks about it, and then, not particularly interested, asks, "How do you plan to do it?"

I don't have a plan yet, but I also don't have anything to lose.

"I'm teaching the project management course. Projects are where the big money is."

She doesn't respond. I take it as a sign to continue.

"It might come as a surprise to you, but the state of knowledge in this field is appalling. Almost no project finishes on time, or budget. And if they do, it's because the original scope has been compromised."

She signals me to continue.

"We have made major progress. Teaching how to substantially better manage projects is of tremendous value to any industry."

"Any organization," she agrees.

Encouraged, I charge on. "This know-how is so valuable that I think I will be able to convince companies to send managers to learn it."

I definitely have piqued her interest. "Tell me more," she says.

So I tell her. I tell her about the dilemma of early start and late start, the dilemma that jeopardizes the ability to focus. I tell her

about the progress measurement that jeopardizes real progress. Then I tell her about the safety we so generously insert into each step and then so carelessly waste. I talk for almost an hour. She listens. She even asks questions. I'm impressed with her ability to grasp these concepts so quickly.

Then she says, "You talked about the problems. Do you have solutions?"

When she hears my response, her interest takes a nose dive. I'm about to lose it all. Desperately, I say, "I think I can find the answers. And I can bring ten more people to the executive MBA program." It doesn't seem to work.

I try to apply to her business sense. "Their tuition will more than cover my salary," I say as convincingly as I can.

"Professor Silver," she softly says, "ten additional students will not be enough. Tenure is forever, and there is no guarantee that you will be able to pull off such a miracle a second time. That is, if you can pull it off at all."

I try to object. She cuts me off. "What you told me is interesting. We must provide valuable knowledge. I believe that otherwise there is no long-term future for an MBA program. In my opinion, in the business school we don't currently teach much of value. I keep hearing about the first year shock, the shock our graduates get when they leave school and start work, and then find out that almost everything we have taught them simply doesn't apply."

"So you don't have to persuade me that it's important to teach a better way to manage projects. The question is, are you the person to do it?"

"Try me. I'll deliver."

Where I got this confidence from, I don't know. Maybe it came out of my desperation. B.J. probably thinks so as well, because she says, "Such things take much longer. And I have a policy to follow."

"I can do it."

She gives me a long evaluating look. "Are you practical

enough? Because if not, how can you develop practical solutions to such problems?"

I'm trying to find something to answer, when she says, "Tell you what. Words are nice, but I need proof. Prove that you are practical by bringing ten more students to the executive MBA program, and I'll extend you another year."

I tried to argue, but it was like talking to the wall. I went out disgusted with the university and with myself. In academia one is supposed to be judged by his ability to teach and his ability to research, not his ability to sell the university to students. I deserve to get tenure. That was the verdict of the professional committees, and now I've become a salesman, and for what?