

My Definition of Insanity

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1.

It was supposed to be the job that catapulted me from poverty into the comfortable world of the working middle-class, but instead it became the dark cloud hanging over my head, like an umbrella dripping of corporate disease. I was told during my interview that I would make \$50,000 a year if I stayed motivated. It wasn't long before I realized, that interview was more like a treaty offering, and I was the Native American who accepted the whiskey and tobacco for my valuable hunting and farming land.

I was fresh out of college with a not so impressive associates degree in advertising design and communication. The plan was to write some nauseating/catchy little ads for some whale of a company, make a small fortune, and retire to some small island full of booze, sun, and brown skinned girls. Not a bad plan. Right? The problem was...in taking five years to get a two-year degree, I had managed to graduate right in the middle of the worst recession this country has seen since The Great Depression. It felt somewhat like I had been walking around for 5 years with a constant erection, only to go limp at the sight of Jessica Alba naked and oiled up in my bed.

It was August, and I had just spent the last seven months slinging pizza out of the backseat of my Hyundai Elantra to drunken college students and cheap fat asses in St. Cloud, MN. I was ready for a change. So far I had no legitimate job offers and two brand new suits on the Visa statement, but then my luck changed.

My phone rang and I didn't recognize the number. Normally I don't answer, but since I was in the market for a job I took a chance.

"Hello, this is Brendan," I answered.

"Hi, Brendan. This is Tom Daley with the Tile Stop," an enthusiastic voice annoyed me from the other end.

"Who?" I shot back.

"Tom Daley with the Tile Stop. I received your resume yesterday from our corporate offices. Are you still seeking employment?"

"Oh...yes of course I am," I said trying to sound enthused. The truth was, I had applied for many jobs in the past two months, and I had no recollection of the Tile Stop whatsoever.

I finished my conversation with Tom Daley and agreed to an interview later in the week. The job was in Woodbury. Woodbury is one of those Twin Cities suburbs you feel naked entering without an Escalade or Audi with at least two hockey bags in the trunk. I pulled up to the Tile Stop in my dented Elantra with one of my cheap new suits on. The way people were looking at me, not only did I feel naked...I felt like one of their teenage daughters must be sitting on my face.

The store itself was pretty high end, with displays set up around the outer edge, and the interior filled with rows of tile displayed on boards. A man was straightening a row of tile as I walked in. He jumped up at the sight of my interview suit and rushed over to me. He was sweating profusely and smelled like a cheap burrito. He was in his

early to mid thirties, but was balding quickly and had the body type of a “N.Y. Giants era” Bill Parcells. He walked funny and had extremely wide hips, although I’m quite positive they hadn’t reared any children.

“You must be Brendan Kelly,” the man gasped in the same enthusiastic voice I recognized from the phone.

“Yes, I am” I replied and braced myself for what I knew would be coming next.

“I couldn’t help but notice you have two first names. I was told never to trust a man with two first names.”

“Huh, that’s a good one. I’ve never heard that before,” I lied.

“Well how about we sit down and get started,” Tom suggested.

“Can’t wait,” I lied again.

The interview seemed to go pretty well. Tom filled my head full of promises and company bullshit, and I believed most of it, mostly because I wanted to. There were the standard interview questions and a few to catch me off guard, but I think I fared well. The interview ended with Tom pulling out a very ordinary writing pen and asking me to sell it to him. I wanted to tell him that if he bought the pen I would shove it up his abnormally wide ass for him, but just in case he wasn’t into that sort of thing I made up some bullshit features and benefits and he seemed to be pleased with my effort. I wasn’t completely sold on the job yet, but 50 g’s sounded a whole lot better than delivery boy.

2.

I decided to take the job against my better judgment. I had a three-year-old son, and I was sick of living paycheck to paycheck. The job also came with health benefits and a 401K. I hadn’t been to the doctor in almost five years so I worried I may be due for a visit. Woodbury was a good hour and fifteen minutes from St. Cloud, but I could crash at my Mom’s in Hudson until I saved up some cash to move to St. Paul. Hudson was only fifteen minutes from Woodbury and my mom wouldn’t mind. She had been begging for company ever since my dad passed away from cancer the previous summer. My son Devin was living with his mom close by, so I would still be able to see him frequently. Besides moving back in with my mom, everything seemed to be working out.

