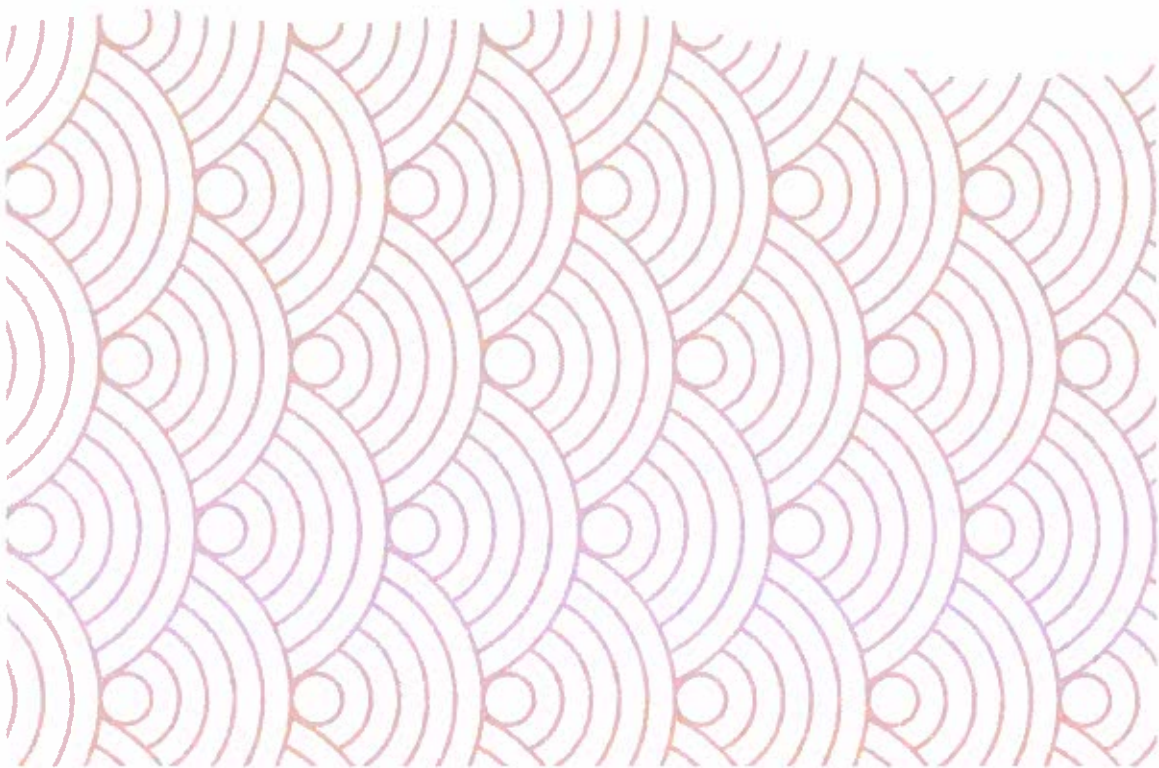




*Scenes from a
Business Affair*



Scenes from a Business Affair

Act 1 Scene 1

"Attention: Passengers arriving in Terminal A. Escalators to surface transit busses and taxis are temporarily closed for maintenance. Passengers should follow signs to Luggage Claim and exit the terminal from there for taxi stands and bus stops and airport shuttles.

"255 Forty-fourth. Manhattan, please.

"DID YOU SAY 245?"

"No 255. Fifty-five. On 44th."

"THANK YOU. PLANES ARE TOO LOUD TO HEAR. WELL SOMETIMES. NO PROBLEM. I KNOW THE PLACE. HAVE YOU THERE IN THIRTY-FIVE MINUTES. UNLESS THE LOWER DECK OF THE 59TH IS BLOCKED AGAIN.

"I COULD TAKE THE TRIBORO. BUT IT'S LONGER AND WOULD COST MORE. THEN YOU'D THINK I WAS TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE A WOMAN.

"BUT IN MY COUNTRY, WE DO NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR WOMEN IN SUCH A WAY. THERE IS NO CHALLENGE TO IT. NO SPORT. IT IS TOO EASY. NOT MACHISMO ENOUGH!"

"Just fix your mirror so you're looking out the window and not my legs. No need to rush. Just do what you need to do to get us and your cab there safely.

"The creep on the plane next to me already filled my quota for cheap thrills and fast talk today. So, you can skip the monologue and just drive . . . if you don't mind. I won't feel a bit neglected if you don't say another word."

HERE WE ARE. THAT'S \$39.50 AND—

"Keep the change. Thanks for the quiet ride. If you want another one of these, I have one for you if you wait five minutes for me to check this bag. Then I have an address cross town for an appointment."

Act 1 Scene 2

"Welcome to the Towers, ma'am. May I help you?"

"Yes, thank you. The offices of Kenderson and O'Reilly, please."

"Fourteen. Elevator banks to the left. Use a local car against the far wall. Have a nice day."

"Thanks. And, oh excuse me again. Where might I find a rest room to freshen up

before fourteen?”

“Each floor has a powder room immediately inside the reception area.”

“Oh. None before that?”

“Well, none for the general public. On purpose, actually. But I’ll tell you what you can do, since it looks like you’re here for the first time. Go up to ten, same elevator car. Get out there. It’s another company’s offices. At the reception desk, talk first before they can ask whom you’re there to see. Ask sort of hurriedly for the powder room. Freshen up. Then when you come out you can act somewhat nervously, or as if you’re embarrassed, whatever suits you, when they redirect you to fourteen for Kenderson and O’Reilly. At fourteen – voilà—you’ll appear on the scene as fresh as you please.”

“You’re the first helpful man I’ve met on my trip today. And the first to look into my eyes when he talks to me instead of sizing me up from toes to neck. You sure you’re from these parts?”

“No, ma’am. Small town in Illinois. Just one state over from you. You do sound like you’re from Milwaukee–Wisconsin, at least.”

“How did you know?”

“Standing here for thirty-five years and listening. Observing people, coming and going. And from watching the Weather Channel on cable. Of course, having a grandpa and grandma who were speech therapists helps, too.”

“Well, if your nameplate is to be believed, Mr. Jack Trenton from Illinois. You do what they say here in New York. You ‘Have a Nice Day’.”

“You, too. . . . Wisconsin.”

“Oh. Sorry. Toni McVey.”

