



Department of Computer Science & Electrical Engineering

Kevin Porter

This case was written by Jonathan Trujillo, an Online Curriculum Designer at Brigham Young University – Idaho. The case was prepared solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective teamwork. Although based on real events, the case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

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Introduction

Kevin sat alone in his apartment, staring up at the ceiling, contemplating his future with Slick Tix. It was finally Friday night, but all he could think about was how crazy this last week was. He had been on the road with another big sales call and couldn't believe how little programming he was able to accomplish. How much longer would this last? After all, he was hired to write computer programs, not sales. Outside his third story window, Kevin heard the sound of traffic and night life. He slid off his bed and opened his blinds to reveal a beautiful scene of downtown Nashville, Tennessee. As he looked down to the streets below, Kevin could see huddles of people and couples meandering their way into different restaurants and bars eager to escape the brisk autumn chill. Kevin remembered that there was a big college football game on tonight which explained the large crowds. For a second, Kevin considered throwing his coat on and walking to the sports bar across the street to watch the game himself, but he decided he would just stay in his apartment and tune in on his phone. Besides, he had been in bars and clubs all week with this last business trip. He was tired of the quizzical looks he got when he ordered chocolate milk. He was tired of meeting so many people.

Kevin slumped back onto his bed and decided he would try calling Rebecca one last time before tuning into the game. If he was lucky, hopefully he would catch her before she took off for the evening with her friends. Kevin had met Rebecca in his last year at BYU-Idaho during a ward activity. It took a few weeks for Kevin to get up the nerve to ask her out, but once he finally did, they hit it off. They started dating at the beginning of Kevin's last semester and have been together since. Rebecca still had another year of school before she would graduate. When Kevin was offered the position at Slick Tix nine months ago, neither of them thought they were at a point to get married or even engaged, but they still really liked each other and didn't want to date anybody else. So, they decided to give the long-distance thing a try. Over the last nine months, they had talked about marriage once or twice, but nothing too serious. At least, Kevin didn't think so. It was hard to tell these days. They used to text and video call almost every day, but recently it had been hard to get a hold of her.

A bright and happy voice rang through the phone.

"Hi! You've reached Rebecca, I'm not here right now so leave me a message...or you know, text me, like a normal person." Kevin sullenly ended the call and swapped over to the order and delivery app of his favorite local pizza place.

"Well," Kevin thought, "I guess my only company tonight will be a large pepperoni from Mama Magalione's." After placing his order on his phone, he quickly swapped over to the college football game. But the game couldn't hold his attention. Kevin's mind was racing. Nine months ago, working at Slick Tix seemed like a dream come true, but recently he had been doing less and less programming and more and more sales calls. Plus, he still felt uncomfortable around many of his work associates. Nashville had felt like such a great big city to live and work in, but now all he felt was alone. On this lonely Friday night, the only thing that Kevin wanted was to

hop on the first flight home to his little farming town in Eastern Washington to be close to family, and hopefully Rebecca. Was it time to call it quits at Slick Tix?

Slick Tix

Slick Tix was started by twin brothers Timothy and Richard Leavitt. The Leavitt brothers grew up as rabid sports fans in the Boston area. Tim and Rich both graduated with degrees in Computer Science from Boston College and started working at Oracle. Once they both had more expendable income, they did absolutely everything in their power to watch as many live sporting events as possible. It seemed like every weekend they had tickets to attend some college or professional game. This is when they realized that most sports organizations each had a different platform for ordering and delivering tickets to fans. Some were much easier to use than others, but no platform was incredible. They started to do some research. The Leavitt Brothers found that most organizations had built their own ticketing software years ago and routinely maintained it as time went by (some organizations better than others). Some software was very visually appealing and easy to use on the front end but lacked robust analytics. Others possessed great analytic capabilities but were incredibly tedious to operate and use. Most professional or college sports program seemed to be trying to fill this need they all had on their own. In short, there wasn't a single great ticketing software solution for all these organizations, until Slick Tix. They had the idea for an industry leading software as a service (SaaS).

The Leavitt Brothers spent a year studying and programming the Slick Tix software as a pet project in the evenings and on weekends. When they had a product they felt good about, they pitched it to as many sports organization that would hear them out. As it just so happened, their first two clients were a professional hockey team and professional football team based in Nashville, Tennessee. They took this as a sign, packed up their lives in Boston, and decided to headquarter the company in Nashville. In the next year and half, Slick Tix was been able to gain several dozen more clients. Investors in the company rewarded this growth with a several million dollars cash infusion. Slick Tix decided to use that money to hire several new full-time engineers to help maintain and develop the prized software as well as full-time salespeople to help the company grow in revenue. It was during this hiring cycle that Kevin crossed paths with Slick Tix.