Training was miserable, and I was incredibly overwhelmed. I felt like George Bush after he was elected President. I knew nothing about tile, and it was extremely difficult to conjure up even the slightest bit of interest in my training. Dwayne was hired at the same time as me and was going through training as well. Dwayne seemed to be enjoying his new employment situation much more than I was. He was about forty and looked like a miniature Al Borland. He was about 5’6” with glasses and a goofy looking beard. He was over-enthusiastic and one of the biggest kiss-asses I had ever met. Every time he opened his mouth I cringed.

Dwayne was also a huge pervert, and since he was so old, he came off as creepy. Besides Dwayne and Tom, there was Lauren, Lexi, James, Gunner, and Tyrone. Lauren was kind of cute, and I must’ve been checking out her ass one day, because James came over and gave me the warning.

“Careful man, that’s the owners daughter over there,” he whispered.

Apparently James didn't give Dwayne the same warning. The next day he strolled up to Lauren and struck up a conversation like he was picking up a forty year old bar slut, not the 26 year old boss's daughter.

"So what did you do last night," he asked.

"I had a date."

"Did you get lucky?" Dwayne asked casually.

"That's none of your damn business," Lauren sputtered.

"Oh come on now. What was his pick-up line?"

"We just went on a date. There was no pick-up line."

"Do you wanna here my favorite pick-up line?" Dwayne asked creepier than ever.

"Not really?" Lauren rolled her eyes.

"Why should you always masturbate with these two fingers?" Dwayne asked extending his index and middle finger on his right hand.

Lauren looked scared to ask but she did.

"Why?"

"Because they're mine!"

Lauren and Lexi (who had been listening) both turned green instantly, but that didn't stop Dwayne. He followed up with an even more obscene line.

"Hey Lexi, my dick just died...can I bury it in your ass?"

Lauren and Lexi didn't fall for any of his lines, and Dwayne got his first warning for sexual harassment.

Lexi wasn't even a butter face. She was a nuttin' butter chest. Lauren was better looking, but it didn't matter. They would both be gone within a month or two. Lauren chose to disappoint daddy and quit for another career. Shortly after, Lexi was fired for not hitting her sales numbers.

They paid us on what was called a draw system, which basically equated to straight commission. The more you sold the higher percentage commission they paid you. The base pay bi-weekly was \$868, so you had to sell at least 9,000 in gross profit to make your base pay. If you didn't make the base, you still got your draw check of \$868, but you had to pay back the difference on your next check. That difference is called subsidy. If you get too deep in subsidy, like Lexi, then you get shit canned.

The pay scale was so confusing it took me a few months to figure out exactly how it worked. Basically we got paid at 10% of the gross profit of our total sales up to \$10,000, 12% at 12,000 gross profit, and 14% at 15,000 gross profit, etc. So if you sold \$9,992 in profit, then your gross check would be \$999.20. On the other hand, if you only sold \$7,000 in profit, then your check is \$868 gross but you owe the company \$168 out of your next check. I found that most months a good check is followed by a bad check, because it is hard to string together two good pay periods. Most of the time when I got a decent check, I was paying some of it back in subsidy because I had a bad pay period two weeks before. Really it was all a bunch of bullshit.

3.

We had to work every Saturday, and every Saturday morning there was a team meeting. The meeting was at 8AM and if you were late you had to teach tile class later in the morning to the do it yourself customers. With the meeting our shift was 10 hours,

and the day dragged on. I sat down next to James right before the meeting started. He waited until Tom started talking and then he looked down at me and said,

“Your cock looks really big in those pants.”

“Thanks,” I said and then turned my attention back to Tom.