“Well good luck on fourteen, Toni McVey. If you need a cab when you go, just have Messers. Kenderson or O’Reilly call down for one.”

“What about a Mr. Clark? He’s the one I have to see, too?”

“Forget him. He’ll never know the color of your eyes.”

“Thanks for the warning.”

“Heed it well, my out-of-town friend. And don’t forget to stop at ten.”

Act 1 Scene 3

"I have an appointment to see Mr. O'Reilly and Mr. Clark at eleven, please. My name is—"

"Oh. You must be Ms. McVey. Hello. I'm Helen. Just let me put these flowers into some water and I'll be right with you."

"Here, I'll get the door."

"Oh, thanks."

"Those are beautiful roses. Is it a special occasion, or something?"

"Oh, no, Ms. McVey. Just Mrs. Kenderson sending her husband some Friday morning cheer. They're very romantic. You'll come to know that ..."

"I mean, if everything works out for you. You'll come to know how romantic they are. It's really quite nice. They're always surprising one another with little gifts. Or arrangements. Dinner reservations. Shows. It's so public, too; and real. So real that no one ridicules them for it. It's not for show. It's just their 'way'."

"Theirs sounds like a storybook roman—"

"Hardly. They've faced some terrible times. Ouch. I didn't see that thorn. In business. In their family. Some real tragedies. But they've stayed so positive and upbeat. They seem to be able to overcome almost anything."

"Are they partners here in the business? Do they each have offices here?"

"No. No. Ms. McVey. Mrs. Kenderson has no office here. But her influence is all around. You'll notice it in—could you hold this, please—the artwork on the walls and the sculptures. The décor. Thanks. She really believes in creating a pleasant environment for workers."

"And not just for the officers of the company and management. Even for the typing pools from the past, which are updated now to these new word processing stations. She made sure Mr. Clark's upgrades included comfortable workstations and chairs, indirect lighting, and artwork. Even vases for dried flowers. All in designer colors, too. Greys, pinks, mauves. Pleasant to look at and work around."

"There's a real feeling of . . . Well, you'll see for yourself this weekend and you can draw your own conclusions. Let me call in for you, Ms. McVey."

Act 1 Scene 4

"Would you care for some coffee or tea or soft beverage, Ms. McVey? I'm Mr. O'Reilly's secretary, Elizabeth. The two gentlemen to interview you first will be Mr. O'Reilly and Mr. Clark. Mr. Kenderson is working on some other matters and will join you later for lunch."

"Tea, no cream or sugar, would be just fine, thank you. This is an elegant room. I don't believe I've ever seen real china cups and saucers and a silver tea service in an office before."

"Oh. Mrs. Kenderson insists. That's why this is more of a dining room table and chairs suite rather than a meeting room conference ensemble. And when she visits you can see she's disappointed when the little lights in the breakfront aren't on. Mind you, she says nothing about it. Just walks over without commenting and switches them on."

"Good morning, Elizabeth. How's your nephew feeling today? Is he out of the doctor's and back home yet?"

"Good morning, Mr. O'Reilly. I'm sorry to have been so late to have missed you before your meeting this morning. Did you find everything. I left for you last night?"

"Yes. Erika helped me gather it up."

"For sure, sweet buns. You owe ol' Randy for the use of his secretarial time.

"I regret the loss of her services to you, Mr. Clark. I'd be glad to stay late and help her finish whatever she would have been doing for you at the time."

"It was me I was thinking of, not my secretary, honey."

"Quite. Well, let's get started shall we, Randy? I'm sure Elizabeth will work out whatever is necessary with Erika, while we work with Ms. McVey, here."

"Ms. McVey, may I introduce myself? I'm Lawrence O'Reilly. We've corresponded before, though it was my partner, Mr. Kenderson, who spoke to you on the phone. I'm quite familiar with your background from your résumé. This is Randy Clark. He heads up the department you'll be involved with mostly if all works out this weekend. He's being considered for 'partner' but currently manages the entire general office work force and handles all personnel training and assignments."

"Charmed, I'm sure, McVey. I've not seen your file yet, but now that we've met I can assure you I look forward to having you work under me."

"Did you have a smooth flight, Ms. McVey?"

"Yes, Mr. O'Reilly, thank you, I did. A fellow on the plane and the taxi driver were a little more crude than I'm used to from Wisconsin, but there were no delays."

"Yes, darlin', you'll find a lot of things are different here in New York. But we manage to get things done. We pride ourselves on it. Don't worry. Ol' Randy will take you under his wing and give you some extra attention, if you show promise."

"Back home, we pride ourselves on *how* we get things done, Mr. Clark."

"Quite. Well, back to—"

"Excuse me, Mr. O'Reilly. There is an urgent matter that Mr. Kenderson needs you to assist with on the telephone. It's a conference call on line 3 in your office. Mr. Kenderson suggests that Mr. Clark show Ms. McVey around the company so she can see how things work and then you can all convene for lunch."

"Ms. McVey. Mr. Kenderson wanted me to express his personal welcome and regrets that this development has upset the order of plans for this morning. He asked me to give you his assurance that by the time lunch is over, everything will be back on schedule."

"Thank you, Elizabeth. I'm sure things will work out however Mr. Kenderson wants them to."

"Randy. Looks like I'm gone for now. Ms. McVey, enjoy the tour. I'll leave you in Mr. Clark's capab . . . I'll leave you with Mr. Clark and see you later."

Act 1 Scene 5

"Might as well get started with the girls in the general office area and then to the more specific offices."

"As you say, Mr. Clark."

"By the way, McVey, how long have you known Mrs. Perkins?"

"Who is Mrs. Perkins?"

"Elizabeth Perkins. You just spoke to her."

"Oh, Elizabeth. No. We just met today for the first time. Why?"

"No reason. Just curious. Let's go."

"Mr. Clark."

"What?"

"How long have you known Mrs. Perkins?"

"Me. About five years, I guess. Give or take. Long as I've been here."

"Do you know what color eyes she has, Mr. Clark?"

"What? Eyes? I don't know. Brown. Blue. Who knows. Why do you ask?"

"No reason. Just . . . just curious. A Wisconsin type of curious, I guess."

"Yeah. Sure. Let's go, kiddo."

Act 1 Scene 6

"Angie, baby. What's happening here? Let's move a few of these things so I can sit on the corner of your desk. There. Angie. This is the new girl from Wisconsin. McVey. Ah,—"

"Toni."