Kevin's First Months

Kevin could not believe his luck when he heard that Slick Tix wanted to interview him. Kevin's two biggest passions were sports and software development. Working for Slick Tix would be a dream come true. The position he was interviewing for was a Junior Developer, and he could expect to spend 75% of his time maintaining and improving the software. The other 25% would be spent working on various company projects or objectives. Kevin asked what those additional projects might look like, and it was explained that it could be anything and everything from marketing to sales calls to attending street events for increasing brand awareness. It was explained to Kevin that Slick Tix was still considered a "startup" company. In a lot of startup companies, everyone is expected to "wear many hats" or do some additional tasks as the

company needs. Kevin thought that it might be fun to occasionally work on things other than just programming. Who knows? Maybe he would get free tickets to games or even get to meet some of his favorite athletes! During the interview, it was also explained to Kevin that if he were offered a position, the company would expect him to work at Slick Tix for a minimum of 18 months as a professional courtesy.

Kevin had a great interview and was officially offered the job later that day. Kevin was beyond thrilled; other than his Church mission to Peru, he had never left the Rocky Mountain area of the United States. He was excited to start a new adventure out east in Nashville.

Kevin's first day at Slick Tix started off normal. He met his boss, Marissa Steiner who showed him around the company headquarters. He met some of his fellow programmers, members of the sales team, some folks from marketing, and even the Leavitt brothers. As he was shown around, Kevin realized that he was extremely overdressed. Most of the other employees wore t-shirts of their favorite sports teams and jeans. Kevin couldn't be sure, but he thought he saw one of the other programmers wearing pajamas and slippers. While meeting others, Kevin got more than a couple joking comments on the suit and tie he wore.

After a morning of paperwork and orientation videos at his desk, Kevin's boss Marissa came over and said, "Hey, me and the guys want to take you to lunch. Let's go!" The group of colleagues walked a few blocks down the street and made their way into a sports bar.

"This is our favorite place," said Craig, one of Kevin's new coworkers. "We come here pretty much every Friday." As their group settled into their table, Kevin looked around the restaurant, taking in the ambiance and appreciating the sports memorabilia that covered the walls. After looking around some more, he noticed that all the waitresses were quite attractive but immodestly dressed. He realized that the immodestly dressed waitresses were the restaurant's gimmick and immediately felt uncomfortable. Kevin's coworker, Craig, slapped him on the back and said, "We're happy to have you, buddy! Let me buy your first drink!"

Kevin stammered out a quick "Oh—um, no thanks".

Craig looked at him reassuringly. "Oh, it's totally fine, this isn't some test or something" he laughed. "Marissa lets us drink here at lunch so long as it's just a few. Besides, we walked here, remember?" Craig motioned over to Marissa for acknowledgement.

"Oh, sure thing!" she said. "Just don't get too crazy, eh Kev?" she said, adding a wink at the end.

A waitress had started taking orders, and Kevin saw most but not all of his colleagues order some type of alcoholic beverage. When it got to his turn to order, she asked, "...and what can I get for you?"

Kevin looked around nervously, "Um, do you have chocolate milk?" The table erupted with laughter and Kevin turned red.

The waitress, laughing too, regained her composure and said, "That's so funny, but really, what can I get you?"

But before Kevin could reply, Craig exclaimed, “You know what? Chocolate milk sounds great! I’ll have one too!” He then put his arm around Kevin’s shoulder and gave him a reassuring squeeze. Kevin breathed a silent sigh of relief. Having lunch with so many new people was stressful enough. He was grateful for Craig’s kindness.

Over the next few weeks Kevin got more used to his new life in Nashville. He really liked his singles ward and attending church on Sundays. They didn’t have many activities because they were so spread out but he really didn’t mind. Some members of the ward lived more than an hour away. Kevin was grateful that he only lived about twenty minutes away from their meetinghouse and thirty minutes from the temple.