Tom had written a quote on the board. It read, ‘Einstein’s definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.’ I wasn’t the type to be inspired by quotations from those who were long dead and it appeared that neither were James or Gunner. I glanced around the room. Tyrone looked like he had just quit drinking an hour ago, and James was rolling his eyes. Dwayne was nodding his head like a Paris Hilton bobble head doll, but our assistant manager, Gunner, was turning bright red and looked like he was going to explode.

I liked Gunner. He was in his early fifties, average height, average build, with silver streaked black hair and a sick sense of humor, but he was always on edge. When I was first being introduced to him he just stood there with this smile on his face like he had just slept with my younger sister, and as I got to know him better, I thought that maybe he had. He was always arguing about splitting deals with him, and he made it pretty clear that he had no love for Tom.

Sitting in that meeting I had a feeling that Katrina was about to hit the Tile Stop, and I was right. Daley seemed to sense the tension in the room and called us all out.

“What’s the matter,” he yelled. “Aren’t you guys motivated by this.” I’m just trying to do my job. And keeping you guys motivated is what these meetings are for.”

“How about we just skip the meetings and get an extra hour of sleep?” James suggested.

“We’re going to have the meetings. Company policy,” Tom countered. “So if this doesn’t motivate you, what does?”

“Money” James shot back.

I quickly agreed, hoping to get out of the horrid meetings every week.

“What about you Dwayne? How do you feel?”

“I find them very helpful,” bobble head answered after prying his lips off of Tom’s ass.

Then the time bomb went off.

“What about you Gunner? Do these meetings help you?”

“They don’t do a damn thing for me,” snarled Gunner.

A month later Gunner was shipped off to the Roseville store. Tom traded Gunner for Turbo. It was like trading Kobe for Vlade Divac. We got Divac.

4.

I walked in one Saturday morning to find this creepy looking redneck walking around the store. We weren’t open yet, so I had no idea what he was doing there. I thought maybe he was on work release and was there to clean the floors or help Tyrone unload the truck. He looked like he was fifty-five but was probably closer to forty. He had black hair that was speckled with grey, and it looked like he cut it himself. He had the posture of a puppet with unmanned strings, and his excessive gold jewelry made him look like a white trash version of Big Daddy Kane. He smelled like he had just bathed in an ashtray and walked like each step he took was the hardest thing he had ever done in

his life. He was wearing the most ridiculous jacket I had ever seen in my life. It was a black leather coat with an ace of spades on the sleeve and a royal flush on the back. It said something about the World Series of Poker or World Poker Championship, and I'm sure Goodwill was amazed that they were able to get rid of it.

His name was Jim Horn, and he was our new assistant manager. He came from Roseville with the nickname, "Turbo." Turbo was obviously a sarcastic name referring to the sloth like movements, which were his normal walking motion. Turbo was a former used car salesman and general overall sleasball. Every shift started with Turbo strolling over to you and asking,

"Did I ever tell you how much I hate my wife?"

"Only every day Turbo."

"Yeah, that bitch let me have it this morning, cuz I was out all night drinking and playing poker. I even won \$300."

"Sure you did Turbo."

"I did. I always win. Did I ever tell you about the time I was at the final table at the World Series?"

"Only every day Turbo."

The only good thing about Turbo was that he moved so slow, you always had a good chance of darting away in the middle of a conversation. I never understood why he came to work everyday when he could make \$300 a night playing poker. I remember one day Turbo came strolling out of the warehouse after one of his hourly smoke breaks when a customer waved him over.

"Hey, can I get some help over here?"

"What can I do for you?" Turbo asked as he slowly made his way toward the customer.

"I need 250 square feet of this," the customer ordered.

"Is that the one you want?" Turbo questioned.

"Yeah I need 250 square feet," the customer reiterated.

"Okay. Lets go write that up then."

I was annoyed. Here I was pissing around with this crazy lady who wanted to tile her tabletop and fish tank, and Turbo walks right into a thousand dollar deal. After he was done writing up the deal I walked over and confronted him.

"Got a nice lay down, huh Turbo."

"Not at all. I really had to hard close that guy," Turbo somehow had the balls to claim.