"Yeah. Toni McVey. She's here for a look around. So I'm showing her how things get done here.

"See, McVey. The key to this part of the office is organization. Everybody knows just what I expect of them. So that's what gets done. On time. Correctly. Then I put it all together so it works for the other divisions.

"There's some overlap. But not a lot. I like a lean shop—and lean workers—so I've let a lot of the old timers go in the last two years. You know the type. Been here too long. Getting settled now their kids are in college or finished and left home. Ready to make a lifetime here of filling a chair as their behinds and tops spread out more and more with each passing year.

"As I've converted from typewriters to word processors and calculators to computers for order processing and for accounting record keeping, I've exorcised the older women and brought in young girls out of business schools or who are too young to have developed bad habits somewhere else.

"Our production's up. Our operations more efficient. And, costs are down."

"At what cost?"

"How's that, McVey?"

"Nothing."

"Over here, Angie takes the raw data in from the field and assesses it, then assigns it to a workstation. That's my baby. Work flows to where it can be handled.

Nobody harbors accounts. Our production and orders processed is up 15% as a result.

"Then the pipeline spreads like a Texas . . . That is, the work flows into what conduit is open. These three girls here from the computer school use menu formats to keyboard the order entry data.

"Hey, Julie, honey, you get that order from Johnson we talked about yesterday?"

"Yes, sir. It was for less
than he told you.
But it came in and it's
probably processed already."

"Guy's a sissy. Too afraid to stock up. I'll have to tell Larry to put a man in that job. Maybe I'll send Johnson a slip and a bra so he can get the message. And Julie, honey, next time tell me where the order is, not just 'probably downstairs' okay, sweetheart?"

"Sorry, sir.
It won't happen again."

"C'mon, McVey. Down here we have the billing functions. Used to be that accounts receivable rekeyed everything that fulfillment already had. But I got rid of that. The menu on the processing screens is the first part of a two-part data field.

"Part two keys off the account number. The girls here process bills only after the account's reviewed. Anybody who's not paid in 45 days an amount sufficient to cover their earlier orders has the current order trimmed or cancelled."

"How does that get determined?"

"I do it. Personally. I get print outs of 'questionables,' as I call them, delivered to me hourly.

"Mary, doll, go get last hour's 'questionables' from my desk to show McVey, will you?"

"Yes, sir. Right away, sir.

"I make the decisions based on data fields by the account numbers. I tell the girls, by code, what kind of letter to send. One says that past due payments must be made before the new order is processed. Another reduces the size of the new order and indicates the reduction and the amount past due that is outstanding and due to be paid before any future orders will be fulfilled. You get only one letter of this second type before the former is automatic, for sending at the time of future orders if nothing's paid in the meantime. My screen tells me whether a reduction's been sent and still unpaid; and an automatic 'flag' kicks in and short circuits the order.

"No orders get processed without paperwork—so it all works out. This—come over here McVey—this workstation slaves out word-processed communications. Jessica, sweet one, hand me one of those letters would you.

Here you are, sir.

"Great. See here. McVey. This shop's one of those to get a reduction letter last week. Still no pay. So, no goods from us this week. That'll open up the cash drawer back our way. Then this guy can restock his shelves again."

"Mr. Clark. The others will see you in five minutes back in the conference room."

"Terrific. Good news, Maxie. Looking good today, pumpkin. Skirt shows off that weight you lost. Keep it off, kid, and you'll do just fine.

"Last stop, McVey. Billing department. Used to be all the older women here did was match up bills to payments and set up bank deposits. What a waste. Everybody just waited for paperwork to arrive. I put an end to that—and them. I hired four top notch bit ... girls with killer instincts from collection agencies and let go six old timers from here. Now we start to solicit payments in 21 days by notes and fax transmissions. The clientele has come to know we interrupt shipment at 45 days, so they see the 21-day notes as a favor almost. We've decreased our cash flow lag time from 60 days to 37 as a result."

"I see."

"I'm sure a lot of this is too quick for you to grasp. But like I said before, I'll take you under my wing—here this corridor goes back to the conference room—and show you this stuff more slowly with my own personal one-on-one instruction to get you through it."

"Yes. Under your wing would be fine. But . . . excuse me . . . if you wouldn't mind much. You can keep your arm off my shoulders, and we'll get along just fine."

"Sure."

Act 1 Scene 7

"How did your call go?" Can we do business with them?"

"Lawrence and I decided they're a sound risk. We've extended them a six month's payable for the first sixty days' business. BY their third month, orders will go into their regular flow for payment. Their people in legal are drafting the language. We should see it for final review next Thursday, with a five-figure binder against the account for our lawyers to hold in escrow in the event of failure to pay."

"Seems a little odd, sir. It'll take work. I'll have to build something into an already complex program to make sure my girls don't get confused."

"The escrow's backed by their line of credit. We're protected as much as we can be from a shortfall in their operating expenses and collectibles."

"Still, I—"

"They'll be around for a long time, Randolph. And as their merger plan for next year involves a good current client of ours and a third entity we have pursued quietly for years without success; it's going to be fine by next year at this time.

"And speaking of developments over the course of the next year—do you think, Ms. McVey, that you'll be able to entice us to finalize our invitation to have you join us soon? And that we'll be able to convince you to leave Wisconsin?"

"It's a pleasure to meet you eye-to-eye finally, after all those letters and phone calls."

"Thank you. I'm flattered, Mr. Kenderson."

"Then 'Arthur' it is. Please."

"Thank you . . . Arthur."

"I've shown McVey here all the department procedures in a nutshell, Arthur. I think she'll be able to pick it up in a few weeks. I'll see if she wants to watch as I make the changes your call from before entails."

"Arthur, we three should really use lunch to go over the phone call with our legal people. Maybe Elizabeth could take Toni to lunch while we do and we could start back in by two o'clock together."

"You're probably right, Lawrence. Toni. What do you think? Would you mind terribly? I know I assured you our attention by lunchtime."

"If there's time, I'd like to get a few things from my hotel for this afternoon. If we could make it back by two, that would be fine. Maybe even better."

Act 2 Scene 1

"Operator? Yes. Karen McVey, please. Yes, I'll hold. Thanks . . . Yes . . . Great, sis. You're in. I was praying you would be. No. Fine. Just need some friendly sisterly advice. No. Now. If you can.