Kevin was still getting used to the dynamic and unique culture of Slick Tix. He noticed that many of his coworkers used crass or vulgar language regularly. Surprisingly, the biggest offender was his boss Marissa. He also noticed that many of his coworkers spoke openly about their dating life, certainly too open for what Kevin felt was appropriate. Kevin was beginning to feel the many differences in culture and values than what he was used to in Eastern Washington and at BYU-Idaho. Kevin felt that all his coworkers were kind, pleasant, and surprisingly talented at their job but he didn’t feel like he was close friends with any of them. That part wasn’t unusual. Kevin only ever had two or three close friends at a time anyway.

The aspect that Kevin enjoyed most about his new job was the work itself. After a few weeks working with the Slick Tix software, he really came to respect and admire all its capabilities. It was very well-designed. It could adapt and change quite easily based on a client’s need. Understanding the business market for ticketing software much better, Kevin could clearly see that Slick Tix was more than exceptional and could very well be the best in the industry. He felt proud to play even a small part with such a great product.

“Many Hats”

It had been a little over five months since Kevin started with Slick Tix. He continued to grow in his craft and Marissa saw his ability to learn quickly and add value to the team. She decided to make him a project leader over a new tool that one of the company’s biggest clients requested. This tool allowed an organization to better understand the demographics (age, gender, income, zip code, etc.) of fans based on where they purchased a ticket in the stadium. That data was then used by the sports organizations to tailor advertising or ticket packages for specific types of fans. This new tool was clearly going to do great things for clients and set Slick Tix apart from their competition even more.

About a month after being appointed as a project leader for the new tool, the company’s co-CEOs, the Leavitt brothers, brought everyone in for an emergency meeting. During that meeting the Leavitt brothers explained that investors were disappointed in the growth of new clients since their last large investment about nine months ago. Therefore, they were going to double the sales efforts of the company. Slick Tix already had several salespeople who were dedicated full-time to finding new clients. Rather than hire more salespeople, The Leavitt brothers decided that every member of the company would spend a portion of their day making some type of sales

effort. If the company didn't grow in revenue, they might have to lay off some of their employees. Afterall, Slick Tix was still a startup, and everyone was expected to "wear many hats." Sales was one of those tasks that everyone should be able to do in some way, shape or form. The next day, Kevin spent about three hours making phone calls and sending emails to different organizations that might be interested in Slick Tix. Three hours wasn't a long time, but it was enough to know that Kevin definitely preferred software development to sales.

A few weeks passed and Kevin continued to dedicate a portion of his day to sales. Although he still hated sales, Kevin saw some early success with his efforts. A large college in Alabama ended up signing a big contract with Slick Tix that all started because of an email that Kevin had sent. He also saw a lot of success reaching out to soccer teams that were a part of the growing United Soccer League (USL). The sales team saw Kevin's success and started to give him more and more sales work.

Kevin was asked to travel in person on a particularly important sales call with a baseball team in Memphis, more than three hours away. The sales team thought it would be nice to have a developer on hand during the sales meeting to answer any technical questions regarding the software. The sales call was a huge success. It turns out that having Kevin available to answer the nitty-gritty questions proved to be very effective. The next week, Kevin started traveling with the sales team, and a new project manager was appointed to take over the improvement projects on the software.

The Decision

Three months later, Kevin found himself staring out the window of an airplane, winging his way to Denver, Colorado for yet another sales trip. Was staying with Slik Tix the right choice? He was seriously beginning to doubt it. Kevin thought about Moises, seated next to him, and John, another co-worker seated in the aisle across from them. At least he'd made some friends. He looked down at the landscape 35,000 feet below. This was closest he'd been to home, or Rebecca for that matter, in months.

"Kevin? You there, Kev? I asked you a question."

It was Moises, his coworker from the sales team.

"Sorry, I was spacing out," Kevin replied. "What was your question?"

"Are you ready for the meeting? You've got to get in the game bro!" Moises was shaking his head. "This is your last chance and you know it," he said with all the earnestness of a good friend.

Kevin sat up straight in his chair, his mind churning. Since he started working more in sales things seemed to go from bad to worse.

Rebecca had become a ghost. They hadn't spoken in weeks. Stalking her on social media, Kevin became convinced she was dating someone else. He couldn't get any closure though. She had simply stopped talking to him altogether.

He couldn't get excited about work. Sure, he was making more money, a lot more money, but he hadn't programmed anything in quite some time. As a result, he started coming in late. He didn't mean to do it. It was just getting easier to stay in bed longer. More than that, his favorite bagel shop always had long lines. There really wasn't anything he could do about it. That Asiago breakfast bagel was the one thing he looked forward to every morning.

