

A Modest Proposal

by

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Setting

A CEO's office.

Time

Now and then.

Cast

CEO (Chief Executive Officer) - 20s-60s.

CFO (Chief Financial Officer)- 20s-60s.

CONSULTANT - 20s-40s.

Synopsis

An innovative consultant offers an "out of the box" (yet traditional) solution to a corporation's labor woes.

Note

The title is borrowed from Jonathan Swift's satirical essay, "A Modest Proposal," in which he suggested eating children as a way to ease the famine crisis in Ireland. Similarly, this play is intended as satire.

(Lights up on CEO and CFO. They are both clearly on edge, exasperated at what seems to be an unsolvable crisis. A half-empty bottle of bourbon and two glasses sit on a desk.)

CEO

Well, maybe it's hopeless.

CFO

Maybe it is.

CEO

Maybe we made a bad call trying to bring our manufacturing back to the U.S. I genuinely thought that with the government subsidies and tax breaks we'd be okay.

CFO

Better than okay! But employee expectations are just too unrealistic these days--

CEO

Fantasyland! Complete Fantasyland! My God...

CFO

And these consultants and efficiency experts we commissioned--how many team-building exercises are we supposed to do?

CEO

Right? How many pizza parties are enough?

CFO

I don't know...do we still have one more consultant out there?

CEO

Yeah, I think so. Well, let's get this over with.

(touching his phone)

Can you send in the last consultant, please?

(CONSULTANT enters, sizing up CEO and CFO with a smile.)

CONSULTANT

Long day?

CEO

You can say that again.

CFO

Amen!

CONSULTANT

Let me guess...team-building exercises and pizza parties? Yeah, those are the big buzzwords these days. And people love their buzzwords, especially efficiency experts.

CFO

Please tell us you have something different for us.

CONSULTANT

Oh, I do. But first, let me make sure I understand your position clearly. Your corporation, founded in 1947, pioneered new innovations in industrial coatings, and established several plants around the country, creating thousands of jobs in communities from Maine to North Dakota. In the 1980s, new economic realities made manufacturing in this country unfeasible, so you moved production to Mexico and China to take advantage of low labor costs.

CEO

Exactly right.

CONSULTANT

Then two years ago, your bean-counters figured out that with various subsidies and incentives, you could bring manufacturing back to this country and then get to play the patriotism card to get around any troublesome labor regulations and environmental requirements...

CFO

Well, that's putting it a little...

CEO

That's not the spin we would put on it.

CONSULTANT

No, of course not! I'm just trying to get down to brass tacks here.

CEO

Understood.

CONSULTANT

But you're having staffing shortages, labor problems, all kinds of benefits issues, and I hear there's even talk of a union.

CFO

Don't get me started. What is wrong with just having a job? We are providing you with a job! Why can't people be grateful for that?

CONSULTANT

Exactly. You are the makers and the only employees available these days are the takers. Now may I speak frankly?

CEO

Please.

CONSULTANT

(to CEO)

Are you happy with the size of your current yacht?

CEO

Well...quite honestly, no. When I pull into the harbor at Monaco for the Grand Prix, it's embarrassing. There's sheiks and Russian oligarchs with yachts twice the size of mine.

CONSULTANT

I can imagine.

(to CFO)

And the private island you just purchased. Are things going well?

CFO

No, they are not! You wouldn't believe the infrastructure costs! My God! Do you know how much it costs to build a runway? How is my private jet supposed to get in there? It's ridiculous!

CONSULTANT

I sympathize. I do. Because you are not just job creators, not merely the corporate elite, you are patriotic Americans bringing jobs back to this country and not enjoying the financial benefits to which you are clearly entitled!

CEO

At last! An efficiency expert who actually makes sense.

CFO

You understand our position perfectly.

CEO

So please tell us you have some kind of solution for us.

CONSULTANT

I do. And the best part? I'm not going to bore you with data and statistics, and I'm not going to make you sit through another PowerPoint presentation--

CEO

Thank God for that...

CONSULTANT

--because I can sum up my proposal in one word. Just. One. Word. Would you like to hear that word?

(as CEO and CFO nod enthusiastically)

Slavery.

CEO

Excuse me?

CFO

What now?

CONSULTANT

You heard me. Good, old-fashioned slavery. You see, slavery gets a bad rap these days. It does. But look at the pyramids in Egypt. Built by slaves. Look at the Great Wall of China. Slaves.

(MORE)

CONSULTANT (cont'd)

If you'll excuse me for being blunt, the plain truth is this--slavery gets shit done. And if I might add, this country, the great United States of America, was built on slavery. And I hasten to assure you that slavery is not a Black thing, or a white thing, or an Asian thing. It's a human thing, stretching back to the very dawn of civilization!

CEO

So, like pottery-making...

CFO

Or prostitution!

CONSULTANT

There you go! For thousands of years, slavery was an integral part of civilization, from the Greeks to the Romans to the great and wise founders of this country. It's only in the past couple of hundred years that people started squawking about it. Well, in my view, this little social experiment has been a failure, and it's time to reinstitute a traditional form of labor that was demonstrably successful for millennia.