"Here's the deal. The setup here is very clean cut. I could handle the job tasks easily. Even improve them, I'm sure. The two principals look okay. Just the third honcho's the problem. He's V.P. and the one it looks like I'll actually be working for and with. But he's a mug. He's all over the women. Don't know about action, but the talk and the body language are neolithic. I'm trying to decide if it's worth putting up with. And I've got to decide during lunch; 'cause I don't want to be showing these guys the store if I'm not going to stay."

"Sis. Can you take him down?"

"Why would I bother?"

"To make it worth the move." Or it won't be as permanent as you hoped."

"It would take months. The guy's being considered for a partnership. I might get his spot eventually. But he'd probably still be my direct boss, more likely than not."

"Why not just go for his spot now? You know. As part of the interview weekend. What are your chances of staging a *coup d'état*?"

"It's only a weekend, Karen!"

"Coups only work with speed and surprise, big sis. That's what we learned in foreign service school and what I teach all my college classes when we do revolutionary movements, periods, and political strategy."

"Give me crash course, sis. The executive secretary's downstairs ordering our lunch. I'm on in under ninety minutes. One way or the other."

"First rule. 'Divide to conquer.' That's a little different from divide *and* conquer. Careful. It's tricky. In the second case, you plunder entirely. No prisoners. You're the only one left. You don't want that. Two reasons. First, you need the two principals left intact. Second, you can't appear to have been the cutthroat. The guy you want gone has to be made to do *himself* in. He's got to be shown as the weakness going forward for the future. He's got to portray himself as expendable by being set off from the others, by his own activities, attitudes, whatever.

"Second rule. Build your support in the rank-and-file by discovering any simmering discontent. Especially discontent that's frustrated because it has been long-suffering and without any voice. But be careful not to exploit those who have feelings of discontent. Let them see you as their vehicle to a better day—and not just the new 'more of the same old' that's going to be friendly for only the while it takes for you to get what you want out of them.

"Now, this guy sounds pretty typical so some of this stuff should be there right in front of you if you can find it. Does any of this make sense or fit?"

"Forget the gloves at Christmas, sis."

"Good luck."

"Hey, Karen."

"What?"

"Thanks."

"What are sisters for? Be good. Be *real* good."

Act 2 Scene 2

"Nice lunch. Good coffee. So, what do you do, Toni?"

"Technically, Elizabeth, I'm a systems analyst. But I specialize in matching people to computers, not just machines to machines. Even more especially, I set up systems between corporate users, companies, and their clients."

"So, you'd be working with Mr. Clark more than Mr. O'Reilly or Mr. Kenderson, I guess."

"I don't really know that part. I know what Mr. Kenderson and I talked about when I was in Wisconsin, but it didn't deal with personalities. I think that's what this afternoon's meetings are supposed to be about. But if I'd have to guess from how this morning went, I'd say you're right. What makes you ask?"

"Oh, I'm just curios, I guess."

"Yes. Thank you. I will have another cup."

"Sure. Half please."

"How is the personnel situation? How does it work right now? For example, does only Mr. Clark deal with the women he introduced me to this morning?"

"For the most part."

"How do they get along?"

"Well. Many are new. He did hire them. So they kind of owe him their jobs."

"How much does he make them pay to settle that debt?"

"Well, you are as observant as I thought you were."

"Well?"

"Well. No one has admitted to having to sleep with him yet. But there's a lot of interest in seeing whether you'll have to, to get this job, I mean."

"That's pretty straightforward of you, Elizabeth."

"None of us are from Wisconsin. So, we don't know what you'll expect. I figured I'd owe you an answer if you asked. And you just asked."

"That being said, what's the sense of the group?"

"Most figure you're a likely target because he could renege later, not recommend you for the job, and send you crying back to Wisconsin. Meanwhile . . ."

" . . . all the rest of you left behind understand the threat and will stay in line."

"Right."

"No, not right. In Wisconsin, anyway. It's dead wrong."

"Here, too, as far as we ladies are concerned. But nobody knows what to do about it. Ironically, most hope you'll know what to do. Wisconsin or not."

Act 2 Scene 3

"Well, good afternoon. It's good to be all together. I've put together some charts. The usual kind. Flow charts. System schematics. Sales peaks and valleys. Customer satisfaction tied to business performance. You know the kind.

"From what I've seen this morning, you've taken some steps that look like part of what these charts reflect. But I've not seen your steps enough to perceive them as parts of an integrated and systematic whole. Mr. Clark will still need more time to show me that.

"But for now, rather than performing an actual judgmental comparison and contrast I'm not in a position to do, I'll just present the program I've prepared to show you.

"Now the national average for growth based on these types of re-engineering systems in our industry is about 27%. For my program, we are at 33%. But we employed these systems in an under-utilizing company, so increases have to be seen I that light."

"Excuse me, Toni. Randolph. Your numbers we received last week were at about 15%, is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go on, Toni."

"Empowering the staff members to be decision-makers and giving economic incentives for success were central to the re-engineering we did out West. While we did establish cut offs for credit and careful review of orders from slow pays, we did something extra for those past customers who didn't fit the new pattern we needed internally.

"These clients were assigned to two staff members, one already slated for early retirement and the other scheduled for regular retirement within the next three years. These two staffers did not look like individuals who were going to fit into what were perceived as 'new ways.' Both were very uncomfortable and inefficient with computers.

"We teamed these employees with customers we switched over to more frequent, smaller order fulfillment; and whose payment terms were set up as a weekly remittance based on annual expectations. That protected their cash flow and made ours more predictable. These weekly payment terms would be outliers from the full new system, so it worked well for them, and us, to handle them as special cases. Accounts that were still active, but processed off-line.

"Doing that saved the marketing costs of replacing them as lost customers. We kept about 70% of their prior year's gross sales. We made up the loss by cutting costs for collection services and financing their receivables, which had jumped out past 120 days over the prior two years. We avoided the cost of re-training two computer-challenged employees in-house on a new system they wouldn't really have long term use for. It was an immediate win-win. We maintained good relations with the companies and sustained morale within our own people in the department.

"Our expectations are that the two companies will fail in a year. But we will lose no receivables because of the weekly schedule of payments, which they feel very motivated to continue to make faithfully. Three other companies look poised for recovery, and we are positioned well to enjoy increased sales from them without the earlier risk. The balance of the firms look to stay right where they are. We have three years to wean them onto a new system, before we have to make any final decisions. All along we'll be generating strong, consistent—though lower—sales, at much less financial risk or lost client replacement costs.