James and I had a field day ripping on Turbo. It got to the point where we were almost sad to see him go when he transferred to another store. A few months later he was given an ultimatum...either resign as assistant manager and return to Roseville as a salesperson or look for work elsewhere. Apparently Turbo's lucky streak of lay downs had subsided.

It was late December, and I had been the beneficiary of a few decent paychecks, and I was looking at apartments in the city. I had already been at my mom's a month or two longer than expected, and I was eager to get my own place. It was Christmas Eve when I got the call. It was Devin's mom, and she was moving across the state to some small farm town in Southwestern Minnesota. I would be able to see my son every other weekend if I met her halfway in Mankato. I had been seeing him two weeks out of every

month and was none too pleased with the offer. I told her to ‘fuck off’ and began looking for a lawyer.

My favorite co-worker was Tyrone. He was about forty-five years old and had worked for the Tile Stop ever since he was discharged from the army fifteen years prior. He had even been fired once and re-hired at a lower wage. Tyrone was at least 350 pounds and well over six feet tall. He was missing a few teeth, thanks to a run-in with a pork chop sandwich, and rode the bus to work everyday after an afternoon DWI arrest.

Shortly after starting at the Tile Stop, I was trying to kill the rest of the day by looking busy on the computer. Tyrone walked up and leaned on the counter next to me.

“Yeah Buddy! I used to get a lot of prostitutes,” he confided to me.

He then commenced to tell me about the time he picked up a crack head on East Franklin one night and gave her the loose change from his ashtray in exchange for some fellatio. Tyrone’s three favorite subjects were, in this order, food, the bus, and the army. Tyrone had been caught sleeping on the forklift at least twice since I had started and always seemed to be on Daley’s shit list. I gave him a ride home whenever I got off early, and we always stopped at the liquor store. One day as we pulled up, Tyrone said

“Ah Shit B, I’m seventy five cents short.”

“That’s fine man, take what you need,” I said, motioning toward the change in my cup holder.

“Nah, that’s okay. I’ll just tell him, I’ll get him next time.

To my surprise, he came out of that liquor store with his usual, a 750ml of cheap whiskey and a 20oz. bottle of coke. To this day, Tyrone is still the only person I know who can get credit at the liquor store.

Sometime in December Daley hired two new girls. One was huge and closely resembled Xena the Warrior Princess, and I was scared she could kick my scrawny ass. The other was a ditzy blonde with the biggest set of bolt-ons you could ever dream of. Daley almost always hired with his dick. One day James and I were staring at the blonde’s tits when Tyrone came up to us from the warehouse.

“Which one would you guys rather do?” He asked.

“The Blonde,” James and I answered simultaneously, as if there was even a question.

“I’d rather take the big one,” Tyrone said.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me,” James exclaimed. “How could you possibly justify that Tyrone?”

Tyrone just smiled.

“Ain’t nobody been down that cave in a while,” he philosophized.

Both the warrior princess and the Barbie doll were gone by the end of the month.

5.

I found a lawyer sometime around March, and cut him a check for \$2500. I was now officially broke again. I had spent over six months in hell and did not have a dime to show for it. Without Devin around as much to keep me sane, I found myself drinking more and more at night. Hell is even more intolerable with a hangover.

Dwayne turned out to be a pretty decent guy once he got comfortable enough to stop kissing Daley’s ass. The guy put his foot in his mouth so often, that I assumed he

had some sort of weird fetish. In the Spring Daley made another hire with his pecker and proceeded to make an ass of himself. He hired a girl named Molly who was fresh out of design school and immediately fell in love with her. She must've paid her tuition with her personality, because by the time she hit the Tile Stop it was nonexistent. She had weird kinky hair and big creepy eyes. She looked like a cabbage patch doll with a ghetto booty. I mean her ass was huge. Even Tyrone didn't think he could handle it.

