

Chapter 3 Kickoff

It was only January 5th but the holidays might well have been months ago as the InUnison sales force assembled in Salon 2 of the Hotel Sofitel in Redwood Shores. The slate was wiped clean and the sales reps and SEs anxiously awaited any news befitting their high expectations.

The audience stood, applauding their beloved CEO, Bill Engler. For a very few, the cheering was sincere and heartfelt in appreciation for his success in building a growing concern but for most, the applause was because of his support for a generous sales compensation plan.

"Everyone in this room is to be commended," Engler said. "Because of you, we exceeded our plan, much to the pleasant surprise of the board. I, of course, had no doubts about your ability to blow out your Numbers.

"While I'm very satisfied with your financial performance, I'm equally pleased with *how* you've achieved them. You've upheld InUnison's standards for dealing with customers: honesty, integrity and partnership for success."

"Why does he have to say that every freaking time?" Murphy asked rhetorically.

"He really means it, that's why," someone near him replied.

"Idealist child," someone else commented.

He paused to allow the group to applaud themselves.

"And now, it is my great pleasure to introduce our VP of Sales, Niles O'Rourke, who turned our motley sales band into an industry juggernaut, I dare say, the best in the business..."

"This is such bullshit," Gatto said, clapping only enough to seem enthused. He didn't want to reveal his short-timer attitude yet. "We always come to this same lame hotel, with their worn-out wall coverings and crummy chairs so that we can listen to managers tell us what we already know."

"That being?" Joe Phillipson, Denver sales rep, asked.

"That, gee, our Numbers are going up while our compensation stays the same at best. Oh, and that our Business Development and Marketing departments have sales as their top priority. Total bullshit."

"Yeah, but I won't mind as long as O'Rourke leaves my territory alone. I've got a target rich environment for our integration engine and ..."

Yo, Joe, I really couldn't care less about your "environment", Gatto thought.

Niles O'Rourke ascended the stage to continued applause from the team. He has been InUnison Software's VP of Sales since the last kickoff meeting, blew out his Number for the year and was the company hero, putting them on the revenue track for a public stock offering later in the year, or so they all expected.

Across the room and in front, the new sales team of Wayne Angelis and Porter Mitchell were taking in this scene, each having very different reactions. Wayne smirked a bit at the rah-rah environment. *All sales kickoffs are the same*, he thought. Wayne had been in the business long enough, and become enough of a cynic, to know that this display was meant to fire up the new hires and impress them with the team's "go-go culture".

Porter, being new to the sales game, was simply bewildered. It was already quite a shock to move from the static world of Hayworth and Steelcase cubicles to the pressures and dynamics of sales in a fast growth software startup. When Porter entered his hotel room, he found his roommate, Sean Murphy, behind the television working with pliers in order to hack into the Sofitel's TV system so he could get free movies. Sean then helped himself to the in-room liquor, carefully prying off the vodka and gin bottle caps and emptying the contents into glasses so that he could refill the bottles with water and return them to their rightful places in the cabinet. He hadn't detected Sean's criminal mind while working on the SecNat project and he hoped he wasn't expected to adopt these kinds of skills himself.

Wayne sensed his new partner's nervousness.

"Hey, Porter, don't get too overwhelmed. All sales meetings are like this. The idea is that we get all energized and leave ready to take on the world."

"Does it work?"

"Nope. Reality will set in as soon as we get our Numbers."

"So, why do it?"

"Beats me. Some motivational consultant is counting his millions on a beach somewhere, laughing about how he sold this so-called motivational drivel to sales managers all over the world."

They turned back to the stage as O'Rourke raised his hands to settle the troops.

"Thank you all for the enthusiastic greeting, but it's all of you who deserve the credit for our tremendous year! Give yourselves another round of applause!"

Salon 2 erupted in cheers and the sales team rose to their feet again, giving each other high-fives. They all shared in the past year of success, with all but one district team – Grim Reaper in Atlanta, of course – qualifying for the first 100% Club trip at InUnison, the reward trip for sales overachievers. They would find out later where the trip would be, but rumor placed it at a Caribbean beach or resort, in short, a perfect place for the over-eating, over-drinking, over-carousing, and playing politics with the sales management on the golf course.

"Great, *another* helping of bullshit please," Gatto murmured. "Just give me my Number and shut the hell up."

"Why can't you bask in the collective adulation?" Joe teased, while trying to outdo the next guy in enthusiasm.

"I don't need no stinking adulation," Gatto said, in his best outlaw voice. "Except from O'Rourke's administrative assistant. I'm counting on a close encounter with Suzy tonight after the tequila shots. She does this thing when she's drunk..."

"I don't want to know, Tom."

O'Rourke continued to review the past year's glories, highlighting key deals, embarrassing the reps who were responsible and sometimes acknowledging the technical talent needed to win the deal.

He motioned for quiet and moved closer to the audience as the room calmed down.

"Unison cannot sit on its laurels. Let's move to the coming year and our plan to continue our explosive growth."

The room was now silent as they knew what was coming, The Mother of All Numbers: the revenue goal for the company. The Number from which all of their Numbers would be derived. It was expected to be some magnitude larger than the previous year so as to impress the IPO market.

O'Rourke, wearing a wireless microphone so that he could pace across the full area of the stage, milked the pause for full suspenseful effect before advancing to his 1998 Plan slide on his presentation. He scanned the room as he drifted across the stage. *Yes, I have them now. It's time to lower the boom...*

A cell phone rang. Not a typical warble, no, it was a loud rendition of the William Tell Overture. About a dozen people in the back of the room reached for their phones, praying it wasn't theirs. It was, of course, Gary Reaper's phone and he frantically tried to turn it off amid the snickers around him.

"Gary!" O'Rourke shouted. "I guess you missed the message banning cell phones and pagers from the room? That'll be fifty bucks, pal." *I should take that phone and shove it up your ass.*

He walked the stage some more, hoping to rebuild the suspense. Once he saw everyone's eyes on him, he advanced his slide.

"Our revenue goal for 1998 is \$70 million dollars..."

The audience gasped. The Number was worse than they could have fathomed: four times that of the previous year. Porter looked around at all the stunned faces.

"The Number is much higher than expected," Wayne whispered. "That means, one; the territories will shrink as the company attempts to hire an army of new sales teams, or two; territories don't shrink but individual Numbers go up even more than the revenue increase."

O'Rourke continued.

"In order to achieve this aggressive – but certainly attainable – goal, we will be equally aggressive on the recruiting front..."

There were hushed, but clearly audible "oh shits" from several in the crowd. This revelation would mean tough battles in the breakout sessions to retain choice territories.

"...and we have a few new faces already. For instance I'd like to introduce Wayne Angelis, a software sales star from New York. Let's give him a warm InUnison welcome! Stand up Wayne!"

While polite applause rippled through the room, Gatto smirked to himself. *Angelis. I'll be getting out while the getting is good.*

"So, a bit of competition, eh, Tommy?" Phillipson asked, assuming Gatto cared.

"No, knucklehead, it means he works for me," Gatto bluffed. "Besides, who are you to talk? See that tall blonde hard body by the door? She's going to cover the cable and media companies in Denver. Didn't you know?"

Gatto was pulling his chain – she was one of the hotel staff he'd been trying to hit on – but Phillipson was so gullible that Gatto couldn't resist.

As he could have predicted, Phillipson's eyes grew huge and he was blubbering about how unfair it was.

"I'm scratching out an existence in Denver and they're going to bring in this tart..."

Gatto salted the wound a bit more.

"So much for the target-rich environment, eh pal?"

Across the room, Wayne shook his head.

"Well, Porter, I hope you have some good shoes, because we're going to have to pound the pavement long and hard. Our Number is going to be aggressive."

"Oh, before I forget," Porter whispered to Wayne, "I got a call from my old manager at the bank. He's starting, today as a matter of fact, with Azalea Financial. According to the message, he's going to be doing almost the exact same thing as our old project. He wants to talk to us as soon as possible."

Wayne thought for a minute. "They're located down by South Street Seaport. Manhattan. That's not my territory. We need to talk to Gatto about it."

"You mean we can't work it?"

"It means *I* can't work it. You can. Remember, Young said you'd have to support me and Gatto." *Great, first day on the job and I'm already going to have to share Porter with the enemy.*

"Norm, are you all set up in your office?"

"Yes, Sam. Connie was extremely helpful with that. You've got a great admin. I'm going to get spoiled."

“Don’t get too used to it. I don’t share her very much. Usually only when Gibson’s assistant is off or something. Anyway, I guess I need to do the honorable thing and introduce you to Stewart Miller in IT.”

Racker dialed Miller’s number and got the usual voice mail greeting.

“There are two certainties about our CIO: he’ll never be at his phone and will never return the messages. That was my fourth attempt since yesterday and I’m out of patience. Follow me.

“Connie, I’m going down to the tenth floor to seek out Stewart Miller. I want to introduce Norm around down there. Hopefully this won’t take long.”

“Sure thing. Happy hunting.”

He and Norm got off the car on the tenth floor and Sam was startled to see windows the entire length of the elevator lobby, through which he could see banks of equipment. They could feel a low, mechanical rumble as they watched numerous operators huddling over consoles and others yanking stacks of paper off of printers.

“Jesus, it really *is* a glass house,” Racker said. “I thought that was an urban legend. Figures Miller would set things up this way; show off his manhood.”

