

Working for the Man... Not the Masses. The Corporate Predators

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In 1973 I was still a somewhat naive college senior ready to face the business world. My major had been in Speech and Theater, with a minor in Sociology. As the year was ending and the new one upon us, I was engaged to be married and needed to find secure employment. Graduation was really just a formality... I needed a steady income. My present job was as a commissioned telephone salesman working in what had been labeled a 'boiler room operation'. We sold office supplies over the phone, using the infamous 'going out of business, 40% off' pitch. I was actually very good at this rap, but the weekly returns were too inconsistent. So, with the urging from my parents and my fiancée, out came the Sunday Times want ads. Not too many jobs in recreation, as the '73 recession hit hard on most programs for youth. What could I do?

The ad said 'Management trainee, college degree necessary, no experience needed'. I called the place, The ****Linen Corporation, and got an interview. Their plant was in downtown Brooklyn, maybe a 30 minute commute from home. After I finished all the paperwork the sales manager interviewed me for maybe just 20 minutes. He was Italian American like myself, wore a suit that was too tight for his *expanding paunch*, and had this (pardon the French) *greasy* look to him. Basically, what he said to me should have signaled all that I would really need to know about this company: "Listen kid, the way it works is that the *more* you save the company, the *more* you can earn... period!" He told me of my duties, which were basically to 'Hold the whip over all the workers and drivers'. Then, he walked me into the GM's office to meet him. This guy, a bit older than the sales manager at maybe fifty years of age, gave me the once over and repeated what the other guy had said. He then told the sales manager to give me a tour of the facility.

When we walked into the tremendous area of the plant where the linens were washed and dried, I thought I was back in the days of the plantations. Here we were, two white guys strolling into a two tiered area, hot as hell (and this was mid January) and noisy enough to force us to shout in order to hear each other. The giant plant was filled with all black faces, with the women wearing outfits that looked like Aunt Jemima from the pancake box. The men all wore white pants and tops, and when we arrived there it seemed like *all* I could see was a myriad of 'the whites of eyes' peering at me. Everything seemed to just stop for perhaps 30 seconds. I felt like I was the new *overseer* at a plantation in the colonial South. The sales manager shouted into my ear "You gotta keep an eye on these birds or they'll goof off every chance kid". He then took me back to his office for my work instructions.

The next morning I was to report to the giant garage area to meet up with the delivery drivers. I was to spend one full day on the road with a driver, and then repeat this the next day with another driver... until I went through the lot of them. In the AM, very early, maybe

at 6 o'clock, I showed up at the garage area, and man was it frigid cold in there. The driver's foreman greeted me and introduced me to the first guy to take me out with him. We got going and I mean this truck was so old it must have had arthritis!

The heater wasn't working too well, and the ride was like a jeep in the jungle! The driver was pleasant, chain smoking one ciggie after another. He had the Bronx territory so we were able to chat for awhile. I learned that the union was what they called a 'Sweetheart union' whereupon the union officials were basically 'in the pocket' of the corporation. This guy pulled no punches. We began making stops, and man there were so many of them. These were bakeries, butcher shops, food stores and restaurants mostly. He told me I could wait in the truck, but I needed to see how things went. After all, in reality I was his boss, yes? At the first stop, which was a bakery, the driver greeted the owner with a few funny hellos about the frigid weather. Then, the 'mad scramble' began. After dropping off the fresh linens, he had to *search* the premises for the old, dirty ones. I mean, they were everywhere! "Is this the way it always is?" I asked him. He nodded as we went down the basement stairs. I really got nervous when I could *sense* that something down those steps was fixed on me. "Don't get too scared kid, those rats are as scared of us as we are of them. They won't hurt ya" as he laughed.

One day on that job was enough for me. I went home and didn't show up the next day. What really hurt me was the fact that those workers didn't have the luxury that I still had. I lived at home and could move on whereas many of these folks couldn't. Those black faces in that plant were mostly uneducated and unskilled folks from the Caribbean and the only jobs they could secure were similar to this shit. The drivers, going by the two or three I had met, were not educated men, and thus another shitty driving job would be the same. The workers in the plant had NO union at all, and I already was alerted to the driver's lot. Sadly, forty five years later *nothing* has changed, perhaps for the *worst!* A *Neo feudalistic* society is what the corporate predators want... and still get!!

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