We quickly learned that Molly had no sales or people skills whatsoever, but Daley wrote her up deals all the time so she wouldn't quit or go into subsidy. According to her, he also liked to get hammered at night and talk dirty to her with facebook messages. Molly had no sense of humor, so she didn't like Dwayne and I, and we didn't give a damn. I found it was easier to avoid her during the course of the day. Things got a little tense after I made a couple of comments about her enormous ass.

By the time summer came around I was really beginning to second-guess my career choice. The store was empty most days and I took some vacation time to take part in my friends wedding. It was nice to get away for three days, but when I got back it was the same old shit. I couldn't help but think it was only going to get worse with the state of the economy. I was on pace to make about \$30,000 that year, but I was working at least fifty hours a week. The problem with most corporations is that they pay you just enough money that you don't quit, and in return, you work just hard enough to not get fired. It's really a counterproductive system if you think about it. Take the Tile Stop for example. The profit margins on what we were selling were ridiculous, but they act like they don't make any money. If they would just pay the salespeople a little bit better, then they wouldn't have so much turn over, and the customers would get better service. Plus they would save a ton of time and money on training employees that were just going to bail after that first bad paycheck.

For the year and a half that I was at the Tile Stop, I was number three on the sales chart 5 out of every 6 months. The top two ate pretty good most months, while I was up and down at number three, and everyone else just cycled in and out like musical chairs. I began to lose all motivation when I realized I would never make that 50 g's I was promised, and my checks suffered even more.

I finally got some good news at the end of the summer. My lawyer had managed to get me better custody rights. It was still every other weekend during the school year, but I got extended visits over the holidays, and half of the summer in two-week increments. It wasn't ideal, but it was the best I could hope for with Devin starting school in the fall. It was really pathetic that we just couldn't come to a similar agreement without spending thousands on lawyers and court fees, but it is what it is.

Daley's obsession with Molly became even more blatant and pathetic. It amazed me how a married man with two kids would risk his marriage and six figure job for a robot with a J-Lo booty. When James and I called him out on it, he became furious and denied any special treatment. A week later he was back to writing up deals for her and covering her shifts while she grieved for her dead dog.

The most frustrating thing about wasting away my days at the Tile Stop was that I was not gaining any experience in anything I really wanted to pursue. My dream of an island full of booze and brown skinned girls was so far out of reach, I couldn't have grabbed it in fifty years with a go, go, gadget arm. I had now spent a full year at the Tile Stop and was still crashing in my mom's basement and slowly developing into a

thoughtless alcoholic like everyone else I worked with. All of the men over thirty I had encountered on this job hated their families, drank themselves to sleep at night, and chain-smoked or chewed tobacco. It was hard to drag myself out of bed each day, and go to work amidst such a group of miserable middle-aged human beings. I was shocked how these brainwashed men could put this shitty, unsatisfying job before their families. I guess I just never understood the game of sales. It never seemed like a game to me. It was more like walking barefoot on a floor full of broken glass to the front door, where 3 out of 4 times I greeted a person who didn't want to talk to me.

Most of the customers you greeted at the door actually looked down on you and considered you the lowest form of human scum... a salesperson. I understood how they felt. When I walk into a store and someone asks if they can help me, the first words out of my mouth are always, "No, thanks. I'm just looking." How did I let myself become one of these despicable leeches that I myself had once frowned upon? Of course there were always the customers who didn't even try to be polite. These were the assholes that I had no problem playing games with. If you want to see who can be the bigger smart ass, you, or me? It won't even be close.

I did learn a few tricks though. If you don't mind being incredibly rude, there is one surefire way to keep a salesperson from harassing you upon entering a store. All you need to do is enter the store on your cell phone and leave it plastered to your ear until you exit. Salespeople despise customers who talk on their phones in the store and only the most obnoxious will interrupt a private call to initiate a sale.

Another trick is to imply that you have already made your purchase and today you are just there to be a royal pain in their ass. Here is a good example. Lets say you don't plan on buying anything and just want to take a quick look around and see what is available. All you have to do is bring some random item from your house into the store with you, and then inform the salesperson that you ordered your tile last week and you just wanted to make sure that it matched your ceramic gnome collection that you keep on the fireplace. Then produce a creepy looking gnome figurine from your pocket or purse. The crazier the item is, the better. No salesperson in their right mind will want to waste their time with a crazy gnome collector who has already made a purchase, when a normal customer could walk in at any minute needing 500 square feet of tile for their basement.