"Randolph. What overall per cent of sales have our policies set aside by eliminating order fulfillment to slow pays?"

"I'm not sure of the exact amount, Mr. Kenderson. But I could probably find out pretty quickly."

"Make a note to get the accelerated cost of sales to secure the two new accounts you reported would be replacing those revenues, too. See if you can go and get those numbers now, while we keep going here, please."

"I didn't mean to make Mr. Clark uncomfortable, sir. I'm sorry, if—"

"No apologies needed. Larry and I can get along with you in the meantime. I assure you."

"We sure can. Tell us more about . . ."

Act 2 Scene 4

"It's a very nicely decorated break room, Elizabeth. More of Mrs. Kenderson's handiwork?"

"Absolutely. Are the three of them going to bring you back into conference this afternoon?"

"I don't know. I'm not so sure I want to face Mr. Clark for a while. The information I gave in my presentation didn't go over very well for him, I'm afraid."

"He was livid when he came out. He sent two of the women home in tears. They think he's going to fire them under some other pretense when this blows over. He absolutely demanded information from them that he has worked to keep from everyone for ages. Then he went into a rage when they reminded him that only he had access to the information. He outright told the two of them to go home. It was terrible. The things he was saying under his breath were horrible. Such names. I don't know if he was only thinking of them, either."

"Me. Too, huh?"

"I'd say so."

"What do the others think?"

"Well. They don't actually blame you. But all the same."

"If I weren't here, none of this would have happened. Is that the idea?"

"Close enough."

"What do you think they expect now? I mean, *from me.*

"It seems they think you're the only one who can fix things up."

"How?"

"Oh, no! I'm not . . ."

"Really, Elizabeth. We're just talking woman to woman here. I'm not asking you to betray any confidences."

"Good. Because I really wouldn't, you know."

"I hope as much."

"What?"

"I need to ask you your advice and your help. I can only do that if I thought you would honor my confidence."

"I'm listening."

"First. I need to know if there's any reason the Kendersons would avoid going to a restaurant called "The Frontiersman." I saw it advertised in a brochure at noon when we went back to my hotel."

"None that I know of. Why?"

"Could you arrange to make each of them think the other set up a dinner there, tonight; on the spur of the moment?"

"I suppose so. I don't know if they're doing anything else already, though."

"Look. It's worth the risk. Please, excuse yourself and interrupt their meeting. Say I was wondering about going back to my hotel to rest and asked if you'd bring me. Tell them I'll call and see if they want me to be available tonight to see Mr. Clark."

"Are you nuts? Why in —"

"Just say it to them. Please! To meet Mr. Clark or any of them for dinner tonight."

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

"I don't know if I'm doing it in the *best way*. But I do know *what* I'm trying to accomplish. Right now, it seems my options aren't too great if I follow my little sister's advice about getting this job."

"Your sister?"

"Never mind. Sorry. Just thinking out loud."

"Okay. Here goes nothing."

Act 2 Scene 5

"Wow, Toni. If this is what the Wild West was all about, I'd almost want to live there. Look at how sumptuous those velvet curtains are on that private table in the railroad dining booth motif. Not quite red, not quite purple. Something richly in between."

"Yes, it's exactly perfect, Elizabeth. Just what I hoped from their brochure."

"I still don't see what you have in mind."

"Good afternoon, ladies. May I show you a table?"

"Actually, I'd like to make reservations for later tonight. For two parties. But I'd like to pick the tables from what you still have available. It's an immensely special occasion and I want to make it just perfect. I've come all the way from Wisconsin to see to it."

"Ma'am?"

"Well, Robert, is it? May I call you 'Robert'? . . . Good . . . You know how important anniversaries are. And how incredibly wonderful it is to see someone after so long a time apart? How greatly surprised and excited people can get? This is something like that. But the timing and the placement are crucially important."

"What precisely are you looking for? We would, of course, be glad to oblige you if we can."

"I'd like to have a party of two seated at seven o'clock in one of the railway car booths. With the privacy curtain drawn once they are seated. There will be flowers sent over earlier with a note for the couple. I'd like the flowers set as a centerpiece for them to see when they arrive."

"That should be no problem."

"Good. Then. I need a table on the main part of the dining floor, directly by their drawn curtain. That's also set for dinner, but for four. That reservation would be for 7:45. I'll be one of that party, but I'd ask you not to recognize me if you're still on at that time. It would spoil the surprise otherwise. And, please take this fifty dollar bill for your trouble in case you are not here for the evening."

"Well. Then. Let us see. Ah, yes. Here. On the floor arrangement I can show you. There are two possible locations left. Would you like to come into the dining room to see which they are? They are just right back here in the second room."

"This pair of tables would be wonderful, Robert. I promise that tonight will be memorable."

"We are accustomed to making the evenings memorable for our guests. Few promise to reciprocate."

Act 3 Scene 1

"Good evening. My name is Robert. Have you a reservation?"

"We think we do. For seven o'clock. It's somewhat embarrassing though. We thought each of us made the reservation. But apparently, we are someone else's guests."

"A woman from Wisconsin, I believe."

"Is that right? Well, what do you know? Come on. Arthur. From everything you've said so far, this woman becomes more and more interesting by the hour."

"If you'd be pleased to follow me then."

"Show the way please, Robert."

"Look at the gorgeous flowers. These are quite magnificent, Robert."

"They are from your hostess, sir. Special order. She mentioned a note."

"And chilled Asti Spumante, too, dear; look. Well, Arthur, your Ms. McVey seems to have done her homework. It would appear Elizabeth had a hand in this, then."

"We'll skip drinks then and start with the wine please, Robert."

"Very well, sir. I'll return shortly with the menu selection for tonight."

"There's a card on the flowers, Arthur. What does it say? Please read it to me."

*Hope this isn't too forward. I could think of
no other way. I'd ask you to trust me. Please
listen in on your fellow diners. But stay behind
your curtain after 7:30. My reasons will become
self-evident if we three can exercise enough
self-restraint. And it will be deservedly rewarded.*

Toni McVey

"Marvelous. Almost like one of those murder mystery dinners we went to last year. I better use the ladies' room now if I'm to comply."

"You really want to do this?"

"We women must stick together, dear. What harm can it possibly do?"

Act 3 Scene 2

"I have a reservation for . . ."