There were doors at either end of the lobby, both with security card readers. Racker took his company access card out and swiped it through one of the readers. The red light flashed, signaling that his access was denied. He tried a couple more times without success. He then walked to the other end of the lobby and tried that door. No luck.

There was a phone on the wall by the first door so Sam went back to that end of the lobby. There were no instructions about any extension to call so he simply picked up the receiver. It immediately rang someone.

“Raised floor. How can I help you?” said the receptionist, Becky Sharpe.

“Sam Racker to see Stewart Miller.”

“Are you authorized for this floor?”

“I should be. I’m the Controller.”

“I’m sorry, what company was that?”

“*This* company, Azalea, I’m the CON-TROLL-HER.”

“Ken Treller?”

Stay calm; this is some low level receptionist. “Sam Racker. I sign your paycheck,” Racker said, hoping she would get the joke.

“Very funny. The computer signs my paycheck.”

“Today is payday. Do you have your check yet?”

“Yes.”

“Whose name is in the signature?”

“Can’t read it. Bad handwriting.”

“LISTEN! You get out here and let me in, NOW!”

Sharpe didn't appreciate being yelled at and punched her mute button. "Hey, Herb," she called out to her Shift Supervisor. "There's someone out front who thinks he's some big shot and can wander in here like he owns the place. Should I call Security?"

"Who is he?"

"Sam Racker. He claims to sign my paycheck but I don't see where —"

"YOU IDIOT! That *is* our Controller and future CFO! He sure as hell *does* sign our paychecks!" Herb Putnam sprinted for the door, ignoring Sharpe's question, "What's a 'controller'?"

"Mister Racker, Herb Putnam, Shift Supervisor. Sorry for the misunderstanding. Becky, well, she takes the security thing pretty seriously."

"I understand. We're here to see Stewart Miller. Can you show me to his office?"

"Sure it's right outside my cubicle. It's quicker if we cut through the datacenter."

"Herb, this is Norm Johnson," he said, introducing Norm as they walked. "He is our new Director of Financial Information. He's going to help sort out the confusion with our financials. I'm counting on some help from you folks, of course."

"Oh you know we're here to help, Mr. Racker." *Does Miller know about this new guy?* Putnam wondered. He led Racker and Johnson through the maze of machinery, pointing out a few things along the way, such as the dozens of StorageTek disk drives and automated tape vaults. Herb was especially proud of the ultra-high speed printers, claiming to run enough paper per day to stretch from New York to Los Angeles. Herb was disappointed that neither Sam nor Norm was impressed.

Racker hadn't noticed the noise of the machine room until he was startled by the silence of the office area. There were rows and rows of cubicles with offices and the odd conference room lining the outside of the floor. They came upon cubicle "10R9" which stood for tenth floor, aisle R, cubicle 9. This was Herb's home for the few minutes a day when he was away from the supervisor's console. It was close to the corner of the floor, where, of course, Stewart Miller's office was located. Miller was out of the office.

"He's around," Herb said. "He was there right before you came down. Heard his phone ringing."

No kidding. He saw that it was me calling and scrambled.

"You want me to page him?"

"Please. I'll wait in his office," Racker said.

Herb left them to return to his cubicle and wait for Miller to answer the page.

Racker and Johnson stepped into Miller's office, which was on the Water Street side of the building and looked out towards the heart of the financial district. All of the office's walls were covered by custom-built shelves populated with coffee mugs, all from computer software, hardware and services vendors. *I guess everyone needs a bobby*, Racker thought. He chuckled at what a waste it was that the mug collection obscured a decent view.

Behind the desk, hanging on a hook driven into the shelving, was a samurai sword. On the credenza below were the usual family pictures but also a large picture of Miller, wearing some tourist version of a samurai outfit and holding the sword with both hands above his head.

"So, this is the office of our problem child. Supposedly, he uses that samurai sword on uncooperative vendors."

One section of wall displayed numerous plaques and other mementos. As he examined them from top to bottom, he realized it was a professional chronology: Marine Corps, late 60's Vietnam – Connie had described his jar head crew cut as so perfect that you could practice putting on it – Piscataway Tech, IBM COBOL Training. Sam quickly scanned some of the other frames.

"Look at this, Norm; no bachelor's degree, classic internal career path. I'll bet he started out mounting tapes for a living."

Racker and Johnson sat down at the conference table in the corner to wait for Miller. *ComputerWorld* and *CIO* magazines were strewn on the table.

"He certainly has the IBM world nailed here, doesn't he?" Norm noted. There weren't any of the newer trade rags like *Wired*, *Industry Standard* or journals covering the emerging use of the Java computer language exploding on Internet applications. Sam leafed through a few of them before his impatience returned.

"Herb," Racker called out, "Any sign of your boss?"

"No, sorry, Mr. Racker."

"Can you come in here, please?"

Putnam walked just inside the door, nervously awaiting some directive. He wasn't comfortable being in Miller's office without being invited by Miller himself.

"Come on over and sit down. I'm still new here and I haven't met too many people. So, tell me about yourself. How long have you been with Azalea?"

Herb settled into the chair opposite Sam Racker. "Almost six years. I started out as a programmer analyst and moved into Computer Operations after a couple of years."

"Why the change?"

"I was a systems operator in the Navy and decided I liked that better than programming."

“After several years in Operations you must know a lot about what goes on here. Perhaps you can help educate me. I’m trying to make some sense out of our financial systems. For instance, this Oracle Financials implementation seems to be a little out of whack. What’s your take on it?”

Herb recoiled at the question. *Talk about a live grenade! This might be a career defining situation here.* He decided to play dumb. “I’m not sure what you’re asking. It’s certainly late, no question about that, but if you’re asking me why, I really can’t say. I’m not involved in the project yet. I deal with code *after* it goes production.” *Development is not my job, thank God!*

Sam leaned back, strumming his right fingers on his chin. *Herb deflected that question quickly.* “I see. But certainly you’re aware of something as radical as bringing Oracle and PeopleSoft in. Must be quite a challenge for the folks in IT.”

“That it is,” Herb said. *It’s definitely a challenge to stay the hell away from those subversive projects.*

Racker tried to ferret out a little more information. “Well, what I mean is, it must be quite a culture shock to see radical new equipment, like Sun servers, and packaged software come into this datacenter. How do you think people are handling it?”

Like ants handle Raid. “Uh, pretty well. There’s a bunch of training going on for the new teams.”

Racker gave him several more chances to go on, but it became clear that Herb wasn’t going to volunteer much. The interrogation ended when Herb’s pager went off. He looked at the number and recognized it as the main control desk. *Thank God.* “This is the Control Desk. I think I better return it.”

Racker nodded his approval and leaned back in his chair pondering the slivers of information while Putnam called the control desk from Miller’s phone.

“Control Desk.”

“This is Herb. Did you page me?” He heard the console operator say “It’s Herb” and then a shuffling of the receiver.

“Is he still there?”

“Who? I’m in Miller’s office with Sam Racker.”

“Shhhhhh. Just answer yes or no.”

“Who is this? I don’t have time for...”

“Shut up! This is Stewart. DON’T say my name. Answer yes or no. Is Racker still in my office?”

“Yes.”

“Tell him you have to go.”

“But —”

“NO BUT’S! Tell him you have a production problem and you’re sorry and all that. Then he’ll leave.”

”But –”

“I SAID...”

“I got it!” *I hate you Stewart.* Herb hung up and turned to Sam. “Mr. Racker, uh, I’m terribly sorry but there’s a production problem that needs my attention. I need to get back to the datacenter.”

“I understand. Thanks for your time. I’ll find my way out. Oh, one other thing. Can you give me Miller’s pager number?”

Putnam froze. *What do I do?* Miller had fired the last guy who gave the pager number out without asking, but he realized that Racker would soon be his boss’ boss. It mattered.

Racker saw the panic on Putnam’s face. He got up, crossed the room and put his hand on the shoulder of a nearly paralyzed Herb Putnam and said, “Herb, I won’t tell him where I got it.” Mildly relieved, Herb wrote it out for Racker.

“It was a pleasure meeting you,” Herb said and fled the office.

Sam looked around for some note paper, finding it on Miller’s desk. He wrote a quick note to Miller, asking him to stop by his office to meet Norm Johnson.

He and Norm returned to his floor. “Connie, this is the pager for Stewart Miller. Please keep paging him every ten or fifteen minutes until he calls back. Try using different numbers if he doesn’t reply. You still have your cell phone, right?”

“Sure, Sammy. What do I do when, well, if, he calls back?”

“Tell him I want to introduce our new Director of Financial Information so we can get going on some reporting work.” He started to go into his office but spun around, tossing his ID badge onto Connie’s desk. “Oh, and figure out how I can get that badge enabled to enter the datacenter.”

The InUnison meeting broke up just in time for a reception with open bar and hors d’oeuvres. This was a time to mingle, collect inside information, and get warmed up for the evening of serious drinking at the hotel bar.

Even within the frugal InUnison budget, the hotel provided a sizable spread of food spanning three or four tables. Being in California, though, the dishes were usually inscrutable to the out-of-towners. It would start with a couple of salad choices, move to a fish or chicken dish – all dusted with unrecognizable spices or simply soaking up a witches brew of marinade – and finishing with a bowl of soup from a large cauldron. It was a juggling act to keep it all together.

“What is this?” Porter asked his roommate Sean, gazing at a greenish, guacamole-type dip. “I didn’t recognize anything but the salad at lunch either.”

“Same crap every time.” Sean replied, as he gingerly spooned through some fishy smelling salad. “You’d think they could at least put out some marinated shrimp or something.”