A less effective avoidance technique is to let the salesperson know that you are just looking today but will be making a purchase from another salesperson. Tell them that your cousin works in the Roseville store and you will be ordering from them, or that your contractor always orders from Sam in the Bloomington store. A good salesperson will try and find a way to get the deal anyway, but most lazy salespeople won't want to waste anytime with you if they think someone else will be getting the commission on their hard work. More times than not, I was that lazy salesperson.

6.

I began to look for a new job in the fall, but all I could find were more shitty sales jobs or telemarketing gigs. There were an abundance of jobs out there, if you didn't mind selling cell phones or supplemental insurance. I had at least a dozen contractors on my ass, begging me for referrals, and I couldn't even satisfy the three or four on my list. Daley was really getting on my nerves, and I wasn't sure how much longer I could take

it. He was the biggest anal prick I had ever worked for, and I wasn't always the greatest at hiding my disdain. I ripped on him constantly. I could do a dead on impression of his dancing, and I wasn't afraid to bust it out right in front of him. His favorite dance move resembled a dog having a seizure while peeing on a fire hydrant. I also liked to mock his awkward flirtations with Molly, and I figured I would be joining Gunner in Roseville any day, but it never happened. I even made a remix of LL Cool J's 'Big Ole Butt,' about Daley leaving his wife for Molly and her super sized rear end. It was an instant classic amongst Tile Stop employees, although I'm not so sure that Tom and Molly would receive it as warmly as Dwayne, James, and Tyrone did.

Living with my mom was really bringing me down as well. I didn't cross paths with her very often, but I never felt independent, and getting laid was almost out of the equation. I didn't even try to take any girls back to my mom's place. It was far too embarrassing. The last time I had gotten some ass was when I convinced my friend's lesbian sister that I had some feminine qualities after his wedding reception. That never would have happened either if it weren't for the hotel room and massive amounts of beer. I was far from putting a bullet in my dome, (I wanted to see Devin play Little League one day) but I couldn't remember the last time I hated my life so fiercely.

I decided one day in early December that I had to quit my job abruptly, or I risked waking up one morning five years later grinding out another sad day at the Tile Stop. The thought was more than I could lift and carry another minute on my slender shoulders. I looked out the window and realized I had risen to the first snowstorm of the year. I normally despised the heavy snowfalls and bitter cold Midwestern winters that consistently accompanied them, but this storm was different. It made me think of fresh starts and clean slates. It was like the storm was covering up that quote from Einstein on Tom Daley's Tile Stop marker board. I realized that I had been doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. I was waking up each morning and going to a job I couldn't stand, and I was waiting for changes I knew would never arrive. I was never going to be happy at that job, and I was never going to get rich. I picked up a pen and pad and began to write...

*Feels like the snow keeps falling, to bury something deep
Maybe if that snow keeps falling, I can finally get some sleep
A cold, white layer, to insulate the pride
The bitter cold outdoors, makes me feel warm inside
The wind picks up, as the innocent continue to play
The snow drifts, and it drifts, but it never drifts away
For some reason, this winter, I hope my blank canvas stays
Want to paint a new portrait, before it melts in May
The branches appear heavy, like the burden on my shoulders
I'm pouring out this drink, while she's asking me to hold hers
Bundling up on that stool, where I used to be a fixture
Hoping to brave the cold, and get lost in the blizzard
When it finally melts, they'll find a new man
Pride fully intact, clenched in a frozen, fallen hand.*

I wasn't going in to work anymore. I wasn't sure what I was going to do next, but whatever it was, I was pretty damn certain that it was going to be more important than whatever the Tile Stop had planned for me. 'Maybe I'll write a book,' I thought to myself. I settled for a short story instead.

THE END