"Hey, McVey. Over here. Want a drink in the bar first? I was just on my way in there. What d'ya say?"

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Clark. Elizabeth said it was a reservation for four according to the message she left. Why don't we just order a drink at the table while we wait for the others? They are apparently delayed and are going to join us after dinner for the dessert only anyway."

"Sure. Why not. I wanted some time alone in the bar first. But if the others are expected late . . . whatever . . . Lead the way, garçon."

"You'll be seated by Gretchen in a moment, sir."

"That's fine . . . what's that say . . . 'Robert?' That's fine, Robert. Rather follow a Gretchen than a Robert any day."

"Gretchen. Table 32 for this couple, please. They'll be joined by another pair later, as you'll recall we spoke about . . ."

"Oh. Yes. Certainly. The two to be four. Good evening, folks. Welcome to The Frontiersman. I'll show you to your places."

"That's an intriguing thought."

"Sir?"

"Nothing."

"Here we are. Enjoy. Your drink service will be along shortly."

"How about that corner table, sweet thing? This one's kind of more out in the open than I like to be."

"Sorry, sir. All the seating's booked solid for the night. Besides, why cheat all the young ladies coming through tonight of the chance to see the fellow they missed out on dining with?"

"But, of course, what am I thinking? Who am I to cut into their fantasies? We'll start with a bottle of chilled Asti. You can just take care of that yourself, without sending anyone else over. And we'll wait a bit to order dinner as well.

"Hope that's okay with you, McVey."

"I'm open to doing whatever it is you do here in New York for a business dinner. It's all pretty new to me."

"Yeah. You know, that's part of why I wanted you to join me in the bar. To talk about how we do things here in New York. You see—"

"And what was the other part?"

"What?"

"You said that was 'part' of why you wanted me to join you in the bar."

"Yeah. So?"

"So . . . 'what's the other part?' is what I asked you about."

"Oh. That. Well, forget it. Another thing is not just how we do things in New York. It's how I do things in New York. You'll have to get up to speed on that real quick if you intend to stay."

"Does that mean you do things differently from Mr. Kenderson and Mr. O'Reilly?"

"In a manner of speaking . . . yes . . . it does mean that. In fact—"

"What would be an example?"

"An example of what?"

"An example of how the ways of Kenderson and O'Reilly are different from the ways of Randy Clark?"

"Well, first of all, they're partners, and co-founders with Mrs. Kenderson. And I'm—"

"Is there a Mrs. O'Reilly?"

"No. Larry O'Reilly took care of his mother until she died. About two years ago. Still lives in the same house he was raised in. The father's dead, too. Try some of this bread, McVey, it's good. Got a bunch of nieces and nephews, though. But he's unattached. Why, you looking to lay—that's good Asti—a claim to him?"

"No. Just trying to understand the different players."

"I doubt old Larry's had too much play. At least with others. And you, McVey. What kind of player are you?"

"In New York? I'm not a player at all. You have to know the rules to play. I was in too much of a hurry at the airport to shop for a Hoyle's."

"Well, a tutor might be better than a book. Like they say—you can't tell a book between the covers. Whereas, with a tutor, you'd know."

"And where would a person from Milwaukee find such a tutor in New York?"

"As Robert Goulet sang here in New York's *Camelot*. '*C'est moi. C'est moi. I'm forced to disclose.*' I could take you in and show you the right ways, the right people, the right places. Under my wing I'd have you whipped into shape inside of a year."

"And is that one of the ways you're different from Mr. Kenderson and Mr. O'Reilly?"

"They enjoy negotiations more. Actually, they make a science out of it. Like you saw today. They make sure the potential client is unsure which of the two of them to talk to first. Before the client knows it, he's bared his soul to the wrong one and they've got him in the middle. It's all honest and above board, don't get me wrong. They just enjoy that, actually *respect* their employees who can do it, a lot more than I do. So, as a result, they pretty much leave personnel matters and staff development to me."

"What do you have . . . a kind of *Berlitz* course for that?"

"Hardly. I'm not into canned programs. And I don't blitz through anything when getting a girl ready to work under me. I've my own personal approach."

"How's it work? Thanks, just a half glass, please."

"Half full? Half empty? It's only Asti . . . Anyway, I give a lot of personal attention to recruiting. I look for one girl at a time so my attention's not divided. It's important for a girl to know she's the sole object of attention. Don't you find that?"

"How have your recruits found it?"

"Don't say much, do you, McVey? No, huh? Well, / find it helps. Mine's an intense program for a week. The girl has to work a half hour early and stay a half hour late. She works right in my office, even though it's sort of cramped. I teach her how to

answer the phone the way I want. I see how well she keyboards and files, so I know what her organizational skills are.

"Then I show her how to do those things the way I want them done. It's real hands-on. I display and explain my organizational structure and foster a direct one-on-one, so she gets it from me—and isn't hearing from the other women—exactly what I need and how I want those needs satisfied.

"After work I give the new girl cab fare so she can go home and change into something she's comfortable in and then have her come to my place. I make dinner and go over all the fundamental social graces. Make sure she doesn't embarrass herself or the company at a lunch or dinner function.

"After all, you've seen Mrs. Kenderson's *dining room suite* they're so proud of and—"

"How does Mrs. Clark fit into your personal training program?"

"She doesn't. I do the training at our apartment here in the City, while she stays out on the Island.

"You interrupt a lot, on top of not saying much. You know that, McVey? I'll have to work on that with you. It's okay. I like a challenge. Something like the décor in this restaurant. It's the cowboy in me. Like busting broncos in the Old West."

"What color is your cowboy hat?"

"What? Oh. Haven't got one. Just a figure of speech. You do have them out in Wisconsin, though, don't you, kiddo? Here. Let's finish this bottle and get another. And grab your menu there. What do you want?"

"Why don't you tutor me. I'll watch as you order for the both of us. Our waitress, Margo, is right behind you. I'll catch her eye."

"Yeah. Hey, Margo. We'll take another Asti. I'll have the steak special tonight, rare. And McVey here will have your lamb entrée, medium. Both of us will have the bisque first. Salads and sides, too.

"So, as I was saying . . . here, I'll finish the last of this bottle, and save the new fresh one for you . . . After a few nights and days of special attention, on Thursday night I tell the girl we're going to dinner, and I'll pick her up. That way I get to see what kind of neighborhood she comes from, and I see firsthand what she looks like cleaned up and fitted out for a night on the town. You learn a lot by seeing somebody out for dinner, you know, McVey."