“People really survive on this stuff?” Porter was looking down the line to see the West Coast folks eagerly loading up on some sort of soybean concoction.

Sean sighed. “They think we should all be vegans or something. We have to put up with it for a few days but it’s become a tradition on the last night of these meetings for us serious eaters to head up to Gulliver’s in Burlingame for the Full Bone Cut of prime rib. Biggest slab of bloody cow I’ve ever seen. But it would be frowned upon for us to disappear on the first day.”

“Well, given your criminal habits, can’t you rustle up something from the kitchen?”

Sean laughed. “You know, I might have to work out a way to scam room service, maybe try to have it sent to a different room and then intercept it or something...”

Around eight o’clock, the crowd started to assemble in the sizable lounge at the Sofitel. It didn’t take long for the industry-standard shots of tequila to show up. Reps who had been with other software companies would relate stories of the quantities of agave consumed at their meetings, always casting InUnison as not up to snuff.

Reaper could be counted on to regale anyone who would listen about his glory days at Sybase. They were about the only glory days in Gary’s life.

“Yeah, when I was at Sybase, that dude with the Greek last name – what the hell was his name? – he wouldn’t let up on us. Tray after tray after tray of shot glasses... We got kicked out of so many bars ...”

“Oh, and *how* many shots was that, Gary?” Phillipson, while no superstar drinker himself, had heard this story at every meeting since joining the company. It was definitely old. The number had grown from 10 to 100 in one year.

“A SHITLOAD! I’m telling ya!” Reaper slurred.

Egging him on a little further was Gatto.

“So, Grim, how’d you end up at InUnison? You were doing pretty well there at Sybase weren’t you? Why leave a good thing?” Gatto already knew the answer and he considered it sport to bait Reaper at almost every meeting. He also knew Gary hated the nickname “Grim Reaper”. But Reaper was too involved in his story and tipsy to notice, disappointing his tormenter.

“Hey, we had a huge, I mean HUGE deal brewing at AT&T. Business Development fucked it up. I left because I got tired of them screwing up my deals. BD and those incompetent marketing people.”

“But you’re always going on about ‘At Sybase we did this’ and ‘At Sybase we did that,’” Gatto said, continuing to draw Reaper to the ledge. “You always make it sound like they were the standard for how to run a software business.”

Reaper started to look sadly at his empty tequila shot glass. “They were when I started there. Then things went to hell.” Gary was almost ready to start sobbing now. He was sure that he’d never see that kind of success ever again.

Gustavson, always the champion of the little guy, knew Gatto had blood in the water and interceded. He’d seen Gatto reduce people to tears with his merciless rundowns before. The Swede could talk trash with the best of them but never with malice.

“Hey, Gatto, you’re always bragging about Sun. Why can’t Gary brag about Sybase?”

“That’s because Sun really was and *is* a good organization. We could do no wrong at Sun. Of course you wouldn’t know a good organization if it fell on you.”

“Yeah, and your shit doesn’t smell, does it?” Gustavson said.

“Great comeback, moron.” Gatto was already feeling the alcohol. Pretty soon he’d believe he could take on the whole bar.

“Who’s calling who a moron, you Jersey Dago?” There was certainly no love lost between Gustavson and Gatto. But Gustavson had about five inches and fifty pounds on Gatto. “If I had New York, I’d have tripled your production.”

Gatto pushed his chest out to meet Gustavson’s, though his chest met at The Swede’s lower rib cage. “Well, for your information, I happened to *live* in Jersey for a while, I’m not *from* Jersey.”

Knowing he had nothing to lose by making up a legend, he went further. “Anyway, now I’ll finally get the resources to do the job in New York properly. That’s why they’re bringing in Angelis and Mitchell to work under me.”

Gustavson sprayed his tequila in Gatto’s face.

“You can’t be serious! You can’t manage yourself let alone a team! Right, they bring in a serious player with a background in startups, some of which he practically started himself, and he’s going to work for you. You’d best lay off of the sauce, my friend. Let’s see, I seem to recall you losing UBS to me because they had no confidence that you could deal with a long, very technically involved sales cycle.”

That ripped an old wound wide open since UBS Warburg had in fact pretty much chewed Gatto up and spit him out as not worthy of dealing with them. He tried to close them on a multi-million dollar deal at the second meeting and they literally laughed him out of the conference room. Financial services companies such as UBS Warburg were always at the

forefront of technology and often had to build leading edge software internally before it was available commercially. Since they knew the technology cold, their evaluation criteria was some of the most brutal in the industry. But if you passed the test, it was usually worth millions.

Gatto couldn't back down now. He'd crossed the point of no return in the story, so why not go all the way?

Keeping a straight face, he continued.

"Yes, Number *Two*," he said, waving two fingers in the Swede's face. "I got the word from Presby himself. He's going to let Angelis in on it at the breakouts. Oh, and you can get used to being number *TWO* for a while," Gatto said, waving the two fingers in The Swede's face again. "As for UBS, you can have those elitist bastards and their fifty page RFIs. I closed six deals in the time it took them to decide which stall to take a dump in."

Even Gustavson had to laugh at this bit of hysterical hyperbole, as no one was buying it.

"Hey, back off, pal!" The Swede said, shoving Gatto out of his personal space. "Your hair is dripping grease on me. Even you know that one UBS Warburg is worth a dozen of the no-name accounts you conned into buying software from us."

Wayne was at the other end of the bar chatting with Ken Presby when he noticed that Gatto and Gustavson were glancing down at him. He saw how animated the conversation had become and figured that they were simply conspiring about territories.

It was a schmoozing kind of chat that Wayne was having with Presby, though he had hoped he'd get some confirmation about his territory. He wanted to lobby, again, for at least a few named accounts in Manhattan – like Azalea – but really didn't want to get into any kind of pissing match with Gatto. Presby, like most savvy sales managers, wasn't going to get sucked into any kind of serious discussion in public. It might have seemed as if no one was paying attention to them, but all eyes and ears from the East team were alert to any clue to come from Presby.

"... Anyway, Wayne, we're damn glad to have you. You are going to fit in fine here." Presby put on his best fatherly face.

"Well, I appreciate the vote of confidence, Ken. I'm particularly happy to be working with Porter. He certainly knows the technology."

Presby wasn't showing any recognition about Porter.

"He's that pale, slim guy with the unruly brown hair at the far table. You remember; SE from Security National Bank. He's been working with our products for over a year. You interviewed him the same day you met with me."

"Oh, right. I'm not thinking clearly. His company used our stuff? Security National? Hmmm, must not have been a big deal. Don't recall the name. Who sold it?"

“I suppose Gatto did.”

“No, wait. Security National, they were an early adopter. I’m told that we pretty much gave them everything for free. No wonder I didn’t remember. It was done before I joined the company and was never on a forecast. Either way, Gatto wouldn’t have dealt with them. His deals always are obscure. He doesn’t have a clue about strategic relationship selling. Always takes the short cut...” Presby caught himself as he was about to start really dissing Gatto. His eyes scanned the groups nearby to see if anyone had been listening in.

Wayne certainly took note. He wondered about what the relationship was between those two; Gatto may have sold to nondescript accounts, but he was still number one in the company.

Just then, Gary Reaper rudely stepped in front of Wayne to talk to Presby. Wayne took the opportunity to wander down to the end of the bar where Gatto and Gustavson were still jousting. He figured he’d better get the reintroduction over with.

“Tom Gatto, how have you been?” Wayne said, extending his hand in greeting.

Gatto shifted his newly refilled beer glass to his left hand to accept the handshake, spilling some on Wayne’s shoes.

“Oh, sorry ‘bout that. Fine, Wayne. Get anyone fired lately?” Gatto said.

Already playing head games, are we? Wayne sighed to himself.

“Actually, no.”

“Still poaching accounts?” Gatto asked.

“I believe I should be asking you that question, Tom.”

“Well, it’ll be nice to be on the same ‘team’ again. I could use some help in Manhattan. You *do* know that you’re working for me?” Gatto said, winking at The Swede and swaying into the bar.

“I see you haven’t lost your sense of humor.”

“I wasn’t joking.”

Gustavson had heard enough and came to Wayne’s defense.

“I’m Bill Gustavson, Wayne. Welcome! And don’t listen to this drunk. His Attention Deficit Disorder precludes him ever really getting a big account.”

Gatto didn’t appreciate his intervention.

“F’ you. Isn’t it time for your beauty sleep?”

“Actually, it is. I need my rest so I can continue to kick your ass tomorrow. See you guys in the morning. The first session is BD, right? It’ll be content-free as usual.” Gustavson downed the rest of his Anchor Steam and left the glass on the bar.

Wayne decided to cut his losses. He wasn't going to get anywhere with Gatto in his current state of inebriation and bad attitude, the latter of which had been aggravated by Gustavson.

"I'm going to turn in as well. It was nice to get, uh, reacquainted, Tom." Wayne said, extending his hand. "I'm sure we'll be able to work together well, just like old times."

"Sure thing." Spurning Wayne's hand, Gatto waved his glass at him instead and turned away.

Out at the edge of the lounge, the SEs congregated among the sofas and armchairs, filling the coffee table with empty beer bottles and drink glasses. The conversation was becoming more animated as the number of glasses increased. The standard religious arguments about Microsoft versus the true egalitarian nature of the software business were hashed out for the umpteenth time.

"Listen, someone ought to sue the Redmond boys and break them up. They are sucking in all the oxygen, strangling the industry."

