

## **Tom Gives His First Performance Review**

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It was Tom's second week with *Empowerment International*, a company that created and sold self-help products to teach people and businesses how to be successful. He was already having buyer's remorse.

Tom's title was "Director of Outbound Sales." Ostensibly, he was responsible for the outbound sales operations and staff. When he was hired, he was told that it would be his show to run as he saw fit. In reality, he was an order taker for the company's president, Don Helmsley. In fact, everyone in the company did as the "Don" ordered. And, now, the "Don" had written a performance review for one of Tom's sales people, Greg Lovitt, and he wanted Tom to deliver it.

It was a harsh review. Tom disagreed with its conclusions and wondered if there was some animosity or conflict between the two men. Both were in their middle sixties and he heard that both had come from the same small town in northern California.

In the short time Tom had been there, he had observed Greg working the phones and thought he was excellent with the prospects. It was true that his quantity of calls were far less than those of the other sales staff, but Tom felt the quality of those conversations were far superior and would ultimately lead to more sales. Tom would have written a positive review, but instead was being forced to deliver an evaluation that included penalties and an ultimatum. Greg's job was on the line if he couldn't pick up the volume of his outbound calls.

Now Greg sat in Tom's office, on the other side of his desk, looking composed and ready to face what was coming. He was close to retirement age, if not already past it. He was an elegant, well-dressed man, although his suit showed some age. He had a full head of silver hair, an old-fashioned pencil thin mustache and piercing, ice blue eyes. He looked like he could have been the Maître'D of an upper-scale sophisticated restaurant. It was only when he smiled, that the illusion of elegance vanished. His teeth were yellowed and there two noticeable gaps where a few were missing. So Greg rarely smiled.

Tom was uncomfortable. He had two copies of the review, one for himself and one for Greg. But he couldn't bring himself to hand over the copy to Greg and was having difficulty deciding how to begin the conversation.

Greg spoke first. "Thoreau is right."

"Huh?" Tom responded.

Greg pointed to the framed poster on the wall behind Tom. It was one of the motivational posters produced and sold by the company. Tom turned around and looked. There was a beautiful image of a couple holding hands on the bow of a sailboat. They were maybe in their later thirties. Tom guessed they were married. They were happy and smiling and looking out over a deep blue sea under a brilliant blue sky. Underneath them was the quote.

***Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.***  
Henry David Thoreau

“You still have time.” Greg said.

Tom turned back around to face him and asked, “What do you mean?”

“You are still young. You still have time to try things, to experiment with life and test the possibilities. I don’t.” Greg gave a friendly smile, although he kept his lips together to hide his teeth. Then he leaned a fraction closer and asked, “Are you married?”

“Yes.”

“Any kids?”

“No, not yet. We’re waiting for the right time.” Tom was confused. It seemed like he had lost control of the meeting before it had even started. At the same time, he wanted to be polite and he was curious. He asked, “Are you married? Do you have any kids?”

“I had a son. He died in the 83 invasion of Grenada.” Greg’s smile faded and his eyes dulled for a moment as his gaze shifted to the floor.

The office suddenly seemed small and stuffy. Tom felt an urge to get up and open the door. “I’m sorry,” He said knowing the response was inadequate.

After a moment, Greg looked back up at Tom and shrugged. “It was a long time ago. My wife has never quite gotten over it. She’s very ill now and requires oxygen and medicine and almost constant attention. Our life is hard and not what we imagined it would be. It didn’t turn out like that poster.” He studied Tom for a second and then continued, “I’m telling you this not to gain your sympathy, but to help you understand.”

“Understand what?”

Greg gave a rueful smile with closed lips and then said, “My real name is Greg Lovitt, but my stage name was Greg Love. It sounds almost magical doesn’t

it?” His smile broadened and his lips involuntarily parted. “In the early fifties, I was an actor and an extra on the lot at Paramount. The ‘Golden Age’ of Hollywood was starting to wind down. But there were still lots of stars there. I remember Ronald Reagan and Tony Curtis and Chuck Heston and Bill Holden. I used to go out drinking with Bill. And I remember Liz Taylor and Marilyn Monroe and Grace Kelly. In some way or other, I worked with them all. There was one day I will always remember clearly. I was working on the set of some ridiculous costume adventure with Tony Curtis. I was dressed like a medieval knight. I was young and dashing and everything seemed possible. Janet Leigh was in the picture. She hadn’t started dating Tony yet. She was... radiant. I had an enormous crush on her. I remember standing there with my fake armor on and my fake sword at my side just staring at her. She saw me looking and she gave me the biggest most welcoming smile I had ever seen. Then she blew me a kiss and winked at me. I planned to ask her for a date after the shoot.”

Tom had forgotten about the review he was supposed to be giving. He asked, “What happened? Did you go out with her?”

Greg laughed. “No, Tony beat me to it.”

Tom laughed too and for a moment they sat in silence, both lost in their own thoughts. Then Greg spoke in a quiet voice. “The very next day I met my future wife. She was an extra too and she looked a lot like Janet. We started going out and soon fell in love. We married just three months later. A year after that, she was pregnant and I took a sales job to help support us.”

“Did you ever get back to acting?”

“I did a few cigarette and car commercials. Had a walk-on part on *I Love Lucy* and small bits on *Sgt. Preston of the Yukon* and some westerns and other shows. But I never made much and always needed to take other jobs to support my family. Then, I don’t remember when exactly, I realized I had given up on acting. I was so caught up in life and responsibilities; I had let my dream slip away. And that’s what I want you to understand.”

Tom looked at him. “You gave up your dream.”

Greg nodded. Then he spoke again, this time with an intensity that caught Tom by surprise. “You’re young. You don’t have kids yet. You have time. Don’t make the same mistake I did. Whatever your dream is, follow it. If you don’t. If you put it off. If you give up. Well, then one day you may find yourself sitting across a desk in front of a much younger man, about to be chastised for being a... a failure.”

Tom didn’t know how to respond. He looked at the performance review on his desk between them and felt embarrassed.

Greg saw the look on his face and understood. He reached over and picked the document up. “Is this my performance review?”

“Yes.”

“Did Helmsley write it?”

“Yes, but I don’t agree with it. I want to rewrite it. You’re... you’re not a failure. I’ve watched you. You’re good at what you do.” Tom held out his hand to take the paper back.

Greg held on to the review refusing to give it back. Then he laid it on the desk and taking a pen from his inside jacket pocket, signed the document with a flourish as if he was signing an autograph. “In the grand scheme of things, this is nothing.” He said, pointing to the review with the pen in his hand. Then he put the pen away, stood up and extended his hand to Tom.

Tom was stunned and it took a moment for him to stand up and take the offered hand. He was surprised at the firmness of the grip. “Thank you.” He said.

The old man smiled, this time showing his teeth and responded. “Don’t end up like me. There’s still time for you. Listen to Thoreau. Live the life you have imagined.” Then he turned and left the office.



Mark Grant

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