"I've heard that. Even out in Wisconsin."

"Then with the week finished, if I decide she is of 'secretarial timber' as they say, I take her out on Saturday with a clothing allowance. It's important that she knows how she should dress if she's going to work under me."

"What do you get her? A dress or two?"

"Hardly enough. For the desired effect, that is. No, kiddo. This is a wardrobe makeover. The wrong undergarments can totally spoil a girl's look in a new dress. With me, the so-called 'unmentionables' are not only spoken about. They are acquired and modeled with the proper suit or dress or slacks to make sure they will be presentable on her in my office. It's actually an all-day affair."

"The girls must be quite beholden to you for all the attention."

"Their loyalty quotient's pretty high. The place is looking up. These girls will do just about anything I ask."

"And what do you ask? How do they show their gratitude?"

"Let's say that each of these four girls I've put through this training program has each found her own way to express her thanks. And I'll leave it at that. Jobs are hard to come by in this industry. And I've sought out girls who need the work and have shown elsewhere that they apply themselves to maintain it."

"And how many more candidates have you for this recruitment program?"

"I have two more lined up. But whether I bring them in or not probably depends on this dinner tonight and our discussions with the others. Which, speaking of that, here's our dinner now."

"Yes, I'm the prime beef and she's the lamb. Good."

"This is very nicely presented. It's sumptuous. What a nice selection you made, Mr. Clark."

"Yes. It does look good. I'll have to remember this place for my training program if I continue with it. How'd you find this place, McVey?"

"Elizabeth made the reservations."

"Who?"

"Brown eyes. Mr. Kenderson's secretary."

"Oh, sure. She probably knows tons of places."

"Why do you say that?"

"The Kendersons are in the romantic twilight of their married years. They're forever eating out, exchanging gifts, the whole wrapped-up-in-each-other thing."

"That's quite nice. Don't you think?"

"Get's in the way of business. I'd rather see her stay out of things and see him more active with clients."

"Have you made your feelings known?"

"No. Not until I'm a partner. Right now I've just got to bide my VP time. That's where *you* come in, I guess. If you make a good impression, that might help my chances of making partner in a half year. Hope you can pick up all this stuff I showed you this afternoon."

"So, you *want* me to get a job here? I must say, that comes as a surprise."

"Best thing for me in the long run—being a partner and having the new VP trained to my personal standards and expectations. What more could I ask from a mid-size firm?"

"But I'm here to tell you that I don't care much for the way you showed me up today with your charts and figures. That's not going to happen again, sweetheart. And I'm raising my glass in a toast and to take an oath on that. I've got a good thing going. I've worked at it hard and no skirt is going to cross me twice. Once, I'll excuse to inexperience. But consider yourself warned over a friendly, civil, social dinner. Just remember, I'm the prime beef and you're the lamb. And /order what we're going to have and *how* it's going to be prepared."

"That's fairly direct."

"You bet the buck you're hiding in your neatly panty-hosed foot to call home when you've lost your way and your purse's been robbed, I'm direct. Makes everything clear. No mistakes get made that way. And every dress and pantsuit in that shop knows who she answers to."

"But you've trained only four in your personal Henry Higgins program."

"Don't you go and get cute with me, Miss Midwest; or I'll see to it that you're back in O'Hare and on a bus to Cheese City by morning."

"And how would such a thing like that take place? Just, of course, so I could recognize what to avoid."

"Of course. First off, I'd find out just who it is you've offended out in cow country and make sure old Mr. K grows wary of the new dairy maid in our midst."

Peasant blouses don't squat side-saddle on milking stools without practicing the same posture here in the Big Apple to shinny up the corporate silo."

"How colorfully put. And just why would your partner-to-be's wife listen to you so uncontestedly?"

"She has explicit faith in me. I'm her knight errand waiting to slay the next windmill too tall for her aging Don. I'm the one who'll put to pasture that wayward Sancho he now calls a partner, in the interest of keeping her beloved and their dream of a company out of harm's way."

"Love Broadway shows, I take it, Mr. Clark?"

"It's important to be seen in the right places, with the right people, so you know the right way to say things in business. I told you that before."

"And how many of your new hires are Dulcineas?"

"Some have comparable origins. But I'm not a glisten-eyed fool who needs doe-eyed worshippers."

"What do you need?"

"I need a group of hard-working, well-groomed peahens who know who the peacock is they work for—and who won't scatter like scared prey when the plunderers of the business world try to spook them out of their bushes."

"And to flock around when you decide to strut your colorful fantail after hours and hit the Great White Way instead of the rails back to the Island?"

"Yeah, something like that."

Act 3 Scene 3

"You can be sure that you won't be doing it any longer in *our* barnyard, Mr. Clark. Be careful not to trip on that drapery, Arthur."

"Mr. and Mrs. Kenderson. How long . . . I mean, how are you?"

"We're much better tonight. Thanks to Ms. McVey. And we'll be much better with her as general manager than with you as our vice president—starting Monday morning."

"May I have your office keys now, please? You're not welcome there any longer. Your attorney may come out at ten on Monday to pick up your personal items and to sign your severance agreement after 'Sancho' and I muddle our way through figuring it out."

"But, Arthur. Sir. I can explain."

"As you said yourself, Mr. Clark. You are direct so everybody knows what you mean. My husband and I have already heard your most honest explanation ever, over this exquisite dinner. Regards to your wife, Randolph. Tell her I'll miss her at the holiday party.

"May we join you for dessert, dear? Arthur and I have a few things to discuss with you. And thank you for the beautiful dinner. The food was delicious and the flowers stunning. And the conversation was so enlightening."

Act 3 Scene 4

"And that's how it happened, Karen. You were right, sis. Divide to conquer. The new sexual politics, I guess."

"How did you manage to get him to admit so much in one sitting, Toni?"

"Turns out the guy had a real golden shovel for a mouth and a mother lode of good opinion of himself to mine. Dug his own grave while he was digging himself. Just ten feet away from where the boss and his wife were sitting. As best as I can figure, he wanted to do the whole number on me before they showed up for dessert. He was whiter than the starched tablecloths when they drew back the curtain of their parlor car—"

". . . to ride him right out of town on a rail."

"Oh, Karen. You're too much."

"And they hired you right on the spot?"