"Please. What are you, some kind of retro-Commie? Maybe you missed it but the Berlin Wall came down a few years back. Gates has simply built an aggressive company. Government doesn't have a right to blow up companies because someone thinks that they are too successful. Sure, they seem to use tactics which should be reigned in, but blow up the company? I suppose you support the death penalty for jaywalking."

Sean Murphy spoke up. "Oh, guys, I just realized that I haven't properly introduced my roommate! This is Porter Mitchell from New York. He's been using our stuff for quite a while now so you won't be able to snow him with any technical or marketing BS."

Each of the eight SEs took his or her turn shaking Porter's hand and welcoming him.

"So, you must know Tom Gatto. How much money did he shake you guys down for?" asked Mark Maskowitz, the SE for Washington, DC.

"Never met him until this meeting. We were an early adopter before he even came on board. I started working with InUnison on version 0.8. Since we were plugged in directly to support and got the software for free, I guess he didn't see the point in spending time with us."

"Of course he wouldn't. Unless it lined his pockets, he wouldn't give you the time of day," Mark said. "We lost two good SEs in New York because they couldn't stand to work with the prick. I ended up shuttling back and forth from DC."

"I was part of the Gatto Shuttle as well," Sean said, referring to the fact that he was also a shuttle flight away in Boston. "He wants you to demo the same thing over and over, never really wants us to engage with the

prospect; always says ‘no’ to a proof-of-concept or managed evaluation. Takes all the fun out of the job.”

“Of course, he doesn’t have a problem engaging if the prospect is female. Hi, I’m Julia Berkowski, Atlanta SE.”

Julia, one of the most respected SEs at InUnison, had a software product engineering background, was an excellent communicator and had a wicked competitive streak which served her well in the sales environment.

She dreaded these sales events, though. A tall, slim yet buxom strawberry blonde, she had to fend off the sex fiends of the company but took full advantage of her sex appeal with the white males who still dominated IT management. At some point during every sales meeting, some tequila-buzzed rep would wander by and “chat” with her. The attempt to pick her up might not be blatant or overt but she knew the rep wasn’t really interested in her latest demo techniques.

That sex appeal had not translated into any lasting relationships, though. Julia hadn’t had a serious relationship for over three years, during which her suitors were all computer nerds who thought she was one of them and the last thing she wanted was a one-dimensional partner. Others, intimidated by Julia’s strong conservative opinions and intelligence on a wide range of subjects, moved on.

As long as she was with the other SEs, though, she had a protective buffer around her. She was one of the guys with them, though they tended to think they were all her older brothers.

“So it sounds like you have more experience with the product than the rest of us put together. Beware; you’ll be getting calls for help.”

“I’d be happy to help out however I can. But you guys are going to have to give me some Sales 101 in return.”

“Julia, don’t you think your sales partner could give Porter some tips?” Sean knew this would get a rise from Julia.

“Oh, sure. Grim Reaper’s Rule Number One: drop trou at the first meeting and beg for the business. Rule Number Two: when rule one fails as usual, offer your SE for long engagements in pointless projects that the prospect doesn’t want or need.”

Julia seethed at having to deal with the arrogant yet clueless Gary Reaper on a daily basis. She longed for the opportunity to really have an impact on a big deal. She was simply unlucky to live in the same geography as Reaper, forced to chase after prospects that had no use for integration software.

“I’m always the one to have the rejection conversation with the customer, along the lines of, ‘I really don’t know why Gary keeps bothering us. We keep telling him we aren’t interested. You’re very capable though, would you like a job here?’”

Everyone laughed, knowing it was true. It was especially funny to have a woman talking about a rep dropping his trousers to get the business.

Ron Defazio, SE in Los Angeles, introduced himself and offered some alternative advice.

“My Rule One: make sure your rep feeds you and picks up the check.”

Sean interrupted, “Of course, Ron, being a California surfer dude is a pretty cheap date for a rep. ‘Oh, could I have some fruit pizza please with a side of tofu?’ Yuk!”

“Well, my body is my temple,” Ron said while caressing his ripped abs. “I take care of it instead of hooking up to an IV of cholesterol like you heathens.”

“I know Wiley worships your body, Ron.”

Wiley Nelson, SE in Chicago, piled on using his best lisp. “Ooooo, big boy, be my roommate sometime so I can worship that body toooo?” This broke the whole team up as Wiley was about 6 feet 5, 260 pounds, practically a twin of his sales partner Gustavson.

“This is where I get off the bus.” Julia loved these guys, but when the conversation degenerated to this level, it was time to call it a night. “Don’t stay up too late. Don’t want anyone sleeping through my presentation tomorrow.”

“Don’t forget to say goodnight to Gatto, Julia.”

“I’ll be sure to give him your room number, Sean.”

“Hey, where’s the Youngster?” Wiley asked. “Shouldn’t he be buying these drinks?”

* * *

“So, what good news do you have for me?” Young asked O’Rourke, after being summoned to the bar.

“I wanted you to know that we have to hire about five SEs in the next two quarters.”

“And where are these SEs going to be located?”

“Oh, not sure, maybe another in DC, Chicago; open offices in Dallas, St. Louis... We already have some reps ready to sign.”

“Isn’t that going to reignite territory battles?”

“No, I’m working hard to be sure everyone has set territories for the year. These are mostly new locations that weren’t being worked.”

This was a very depressing aspect of Young’s job. O’Rourke always treated the technical side of the team as an afterthought even though the reps craved access to quality technical talent – dedicated to them, of course. When his hiring lagged the sales rep hiring, he felt tremendous pain.

“Shit, Niles, when was this decided? You know it takes twice as long to find SEs as reps, and then it takes a quarter for them to be proficient. In the meantime, my guys, and me of course, get run ragged.” He’d made the argument for as long as he’d been an SE manager, and as usual, his VP didn’t care. “Speaking of getting run ragged; you realize that we are going to have to add another SE manager to the mix. It’s not so bad right now as

we are one to one, SE to rep, but you add five or six more and I'm going to be doing nothing but playing traffic cop and wet nurse. My first choice would be Chicago to cover the Central Area."

O'Rourke gave Young that humoring kind of smile for which he was famous. It made the recipient feel like O'Rourke cared, but the effect wore off quickly.

"I'll take it under advisement. Youngster, I know you can meet the challenge. Where's your drink?"

Young decided that he needed something stiffer than a chardonnay.

"What single malts do you have?" he asked the bartender.

"Hey, where's this Kenneth Presby guy from room 847?" the Bartender called out, ignoring Young. It was closing time and he needed someone to pay up or sign out.

Shit. They did it to me again, Presby thought. He tried to hide his room number but at every sales meeting and company event, someone found out and started the tab on his room bill. *What would it be this time, four figures?*

"I'm Presby. Give me the damn bill." He made a show of snatching the bill and looking disgusted but it would be bad form to bitch too much.

Chapter 4 Switch Play

“We can’t talk to your mainframe.”

“Excuse me? Say that again??”

“Our mainframe connector isn’t ready yet.”

George Melani could feel his blood pressure spike. He was used to it after two years at Potential Investing. It was a very aggressive and demanding environment dependent on a lot of technology for its business. He was now in charge of the foreign exchange project which needed to pull together information from all over the organization and deliver it in real-time to customers.

But now he was realizing that what he was hearing was career threatening. He began to back Sanjay Chandra, a senior Professional Services Engineer from InUnison, into the conference room corner.

“*Your* company promised me you could integrate with my mainframe with *this* version,” he said, as he waved the software CD an inch from Sanjay’s nose. “*You* have been here for two months and only now figured out that we can’t get to my mainframe?”

Chandra backed away from Melani but was running out of conference room to melt into. The usually very comfortable, wood-paneled conference room had turned into one of those interrogation rooms from an old spy movie and a hot lamp named George Melani was focused right on his face. As the lead engineer assigned to Potential, Sanjay was in the unenviable position of giving Melani the bad news that InUnison wasn’t going to achieve the promised results. George was legendary at Potential for his temper, a weapon he used to get his way. This time Sanjay was the unfortunate target.

Stammering, Sanjay tried to explain.

“Well, uh, I don’t know who misled you but the current version of our software was never meant to –”

Melani erupted.

“BULLSHIT! Your scumbag rep *promised* that the features were in THIS version!” he said, again furiously waving the CD. “We PAID for it!”

“Well, uh, well –”

“SHUT UP! So when do I get the real product I paid for?” He kept moving toward Sanjay who stumbled over a chair as he peddled backward.

“Well, uh, according to Engineering –”

“SHUT UP! You’ll tell me anything at this point.” He shoved the offending chair into the conference table and closed the distance.

Sanjay was now trapped in the front corner of the room. “But, George, it’ll only be another...”

“SHUT UP and GET OUT!” he yelled, flinging the CD at the door. “Tell that bastard Gatto that if I ever see his ugly face in here again, he’ll leave without it!”

Sanjay didn’t need to be asked twice. He bolted out the door of the conference room and into the elevator. Catching his breath once he stepped out onto street level, he spotted the Crowne Plaza Hotel across Broadway and decided their lobby would be a safe place to get some coffee, settle down and call Tom Gatto about this. It had been another in a series of Gatto accounts where PS was supposed to implement the fantasy he sold. The engineers were practically in a mutiny and some refused to work on an account owned by Gatto. Sanjay himself had been flown in from headquarters to fix things.

Sanjay hit the speed dial for Gatto. It would be about 6:30 a.m. in California but he didn’t care about waking him up. He didn’t appreciate being set up for failure at Potential and wasn’t in a mood to be courteous.