CEO

That is definitely a bold idea.

CFO

Traditional, but innovative!

CEO

True. But I feel compelled to point out that times have changed. We can't just go around the world abducting people and making them slaves. After all, we're a Fortune 500 company. We don't want any bad press.

CONSULTANT

There is no press! The days of accountable journalism are over!

CEO

Good point.

CFO

That is true.

CONSULTANT

And on the off chance anyone is determined to kick up a fuss, the Supreme Court has ruled that bribery is completely legal!

CFO

God bless the Supreme Court!

CEO

You can say that again!

CONSULTANT

Even better, you won't need to abduct anyone! Not a single slave will need to be shackled and dragged to your factories. The slaves will come to you.

CFO

How so?

CONSULTANT

Consider this. The last fifty years or so have softened the American people up considerably. The supply-side theory of economics, better known as trickle-down, has effectively gutted the middle-class. Money has migrated upwards to the one-percent, leaving everyone else to scramble for whatever scraps they can. Once upon a time, you could have a factory or white-collar job, and with the money you earned you could have a house, partner, kids, and a boat up north.

CFO

Crazy!

CEO

Hard to believe.

CONSULTANT

But those days are gone. Long gone. A masterfully orchestrated redistribution of wealth has been pulled off. Now realistically, when people look around for who to blame, they should look at people like you, the people with yachts and private islands. But thanks to our bought-and-paid-for friends in the media and social media, you folks are free and clear. Instead, people blame immigrants, people of color, Muslims, gays, liberals, university professors, and so on. It was neatly done--perhaps the greatest disinformation campaign of all time.

CEO

And thank God for that.

CFO

But that still doesn't explain where we would get our slaves from.

CONSULTANT

Simple. Let me ask, do either of you have any student loan debt?

CEO

Ha! Hell no! My daddy paid for all that.

CFO

Not me! You are looking at a genuine Native American, gender-fluid, handicapped person. I had grants and scholarships up the ass!

CEO

You're Native American?

CFO

I was born here!

CEO

And gender-fluid?

CFO

Why the hell not?

CEO

And I always wondered about your handicapped license plate. You seem perfectly normal to me.

CFO

Well, the doctor I slipped two hundred bucks says I'm handicapped, so who am I to argue with an esteemed member of the medical profession? Really helps out when I'm doing my holiday shopping.

CONSULTANT

Native American, gender-fluid, and handicapped! That is the Entitlement Triple Crown, my friend!

CFO

You're damned right it is!

CONSULTANT

Okay, so no student loan debt...and I'm guessing no credit card or medical debt either.

CEO AND CFO

Nope!

CONSULTANT

As it should be! But your future slaves are absolutely riddled with debt. Debt of all kinds! Debt they will never be able to repay. And look at all of the wonderful things you will be offering them with slavery! Job security! A roof over their heads! Three meals a day!

CFO

That's a good deal!

CEO

Definitely! But isn't that a little like...prison?

CONSULTANT

Absolutely not! True, the private prison system currently enjoying so much popularity is just another form of slavery. That's why it attracts so many investors and mutual funds. But I hasten to point out that the people in prison need to go to the trouble of committing a crime to be admitted. And what will you be offering? Slavery with no crime required! Just show up at the front gates, sign a few forms, and you can immediately enter the carefree world of slavery! No bills, no responsibilities, no worries about your credit rating, just a brand new life of security and safety from all the threats of the modern world! Maybe even throw in free Wi-Fi! And your labor costs? Zero.

CEO

That does sound pretty sweet. But all the same, I'm hoping you have some kind of way of describing what we'll be doing without the... without the "S" word.

CFO

Optics are important.

CONSULTANT

Definitely! So I'm glad to tell you that I have not one, but two market-researched slogans for your consideration.

CEO

Great! Let's hear the first one.

CONSULTANT

"Volunteers For the American Way."

CFO

Hmm...I like the patriotism angle. People eat that shit up. Maybe we could have like, an honor guard or jet flyover at each new factory opening.

CEO

With lots of flags.

CFO

Tons of flags!

CEO

And the second option?

CONSULTANT

Slightly bolder, but fresh, new, and it really tells it like it is. The very clean, very simple, "Slavery. Hell yeah!"

CEO

That is fresh!

CFO

And new!

CONSULTANT

Well, that's my pitch. If this sounds like a path you'd like to pursue, we have a number of resources and implementation plans ready to go. You just give me a call when you're ready to pull the trigger.

CFO

We definitely will!

CEO

It's a real pleasure meeting a consultant who can think outside of the box.

Absolutely!

CFO

And I feel confident in saying you can expect us to be in touch.

CEO

Excellent!

CONSULTANT

*(Quick handshakes and CONSULTANT exits.
CEO pours two glasses of bourbon and
hands one to CFO. They raise their
glasses.)*

Slavery?

CEO

Hell yeah!

CFO

(They clink glasses and drink.)

END OF PLAY.