"Oh, no. Not right on the spot. That took three more hours back in my hotel room after dessert and a cab ride. They even had O'Reilly come over. The three of them and me. In my room. How ironic. Clark had designs and he had me booked into a two-room suite, with a kitchenette.

"They made me go through everything I'd brought from Wisconsin. The works. The organizational charts. The sales figures. The production studies. The savings calculations for unemployment taxes gained from not laying people off. The lawyers' fees avoided for not having to fight age and gender discrimination charges expected to be filed, if people *had been* fired without properly documented cause.

"They spoke about what they wanted to do at their place to move forward and to fix things with the people Clark let go. Of course, they wanted to know if I had done so well in Wisconsin, why was I expendable."

"God. Did you tell them?"

"Sort of. After I had shown them everything I brought, I admitted my last day in the Wisconsin job was last week. But I didn't bare my soul to them any more than I was willing to bare my body to Clark.

"I told them the company became so profitable that they and their competitor agreed to a friendly merger, all to fight off a hostile takeover by a mutual competitor, a larger conglomerate.

"Turns out, that's exactly the kind of protection the three of them were seeking for themselves, without this guy Clark knowing anything about it. So, I start Monday. With a two-year contract and full benefits. Stock options after the first year. Bonus based on quarterly sales, with no take back for lower quarters year-to-date, and no loss from the high quarters siphoned off by annual averaging.

"And a week off in a month's time to come back to Wisconsin to gather up things I need to bring East, but won't need right away. Plus. I get to use the corporate suite at a nice place for the first month, while I look for a place of my own.

"And get this, sis. Mrs. K? She smiles a big smile and tells her husband and O'Reilly, that in Mr. Clark's absence, it only seems fair that I get a clothing allowance to tide me over a bit 'til I can come home and get the rest of my stuff."

"I'll have to make notes about your dinner and create a case study for classes later this semester. I might have to call it *The Coup over Coffee* or something like that. Or, for the culinary-minded, how about either *A Steak Through the Heart* or *Toni Was a Little Lamb*?"

"I think that's enough, Karen. I've got to go now. Turns out that Mrs. Kenderson is coming around noon to go to lunch and show me some places with vacancies that are near the subway lines and not too outrageously priced."

Act 3 Scene 5

"Good Monday morning, everyone. Arthur and I would like to announce that, as of today, Mr. Clark will not be with us any longer. Yesterday we hired Ms. Toni McVey, whom most of you met briefly on Friday, to head the department. This was our intention when we asked Ms. McVey to fly here for an interview, though not with as much speed as events actually moved."

"It became evident over the weekend that we would be placing an unwanted burden on the company to add Mr. Clark as a partner at this time. That had been the other part of our plans, prior to the weekend sessions. Mr. Clark's attorney will be by today around ten o'clock for a meeting. Any of his personal belongings that might be around the department should be set into the carton on the desk out front, so such things can be returned to Mr. Clark through his lawyer.

"Without further delay, then, let us present your new department manager, Ms. Toni McVey."

"Thank you, sirs."

"Excuse me, Mr. Kenderson, you have a call."

"Thank you, Elizabeth. We were just leaving the group to their own introductions. Good timing. Let's go, Lawrence."

"Hello, everyone. As you know, my name is Toni McVey. I asked Erika to have you make some name tags just for today. And I see you are wearing them, thank you.

"But there seems to be a problem. You see, none of you printed your middle name on your name tag, so I don't recognize all of you from Friday's visit."

"What's she talkin' 'bout—
middle names?"

"I don't know girl. Jus'
more of the same.
Jus' a different package.
Now jus' shush,
'fore she hears you
big mouth.
Aw, geez Louise,
too late."

"No, Ma'am. It's just that we
are not sure what you mean
by 'middle names.'"

"Well, for instance, your name tag says SHIRLEY. But I remember you from Friday as Shirley Doll. And your friend MAXINE next to you there. She was Maxine Pumpkin. ANGIE up front here was Angie Baby. And I recognize you. You're Julie Honey.

"Awlll riight!"

"I can get behind that."

"It's about time. Hey, Ms. McVey.
What about these clothes?
I'd love to go home and change and
throw these skinny ass things
into that ole box out front
that Mr.O was talking about.
I could make it back by ten."

"Me, too. Who ever heard a sittin' 'roun'
in a thong all day, anyway? I could sure
use some relief, if ya get my meanin'.
Why, I'll run all the way home and back
to make my personal contribution by ten.
And I'll tell you girls somethin'. I ain't
gonna launder 'em first, neither."

"Not me."

"What do you mean, girl.
You actually
like those blouses?
Why. Honey,
your momma would die
to see you in them
at your place of work!
She would, too.
Don't you forget,
I know your momma."

*"Not the clothes, girlfriend.
I'd sit here with nothing
but my workout sweats
on all day to get shed of these.
But I'd rather mail them
to his wife at home,
after cleaning them and
folding them nice, and
tell her she can wear them
since her husband paid
for them. Fix his butt, good."*

"Sweet Jesus.
Why didn't
I think of that?"

"You're too much, girl."

"Okay, okay. All four of you can have the morning off to get yourselves put back together. We'll ship the box this afternoon with customer orders. But there'll be no letters home to the wife. Let him figure out how to come clean on his own. That's their clothes. That's their laundry, more ways than one. Go on, now. See you later . . .

Act 3 Scene 6

" . . . Now while they're gone from that department, I'd like to work with you veterans for the rest of the morning.

"We're going to spend the first few days with me just floating around. I'm going to sit in on your normal work. I want you to keep what you're doing. But while you do it, I'm going to be making a lot of notes.

"And I want you to tell me what you think is good about how Mr. Clark had you do your job and what you think needs changing. If you have ideas for those changes, please let me know. I'll make even more notes. If you don't have ideas for the changes, but still think some kind of change is needed, I want you to tell me why you think it should be changed."

"Are you kidding?"

"Absolutely not. Next. When someone dominates a work force the way Mr. Clark did, two things often happen. First, people stop making suggestions for improvements. Well, I want you to start making suggestions while I'm walking around and sitting with you this week. The second thing that happens is that people hide things. So whatever you have in the bottom of a drawer or in an unmarked file, pull it out and let's go over it. Full amnesty. No problems, no regrets.

"That's all I have for now. I have a few phone calls to make to your friends who left the department less than willingly in the last year. We'll see if they can help us with making some of these changes and catching up on some of the customers who got dropped by the wayside."