Gatto was still recovering from his morning workout – a highly aerobic romp with O’Rourke’s admin, Suzy Kestral – when his phone rang.

”Good morning! This is Tom Gatto. How can I help you?” He answered pleasantly; after all, it might have been a prospect.

“Tom, Sanjay Chandra here. We have a problem.”

“Who?” Gatto tended to forget PS people. They came *after* the sale and what did he care about that?

“Sanjay from PS who’s trying to keep Potential Investing as a happy customer.”

“Oh, sorry Sanjay. I didn’t hear you right,” Gatto lied. He had no idea who Sanjay was. “So, what’s going on?”

Sanjay got right to the point. “We finally had to tell Melani that we don’t have our mainframe product ready and his project is in the toilet. He almost decapitated me fifteen minutes ago. Why is it you guys can’t tell the truth?”

“Spare me. I had to get the deal and took a chance we’d have the product ready by the time Potential would need it.” Gatto then applied a little textbook blame shifting. “Anyway, your boss committed to the project so I suggest that you talk to him.”

“I’ll do that. But don’t you need to talk to Melani? He’s saying he’ll pull the software.”

Suzy was alive again, and began stroking and kissing Gatto’s inner thighs.

“Let him – Suzy please! – we already got paid. Besides, there’s no commitment in the contract for the mainframe piece.” *Thanks to my deft deletion of that clause from the contract*, he thought, patting himself on the back. He was aided in his editing of contracts by the fact that both InUnison and Potential used outside legal council who were overworked and disinterested,

and usually waved drafts through. He also chuckled at how easy it was to evade responsibility when he had nothing to lose.

Sanjay had dealt with reps for a quite a number of years and was used to having to clean up messes but was taken aback by this level of arrogance. Even the most cynical reps would at least have some regard for their reputation.

“Dude, I can’t walk away from this! Don’t you care at all about reputations?”

“Well, *dumunde*, I don’t have time for people like Melani who won’t take responsibility for their decisions – oh, yes! Do that butterfly thing, Suzy! – He took the chance that we’d have the stuff ready for him. We don’t. He fucked up.”

Gatto had to lean back a bit to get out of the way of Suzy’s bobbing head.

“This is a waste of my time,” Sanjay said, realizing that he didn’t have Gatto’s undivided attention.

“*That* I agree with, Sanjay. Don’t worry, I won’t be around here much longer...I mean, I won’t be around here in California, much longer and – oh, that’s *great*, Suzy – I’ll deal with Melani when I get back.” He decided to lay it on a little thicker. “Hey! I have lots of new business in the pipeline that will keep your team busy!”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.” Sanjay hung up and stared out the bar window onto Broadway, wondering why he stuck with this business. He punched the speed dial for Jim Silvester, Vice-President of Professional Services. Jim never passed up a chance to bash sales reps who put his engineers in bad situations and this certainly qualified.

Gatto flopped onto his back, fully giving in to Suzy’s talents.

* * *

Sean and Porter left their Sofitel room together, lugging their meeting binders and their laptops, ready for day two. It was inconceivable that any SE would sit through a business meeting without hacking some code to relieve the tedium.

“Hey, did you hear that?” Murphy asked Porter as they walked past the second door down the hall.

“Hear what?”

Sean led Porter back to the door and leaned in to listen.

“You’re the best! You’re great! You can do it all, Buster! You *know* you can!”

“What the hell is that?” Porter asked. “Some TV show?”

Murphy was snickering. “I didn’t believe it, but it’s true! It’s Grim Reaper!”

“Are you ready? *Are you READY!?* Then go get ‘em, Tiger!” Reaper was audible all the way down the hall.

Porter and Sean heard him rustling in the closet barely inside the door and scrambled back to their room's door just as Reaper came out and charged down the hallway without noticing the two SEs behind him.

"What the hell was that, Sean?"

"Like I said, I had heard about it before but didn't believe it. Supposedly he stands in front of the mirror and gets himself all revved up. Pathetic."

The usual trays of breakfast breads awaited Sean and Porter inside the conference room. Porter already knew two things the Sofitel was good for: quality coffee and French pastries. The two SEs entered the ballroom together to see Wayne making some tea.

"Good morning, Wayne. Where are you sitting?"

"Second row on the aisle," he said, waving a croissant in the general direction. "Want to join me?"

Sean chuckled. "Suit yourself, roomie, but that's way too close to the front. They'd see me nodding off if I sat up there. Besides you can't crack jokes about the speakers if you're too close."

"Maybe if you hadn't been up half of the night watching porn you could stay awake."

"Hey, the dialogue was riveting; 'Oh, yes! Oh, YES! Give it to me! Oh...?' How could you want to turn that off?"

Porter dropped his notebook next to Wayne's and returned to get some coffee.

"So, Wayne, the first session is Business Development. Just what is that?"

Always quick with commentary, Sean answered first.

"It's sales without quotas, hence no accountability. Not to jade you newcomers but Fred Lakota, our VP of BD is a total sleazebag. We call him 'Lucky Lakota'. He always seems to screw things up but never has to deal with the consequences. The smart reps keep him the hell away from their districts. It's particularly galling because we see press releases from VibraWeb on a weekly basis about some new partnership they made. Only last week, they had a major commitment from Perot Systems. Lakota's next partnership will be his first."

"Well, Porter," Wayne said, "in theory, BD is supposed to build partnerships with other companies in the industry to do things like resell our products or imbed our technology in their products or services. They also try to get the big consulting firms like CSC and Ernst & Young to adopt our products in their practices."

David Young entered the room.

"Now, there's one guy who doesn't take any BD crap," Sean said, loudly enough for Young to hear.

"Sean Murphy. Why is it that your voice is always the first one I hear?"

“I want to always be in your thoughts.”

“Yeah, like a bad dream. Your references warned me about that. I should have wondered why they wouldn’t hire you.”

“We were discussing the valuable and productive role BD plays in our sales efforts.”

“Shit. Counterproductive, you mean. I can’t even talk to Lucky any more. The last serious conversation I had with him ended with me screaming into the phone about how my guys were always taking it up the ass for him. It’s a good thing I’m not based in HQ. I’d have strangled the bastard by now.”

Reaper returned to the coffee stand for a refill.

“This is always the most productive part of these meetings,” he said. “BD has always helped me out. Way more than those losers in Marketing.”

Porter watched as Young, Murphy and even Wayne’s jaws dropped.

“You can’t be serious,” Young asked. “He’s a total asshole.”

“Be careful, Dave. He might be your boss one of these days.”

“In your wet dreams, Grim.”

Reaper gave Young a look of disgust and returned to his seat.

“Oh, excuse me a second.” Murphy crept up behind Reaper. “So, Gary; are you *READY*, tiger?”

Reaper whipped around. “You have a problem, Murphy?”

“Nope. Making sure you’re psyched for BD ... *TIGUURRR!*”

Arriving for the BD presentation, Niles O’Rourke was intercepted by Bill Engler. He asked O’Rourke to step outside to the parking area of the Sofitel. “Niles, what the hell is going on in New York?”

“I’m not sure what you mean, Bill. We’ve done pretty well there, as I think you are aware.” O’Rourke wasn’t used to having Engler in his face so he knew something must be really bugging him.

“Well, in the last day I’ve received at least five emails from accounts in New York who are really pissed off. I got one a few minutes ago from someone named Melani at Potential Investing threatening my first born and my gonads. He claims we lied to him about the mainframe connector. He further accused us of tampering with the contract during closing. He said that the commitment for the connector was in the contract at one point and then, poof, it wasn’t in the final version. Do I have to eat my words from yesterday? Remember? The ones about how proud I am of our integrity, our customers’ happiness?” Engler bit off the syllables through his gritted teeth.

“Let’s get Presby out here. He would have the detailed information. But I have to point out to you, again, that we have to get someone internal to do contracts. The outside law firm doesn’t exercise controls like being sure that line items are actually shipping product and stuff like that.”

Engler winced. O'Rourke was right. He'd been warned multiple times by O'Rourke and his CFO, Jay Antoniazzi, that his controls were lax.

"Okay, find Presby and let's get this sorted out."

Niles ducked into the conference room and scanned for his Eastern Region sales director. He spotted him in the second row just as Presby happened to look back at the door. He gave him a quick index finger pointing to the lobby.

Presby let the door close slowly to avoid the clanging of the panic bar. He turned to see a very grim CEO.

"Good morning, Bill. You need me for something?" he said, not wanting to hear the answer.

"I want to know what the hell is going on in New York. One of our customers threatened my first born if we didn't get him his mainframe connector. Who was the wise guy who promised it in the first place? I thought we made it clear that it wouldn't be ready until Q2."

"What's the account?"

"Potential Investing, but I've got flame mail from several others as well, all from New York. So what's the deal?"

"Potential is definitely a Gatto account. He plays it pretty loose out there but it would be a stretch for him to blatantly commit to something like -"

"Commit, my ass! You mean he made it up, right?" Engler interrupted. "There's no gray area here. If he sold them this thing, then he was lying. It couldn't have been clearer about the status of that product. It wasn't on the price list after all."

"Ah, Bill, actually the connector *was* on the price list," Presby reminded Engler. "Marketing put it on, inadvertently, for a while in Q4 before the decision to delay release."