Sales had become the most tedious job ever. To alleviate the boredom, he turned to Netflix. He started with one episode, then two, and one time stretched it to three. That had been a bad day. The whole morning was nothing but meetings and more pressure. Pulling Netflix up on his phone he quickly lost himself in the TV show and forgot the time. Unfortunately, he also forgot about an afternoon meeting with a potential customer. Remembering after it was too late, he rushed out the door to arrive 45 minutes late. His teammates were fuming but couldn't really say anything in front of a sales prospect. He made a comment about bad traffic and acted like nothing happened. The crazy thing was that he didn't even like the show that much!

He even started to care less about software. Since he was the only person on the sales team with any real programming experience he always got the technical questions. He really enjoyed the role at first, taking great care in his responses. During one meeting, he and a like-minded customer actually came up with an enhancement to improve one of the software's less helpful features. They closed the deal easily and several others they were working on that week. But those days were over. He wasn't excited anymore and it showed. His answers were often vague, and more times than he cared to admit wrong. Moises usually rescued him. That was fine as far as he was concerned.

Kevin knew Moises was right. His mind turned to the run-in he'd had with John about a week before. John had called Kevin during lunch to see if he would be able to join him for a 2:00pm meeting at a local company's office. He anticipated several detailed technical questions and wanted Kevin around to help answer them. Why else would he call him?

Kevin had another meeting scheduled for the same time but wasn't looking forward to it. He decided to blow it off and help John instead. Switching back to YouTube, he decided to watch a few more videos before leaving. Kevin arrived at the customer's office at 2:23pm.

"What happened!" John whispered as Kevin checked in with the receptionist at the front desk.

"Nothing. I was at lunch." Kevin responded uncaringly.

"Seriously?" John asked.

Something snapped inside of Kevin. "Don't worry about it. I'm here now," he said loudly and condescendingly. "What's the big deal anyway? It's software, not rocket science. I mean, give me a break man! Any idiot should be able to answer their questions! I won't always be here to hold your hand!"

Kevin continued his tirade for several minutes. When he was finished, he turned around and simply walked away, exhausted after the emotional outburst.

"You can go in," said the receptionist, her eyebrows raised, as she handed John a visitor's badge.

“Thank you,” he replied, his face flushed with embarrassment.

Kevin knew there would be consequences. He just didn’t know they’d be so severe. When his manager heard about the outburst and the lost sale she was furious. It wasn’t long before she was standing in Kevin’s office explaining how his performance and attitude were having a serious impact on the team. Not to mention the company’s bottom line! Every sale was critical for the little startup. She finished the meeting with a simple ultimatum. One more mistake and she’d have to fire him.

Kevin’s mind returned to his immediate surroundings. He glanced at his friend, Moises, then at John sitting in the seat one aisle over. He paused as he considered what to say. Guessing Kevin’s thoughts, Moises quickly interjected.

“Don’t you do it! Don’t mess this up on purpose so you can get fired! If you leave before your 18 months are up you’ll lose your shares. It’s in your contract. And a non-compete clause too!”

“Non-compete clause?” Kevin had forgotten most of his contract.

“Yes, once you’re fired or resign, you can’t work for a direct competitor of Slick Tix for a year,” explained Moises.

“No programming for a year?” asked Kevin. The thought of not being able to solve problems or be creative for a whole year was almost more than he could bear.

“Well, at least not in the same industry,” Moises continued. “Even after the year’s up you’d probably be blacklisted. It’s a small industry and word gets around. No one in sports ticketing will touch you for a long time.”

“That’s great,” was all Kevin could say. He hadn’t actually considered sabotaging himself that way but now that Moises brought it up he could see it would be the easiest thing in the world to do. All his problems would be solved for him.

After a few minutes of silence Moses continued, “If I were you, I’d figure out what I want pretty quick. If things go well on this trip the company plans to open a new sales office close by. We’ll most likely be relocated and you’ll probably be in sales permanently.”

With that bit of news, the pilot’s voice came on the loudspeaker announcing their descent into Denver International Airport. As they grew closer to the city, Kevin thought that reality was so much different than the fantasy he had envisioned when he first accepted the job at Slick Tix. He was exhausted from all the travel. He was frustrated with the change in job description. But most of all, he was lonely. Kevin felt that he didn’t have a single true friend in Nashville. Maybe he had himself to blame? How much longer could he keep this up? Was it time to call it quits at Slick Tix? Was it time to go home?