Engler gritted his teeth and seethed. "That's not enough of a fig leaf, guys. Look, find out what is going on with these New York accounts and get back to me. You know I place a high priority on having 100 percent of our customers as references. It looks to me like we have a lot of repair work to do in New York. Niles, I've grown to regret letting your predecessor hire Gatto. I didn't think his style was going to fly here. If he's become a loose cannon, then tie him down or throw him overboard. I won't have that here. I'm used to customers telling me how comfortable they are doing business with us. It is totally unacceptable for any erosion in that reputation. Is that understood?"

Engler alternated his laser-like gaze from Presby to O'Rourke. They both knew he was laying the responsibility on their shoulders. The last time they had heard him call something "totally unacceptable" and the situation wasn't rectified, the VP of Marketing disappeared.

“I’ll get to the bottom of it today,” Presby assured both Engler and O’Rourke.

Engler went into the BD presentation while Presby and O’Rourke hung back.

“Ken, I don’t appreciate being Pearl Harbored like that. It indicates a lack of control on your part.”

“Look, that’s bullshit, Niles, and you know it. I inherited the bastard when I came in last year. Your predecessor hired him and I guess there was a different hiring profile that year. Besides that, our internal controls on contracts stink. Am I supposed to analyze every contract to be sure the rep is on the up and up? I’m trying to crack the whip here.”

“You weren’t cracking the whip a little too hard, were you? Or was the prospect of additional bonus so attractive that you and Gatto bent the rules?”

“I’m offended, Niles, that you would think such a thing of me! I simply wanted to motivate everyone to close out the year strong.”

“Well, based on what seems to be transpiring, I’m not going to give Gatto credit for anything he closed in December, let alone double credit. It’s tainted money. If he really did alter contracts, that’s grounds for dismissal.”

Presby wanted to ask if that meant he wouldn’t get credit either, but quickly swallowed the question.

“I’m having breakouts this afternoon and I’ll get to the bottom of it,” Presby said, appearing to be in charge. “I already have a guy, Wayne Angelis, ready to go in New York if necessary. I’ll figure out a way to shift things around.”

“Do whatever it takes,” O’Rourke said, jamming his finger into Presby’s chest. “We won’t be able to paper over this with Engler. He is taking it very personally, and frankly so do I. I’m holding you responsible for fixing this fiasco.”

“Will do.”

Presby slipped back into the BD presentation but couldn’t focus on Lakota. He looked around for Gatto but couldn’t find him. *Blowing off the meetings as usual*, he reminded himself. His eyes fell on Wayne, who had his hand raised to ask Lakota a question. He pondered how he could spin this in his breakout with Wayne. It would be a challenge to sugarcoat this mess for his brand new rep.

Lakota acknowledged Wayne’s raised hand.

“Hi, Fred. I’m Wayne Angelis, covering New Jersey and Connecticut.”

“Welcome, Wayne! Good to see a new face!”

“Thanks. I understand that you have responsibility for recruiting third parties to build connectors for us. Who on your staff handles that process? I have several good candidates in my district.”

“Oh, boy, did he step into a pile of dog shit,” Gustavson whispered loud enough for the back row to hear, setting off a new round of chuckles.

“I wonder what excuse he’ll use this time,” Sean Murphy said a little louder.

Wayne turned to see what the buzz behind him was all about. All he saw were shaking heads.

“Well, Wayne,” Lakota started. “Right now, I’m dealing with that on a case-by-case basis. Since you’re new here, perhaps we should take that offline.”

“Oh, Fred?” Gustavson asked, standing and towering over the back row. “I think we’d all like to hear this. You didn’t have any info for us at the last sales meeting.”

“Bill! Good to see you! Yes, well, as you know we have requests for new connectors all the time so we are looking at farming out some of the work.”

“You’ve been ‘looking’ at it since at least July,” The Swede said. “What’s the hold up? We are losing business because we don’t connect to everything yet. Every deal now needs one more connector than we offer. Take that customer service application, Clarify. You promised someone to do that one in October. What’s the status?”

“Engineering decided to do that one inhouse.”

“How can they?” Young asked. “No one in Engineering has any expertise in Clarify. We have dozens of potential partners who know Clarify.”

“Boy, did I hit a sore topic, huh Porter?” Wayne whispered.

“No kidding. Sounds like Murphy and Young were right about Lakota.”

“I’m sure, but none of them have InUnison experience,” Lakota replied. “That’s a much harder proposition.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it, Lakota,” Dave Young countered. “We can’t expect our engineers to know all these systems we have to connect with. But we’re losing a lot of opportunity because we don’t have these connectors. We have to get going with third parties. Now!”

There were loud “harrumphs” and “fuckin’ A, bro’s” in agreement.

“I have plenty of beltway bandits who could write these things,” Federal Government rep, Al Fisher, said. “It’d be no praaablen.” Everything was “no praablen” to the hoarse-voiced Fisher.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen! Patience! You know these things take time,” Lakota responded with a grin.

“You haven’t signed one third-party yet. That’s unacceptable,” The Swede said, pointing at Lakota. More “fuckin’ A’s”. “Who are you talking to right now?”

Lakota was still smiling. “Guys, I need to do a lot of prep work first; I don’t have a contract ready, for instance. Heh, heh, you know how lawyers are.”

“Can we at least see the draft?” Wayne asked.

“What good would that do?”

“We could start greasing the skids with our third party contacts. Also, I’m sure we could come up with sample agreements. We have a lot of experienced people in this room. I would think that we could fix whatever is wrong —”

That took the smile away from Lakota.

“There’s nothing *wrong* with it! I have the responsibility to manage these things. I don’t need twenty or thirty opinions on the matter.”

“So, again, when can we get it?” The Swede asked.

“Soon.”

“How soon?” Wayne pressed.

“Maybe by the end of the month.”

“Maybe? Is that a commitment?”

“I’ll give it my best effort, what did you say your name was?”

“Wayne Angelis.”

“Ah, yes. Wayne. Well, you’re new here. I’m sure it will take you a while to get acclimated. Now, moving on to our next topic, strategic partners...”

What the hell did that mean? Wayne wondered. He turned to Gustavson, who was still standing, shaking his head. The Swede could only respond to Wayne with a frown and a shrug.

“...and to cover that, I’d like to introduce our new Director of Strategic Partnerships, Wa Chu.”

“Gesundheit!” Sean Murphy said, cracking up half of the room.

“*Another* director in Business Development?” Dave Young said, getting up and heading for the door. “This is fucked. I’m outta here.”

Day three of the sales kickoff found several hobbling about the Sofitel or displaying black and blue fingers or patched wounds. Those badges of courage identified the wearer as a participant in Engler’s basketball tournament. Back at headquarters, the CEO had his middle finger splinted to his fourth finger, having dislocated it on The Swede’s face and Tony Tibbetts, the mainframe connector engineer, had his foot in a bucket of ice courtesy of being stepped on by Wayne Angelis, driving to the basket. The injuries were fewer than normal.

Once away from the reality distortion of the mass sales meeting, the past year was forgotten and the new year was laid out. At InUnison, the regional sales managers summoned each sales rep to his room for a “one-on-one”.

They would to discuss any new geographical alignments and of course, the new individual Numbers.

Reaper was the first to be ushered into Presby's room. He showed up fifteen minutes late and soaking wet.

"Gary! What the hell happened to you?"

"Well, Ken, I had to run out on an errand and, well, you know it's raining like hell. You know how Januarys are out here and it's been worse than usual this year..."

"Couldn't you have at least changed? I feel like I'm looking at a stray dog or something."

"Oooo, that's a good one, Ken!" Reaper said, laughing. Only it wasn't a joke to Presby who didn't appreciate falling behind schedule. He simply offered Reaper a chair and a towel.

"Listen, Ken, I have no business in my patch. You may think Atlanta is a major metro area with lots of growth companies, but believe me; I can't possibly make my Number this year without more territory. Every deal needs a lot of systems engineering resources and my SE partner is close to cracking. Marketing sucks and I don't get any professional services help. When I was at Sybase we..."

Presby had heard this before and would have none of it, particularly any more references to Sybase. While he welcomed a healthy back and forth with his reps, he was tough as nails when it came to whining reps who tried to put one over on him.

"Well, that's interesting, Gary. Let's see, you're partnered with Julia Berkowski, one of the best SEs in the company; BD has introduced you to lots of valuable partners and after all, you *almost* made your Number," he said, drawing out "almost" as if slowly pulling a sword out of Grim's midsection. "So, I'm confident that you can grow your business at least 100%. Have a nice day and let's go sell! Beat VibraWeb!"

After a few other Eastern Region reps had their opportunities to grovel, Tom Gatto's turn came up. Given his performance as Number One, he entered Presby's room with a swagger. He had been practicing his demands for days, including some trial arguments in between trysts with Suzy.

After the initial pleasantries with Presby, Gatto swung for the fences. He figured that he didn't have anything to lose; if Presby caved, he could still stiff VibraWeb.

"Okay, Ken, enough chit chat. This year, I'm not going to take any of your usual crap. I came through in December, I'm Number One. I want a district to manage with an admin and three reps reporting to me. Given my track record of two years blowing out my numbers and"

Presby wasn't in the mood for this power play given his conversation with Engler and O'Rourke. He went on the offensive.

“Oooooo, mister BIG TIME!” Presby interrupted, laying on the sarcasm. “Well, I’d looove to hear how you’re going to manage a cumulative number of \$9 million, since that’s what you’d get if I gave you a district to manage. And, of course, it’s going to take you two quarters to staff your district, so what are you going to do to generate revenue in the meantime?”

“But, but, I’ve *earned* this!” Gatto said, shocked that his challenge was being met.

“Earned? How? Just by making your numbers? All the potential reps you’d inherit think that you’re an arrogant bastard. How hard do you think they are going to work for you? What are you going to do to make sure that they fulfill their commitments? SEs hate your guts. Youngster would like to see you drawn and quartered in Times Square since we can’t hold on to any technical talent in New York. And now I’m hearing that you like to play fast and loose with product commitments. You’ve managed to make your messes visible all the way up to Engler. What were you thinking promising people the mainframe connector?”

Shit, Gatto thought to himself. *How’d he know about Potential already? Must be that rep-basher head of Professional Services.*

“Look, that Melani guy is insane; he could be saying anything to save his ass.”

“Gee, did I name anyone in particular? And there are five or six others out there. Any other time bombs you want to tell me about?”

He’d never seen Presby this confrontational, in fact, didn’t think he had it in him.

Gatto counterattacked. “I don’t suppose you remember our conversation in early December, ‘close them however you can’? You remember; ‘finesse’ them, be ‘creative’? ‘You’ll get double credit’; ‘You’ll catch The Swede!’ Well, that’s what I did. And where’s the reward? I look like a total sap busting my ass for your benefit.”

“I challenged you to help the company achieve its goals, that’s all.”

Bastard! He’s going to hang me out to dry!

Presby seized back the initiative. “So let’s take inventory here. To be Number One you lied to customers, possibly altered contracts without review by our outside council – oh, that’s felony fraud – and put the reputation of the InUnison family at risk. And you think you should be a manager? Some example you set. You can’t browbeat reps – or PS engineers, by the way – into submission. You need to show leadership and frankly, you’ve done everything but. We treat each other with respect and as peers. You don’t even bother to participate in team conference calls. I happen to agree with your peers, you *are* an arrogant bastard and I’ll be damned if I’m going to depend on you for a big chunk of my Number when you have the morals of a cobra. Your territory is enough of a liability,

what with pissed off customers who think you lied to them about what our products could do for them. It's not the InUnison way. Oh, by the way; until these accounts get straightened out, you're not getting paid on them, and that includes what counts toward the rep rankings. So much for the Rolex, buddy."

He gripped his wrist where the Rolex was to go. "You *BASTARD!* This is how you treat your number one rep? You sucker me into doing your dirty work to make your bonus and then deny the whole thing? You and O'Rourke talk a good game, but in the end you're as manipulative and abusive as anyone. You make it sound like InUnison is the fucking Waltons. I think Corleone is more appropriate. 'Yo, Gatto, make 'em an offer they can't refuse'. You're all a bunch of gangsters..."

"That's enough! We've treated everyone equally and with respect. Your problem is you think the world should spin to your cycle, and it doesn't, pal, I'm sorry. We play by the rules, and that starts right at the top."

"Oh, you mean, Bill Engler, the Godfather? Ooooo, sorry, wouldn't want to upset the family atmosphere but I don't kiss rings, or any other body part. This sales team is pathetic, it's worse than mediocre and THAT starts at the top."

"I SAID THAT'S ENOUGH!!!" Presby yelled, standing now, and close to hyperventilating.

"AND I SAY..." Gatto said, raising the middle finger of his right hand, "FUUUUUUUUU YOUUUU! This is the way you treat your best rep? Well, keep your fucking family, I'm OUTTA HERE!"

Gatto stormed out of the room, almost running into Wayne who was arriving for his one-on-one. He pointed his finger at Wayne and screamed into his face, "It didn't take you long to find that knife to stick in my back again, did it?"

"I don't know what –"

Gatto started to back Wayne up into a doorway. "Don't give me that shit! Watch *your* back, Angelis!" he said.

Presby appeared in the doorway. "Get the fuck out of here, Gatto!"

Gatto stormed off down the hall, shouting, "Watch out for those land mines I planted, Angelis!"

"Please come in Wayne," Presby said, composing himself. "I have some breaking news to share with you."

* * *

While the reps were having their breakouts, the systems engineers were back in Salon 2 getting an immersion of technical details from the Product Marketing and Engineering departments. This was to be a grueling session, as the SEs were in a very ugly – and still hung over – mood, frustrated with the lack of information coming out of Marketing about the forthcoming release. The SEs wanted to start demoing the pre-release of InUnison's

new Data Transformation tool and Rule Agent but Engineering wouldn't allow it. Product Marketing, nominally in charge of such decisions, was in the middle getting pushed by the SEs and pulled by Engineering.

"Look, guys, I want to get this into your hands as soon as possible but I can't overcome the engineers right now." Phil Lansing, Director of Product Marketing was pleading for some understanding.

"Phil, the reps are already *selling* it for Christ's sake!" Sean Murphy said, ever the first to speak up. "Look, everyone knows that it is Samantha "Dr. No" Brinks who is the hang up. I think she needs to get laid or something."

"Are you volunteering?"

"Nooooooo waaaayyy."

That loosened the tension a bit as everyone chuckled – including Julia – but the seriousness soon returned.

"Oh, I'm supposed to control Engineering," Lansing said. "But you guys can't control the information the rep gives out? We don't have a whole team of Gattos out there do we?"

Sean parried, "Nice try, Phil. We announced this at that San Jose show last month. If the field can't show it, why did you start creating demand for it? Doing that is like giving the reps *carte blanche* to start talking about it. And God only knows the extent of the fantasy they'll be spreading. Please tell me that it will at least be on time."

"Um, well..."

"I thought so." Murphy sat down in disgust.

Phil knew Sean was right. It frustrated Phil that while he was, in theory, responsible for the product development lifecycle, he was missing some key authority to discharge those responsibilities, authority zealously protected by VP of Engineering, Samantha Brinks. "Sean, we'll get it to you ASAP. I can't commit to a date yet."

While they could be tough to deal with, Phil had a lot of respect for the SE team and genuinely wanted to give them the weapons and ammunition to adequately sell the products.

Dissatisfied, Sean slouched in his chair and Phil moved on to other topics.

"Gatto imploded and won't be with us any more. Frankly, he never really fit in around here and ..."

Wayne tried to understand the ramifications of this. It certainly explained the comments from Presby at the bar. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. *Sure, not having to share the territory would be great*, he thought, *but dancing on the corpse of another rep? Even Gatto's?* Wayne knew it was bad enough to manage any account transition but an involuntary, cold turkey situation like this?

“Now, one thing you need to know is that there will be some issues to address with some of our New York accounts so you need to jump on in and get acquainted quickly.”

“Not a problem, Ken, but what kind of ‘issues?’”

“Oh, a few outstanding commitments Gatto made which need some attention. We’ll get those to you right away. We’ve had a couple of product schedule slippages and we have to smooth some ruffled feathers.”

Uh oh. The hair went up on the back of Wayne’s neck. *There’s a lot more to this than a few “issues”.* He realized that this was worse than cold turkey; it was going to be Wayne flambé’. Before he could try to get Presby to elaborate about Gatto’s “land mines” curse, he was getting the bum’s rush out the door.

“...and I think your potential with InUnison is unlimited! Sooo, let’s go sell! Beat VibraWeb!” Presby clasped his right hand in Wayne’s, smiled broadly and ushered him out the door.

News of the blow up between Presby and Gatto swept through the InUnison sales meeting. There weren’t too many reps upset that prima donna Gatto was out, especially in the Northeast region as they were relieved that they wouldn’t be reporting to the Evil One, a rumor making the rounds.

“Can’t believe he just up and quit. Not good for the reputation,” sniffed The Swede. “No class.” *I better find O’Rourke right away and remind him that I can handle some of those accounts from Chicago.*

Reaper, who fancied himself a friend, called Gatto on his cell phone.

“Gatto, what the hell are you doing? You already have somewhere to go?”

“It won’t take long. I always have headhunters calling me.”

“Well, old buddy, remember your friend, Gary. I’d love to work with you again.” Reaper immediately set off to find Presby and offer to take over AT&T and any other accounts that might have an Atlanta presence. A P.O. box anywhere in the Southeast would do for justification.

Gatto closed his cell phone, shaking his head.

Yeah, he’d love to work with me. In his dreams, the mediocre bastard.

He was still fighting the urge to race back to Presby’s room and wring his neck. He had never been so shabbily treated, even when he was let go by NeXT and he wanted a pound of flesh for his humiliation. He realized that his best chance would be with his former enemy, VibraWeb.

Gatto knew the way to the Santa Clara Marriott where VibraWeb was holding its kickoff meeting and jumped into his car immediately. Mid-day traffic on Route 101 was cooperative and he made it in 20 minutes,

hydroplaning through the January rains. Concerned that he'd be recognized as an enemy agent, he planned to call Means from the parking garage.

"Means," George barked into the cell phone.

"Hi, this is Tom Gatto. Looks like I'll be able to start right away," he said, going on to explain what happened at the Sofitel.

"Outstanding! Can you get down here?"

"I'm pulling into the garage now."

"Okay, look for me outside the Monterey Boardroom. It's in the garden section of the hotel, out in the back."

"I'll be there in five."

He marched into the lobby of the Marriott, checking the direction signs for the Monterey Boardroom. The room was way in the back of the low rise rooms and the hallway was practically deserted except for a couple of people outside the conference room. He stepped up to the impatient looking man first.

"Hi, I'm looking for George Means?"

"You Gatto?"

"Yes."

"Great! Let's go out the lobby and go over things."

Gatto ran to keep up with the high strung Means.

They made their way back to the lobby, stopped for coffee and settled into armchairs off the lobby.

In a moment, Simon Hager came storming through the lobby and detoured when he saw Means.

"What the fuck are you doing out here? Marketing is presenting and as usual has things all fucked up. Get your ass back in the fucking meeting."

Means could have strangled Hager for putting on a tirade in front of Gatto, but had to take it.

"Simon, I'd like you to meet Tom Gatto, our new sales manager for New York. We stole him from InUnison!"

"InUnison, huh. What makes you so fucking special?"

Gatto didn't flinch. "Listen, I was kicking your company's ass all over Manhattan. *That's* kind of special."

Hager liked that. "Excellent! Someone who won't take any fucking shit. Anyway, like I said ... HAGER!" He answered his cell phone in mid-sentence. "No fucking way – you better get into the Marketing presentation – I said NO FUCKING WAY, what isn't clear about that? Five hundred fucking thousand or zero." A mother with her five-year-old in tow fled the lobby, horrified.

Means pulled Gatto by the arm and led him back to the Monterey Boardroom. Once Hager got on the phone, there was no way to have a meaningful conversation.

Inside the conference room, Gatto found it difficult to find an open seat. The room was cramped and the air was already getting pretty ripe even though the outside doors were open. He slipped into the back of the room and stood while the VP of Marketing continued his presentation.

“If we are to achieve our goal of being thought-leader, revenue-leader and technology-leader in our target product category, we have to have quality referenceable, deployed customers who are willing to participate in advertising and aggressive outbound communication initiatives ...”

Gatto didn't quite grasp what he was talking about but hoped that maybe it was because he missed the first several PowerPoint slides. A young attendee got up from the back row of seats and stood next to Gatto.

Whispering to Gatto he said, “Make any sense to you?”

“Typical marketing bullshit.”

“Eric Miller, Bay Area rep. Are you just starting with us?”

“Looks like it. New York.”

“Oh, right, Thomas finally snapped. It was only a matter of time. He took this stuff way too seriously. Anyway, as usual the Bomber has latched onto the latest marketing craze without doing his homework. He's about as original as concrete sidewalks.”

“The Bomber?”

“Yeah, that's Eugene Kaczynski. Unfortunate coincidence in names which we, of course, have no shame in taking advantage of. Gene is so anal he's an easy mark.”

“Well, he's bombing with me so far.” Gatto recalled Steve Jobs saying once that there weren't any good marketing people left in Silicon Valley because all the good ones were now CEOs starting their own companies. Over the years, Gatto decided he must be right.

Eric continued his commentary. “You'll love our partners people. Really know how to sign up those consulting firms. In the four companies I've been with, this is the first time I've actually seen production, I mean real business, from a partners group. They rock.”

“I know what you mean. I'm not used to that.”

“Where you from, Tom?”

“Um, could we step outside and chat? Sounds like you could give me a lot of insight to this organization.” They stepped out into the hall.

“I left InUnison today.”

“NO WAY!”

Tom laughed and tried to set his new best friend at ease.

“No, I'm no spy. They screwed me, I left. Simple.”

“Weren't you making your Numbers?”

“Number one in the company.”

“Okay, you were throwing down with the VP's admin then?”

“None of your business on that,” Gatto said with a wink. “So, what inside dirt can you give me?”

“The management is a bunch of assholes but they have their eye on the revenue and IPO balls. Have you met Hager yet?”

“Yes, out in the lobby. Hyper dude.”

“To put it mildly. I don’t think the guy ever sleeps. He’ll call you any time of day or night to go over your deals. He’s also the most abusive manager I’ve ever seen.”

“What about George Means?”

“I don’t know Means all that well, but I haven’t heard anything from the guys in the East about any interference. The usual bitching about pipeline reviews. It’s Hager you have to watch out for. He’ll sort of parachute into your patch and want to go on calls.”

Gatto shook his head. “I usually avoid involving too many people – particularly sales management – in my deals. How do you manage that?”

“You can’t. I try to stay under Hager’s radar and make my Number. Be careful who you let Hager talk to. Most prospects end up hating his guts. But like I said, these guys are driven, especially Hager, Tsai, and Singh. Singh definitely has a chip on his shoulder. He really has a thing about becoming a legend in the Valley, right up there with Jobs, Ellison, and Clark. I tell you, it *is* infectious.”

“Can you put Tsai and Singh in front of customers?”

“If carefully scripted. They *can* be trained. Chin Tsai can be awesome with senior technical people. He can do the vision thing like nobody’s business and he’s great at handling technical objections. Unfortunately, he’s also an arrogant SOB who will rip a stupid customer apart if he senses weakness or if some prospect calls his baby ugly. We have to be very careful to control his visits. That’s one of the reasons we do a lot with video. When we bring prospects in, we keep it pretty controlled. Kaczynski owns all that stuff.”

Gatto pondered all this. He had dealt with assholes before and succeeded. If what Miller was telling him was true, this would be the ride he was looking for. He was starting to feel comfortable with the change.

“Oh, hey, I have a tip for you. My cousin is CIO at Azalea Financial. He’s fighting a battle right now with some new guy over integration issues. He could really use our software. I was home for Christmas and talked to him about it. I had passed it on to Thomas but I don’t think that he followed up. I’ll introduce you to him, Stewart Miller. He’s a tough bastard and he’s got clout.”

“That’s excellent! Thanks! Azalea is a pretty big fish.”

The final night of the InUnison Kickoff Sales Meeting included the annual awards banquet. After another two hours of open bar, the well-

lubricated group sat down to dried out lemon herb chicken, soggy green beans and tossed salad. Gary Reaper reminded everyone – as he did every year – that Sybase’s banquet included filet mignon. As usual, no one believed him.

While there were some seriously coveted awards like Gustavson’s Rep of the Year – courtesy of Gatto’s departure – and Wiley Nelson’s SE of the Year, it was the culture of the company to be sure “everybody got a lollipop”, some hunk of Lucite or slate with the company logo embedded and some cute motivational slogan like “The Best of the Best”. There would be an endless series of made up – supposedly humorous – awards such as “Unsung Hero”, usually given to the SE unfortunate enough to be paired with the least productive rep. That award went to Julia Berkowski who didn’t react as if it was much of an honor.

Finally, at the end of the awards, came the roll call of 100% Club; those reps, SEs and other key “friends of sales” from other departments in the company would be called to the stage. Once all the members of “the Club” were present, the worst kept secret of the meeting would be announced: the site of the Club Trip. Everyone knew it to be St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. Suzy Kestral was known to have made several trips to scout the hotels and facilities, breaking the hearts of several reps who had volunteered to chaperone her.

Niles O’Rourke stepped to the front microphone, flanked by the club winners. He gave the signal for the video to start as he unfolded a couple of sheets of paper.

“Oh please, not a corny poem,” Gustavson whispered to Nelson. He had heard from his contacts at O’Rourke’s previous company that he aspired to be a poet laureate. The result was usually strained abdominal muscles, as no one wanted to be the one to guffaw in the middle of a serious literary discourse.

**“There once was a sales rep short of his
Number
who awoke late in the quarter from his
slumber...”**

Gatto was able to get a room at the Marriott for the final night of the meeting and was the toast of that night’s libations in Champion’s Sports Bar. He was quite a celebrity with his new sales colleagues for having jumped to VibraWeb directly from a key competitor. He was a bit late for the closing session – due to the late night and lingering tequila buzz – and slipped into the back of the Monterrey Boardroom where Hager was spewing fire and brimstone.

“Now, listen. I need you to get out there, FIND THE MONEY, and get it off the fucking table and move on to the next table. We need MARKET SHARE, MARKET SHARE, ... FUCKING MARKET SHARE! And of course when you do that YOU will make a lot of fucking money. Where’s Susan Sheffield?” Hager asked, waving his hand across the audience looking for his top rep for the year. She had brought in several big accounts and ended up achieving 300% of her Number.

“There she is! Stand up! Don’t be shy! Folks, this is our number one rep.” He waited for the applause and cheers to die down. “How much did you make last year?”

Sheffield stood up, giggled nervously and tucked her bleached blonde hair behind her right ear. Like the majority of the crowd, she was pretty hung over and wasn’t sure she was steady enough to stand.

“Uh, quite a bit, Simon,” she said, not taking him seriously.

“Come on, don’t be humble. How much? 500, 600K?”

“Really, Simon, I don’t think....”

“HOW FUCKING MUCH?”

“Seven hundred fifty-five thousand” she murmured into her shoes.

“Didn’t quite catch that, Susan!”

Totally pissed now, she yelled “SEVEN HUNDRED FIFTY-FIVE, DAMN IT!”

“See, that’s what YOU ALL should be shooting for this year,” Hager said.

Susan sat back down, feeling totally humiliated. Her head was really pounding now under the mix of rage, embarrassment and leftover tequila. Only Simon Hager could take an achievement that she was very proud of and make it feel dirty.

The rest of the team gave her a standing ovation, not so much in tribute for the accomplishment but more in sympathy. *There but for the grace of God...*

What wimps, Gatto thought. He would have been proud to announce his earnings in a loud clear voice. Reps seldom talked openly about their actual compensation but, fact was, every rep knew exactly what all the other reps were making simply based on their quota achievements and knowing the accelerators. Why not shout your achievements to the world? That was what it was all about.

As he recognized Sheffield’s title along with the rest of the VibraWeb sales team he smirked to himself.

I intend to be the one standing next year, using Angelis’ corpse as a riser