

The Cattle Call

by Tony Lindsay

Four heads, of which I am one, are bent over employment packets on the boardroom table. Our heads are in the third hour of what I nicknamed cattle-calls. These cattle calls are open interviews for sales staffs, and none of the heads including myself enjoy them because of the low ratio of qualified applicants garnered from the calls. But the order came down from up high to do one, so we are doing one. Of the fifty- three packets already reviewed, the team has conducted a total of eight interviews with only one second interview extended.

I begin reading over my fifteenth packet of the morning, and I see the applicant has a Series 7 and 66 licenses, along with being a graduate of Michigan State and Kellogg, a TKE, and six years sales experience with Morgan Stanley.

The résumé causes me to pull up the chair's adjustment level bringing the heavily cushioned back straight. I pledged Tau Kappa Epsilon eight years ago myself. Looking to the papers on the table, I find the résumé's accompanying application and check the references; none of the five names ring a bell.

“Hey Reynolds, it's time for a smoke break.” The sandpaper scratchy voice of Patrick Kearny, a constant irritant to me and the firm's most productive sales manager interrupts my reviewing of the employment packet.

My eyes remain on the résumé not looking up at Kearny because I don't want to see his cherub round face grinning and trying to promote an 'ok go smoke' out of me. Smoking is a weakness. A horrible habit I kicked six years ago because it represents a character flaw. A person that smokes knowing that smoking is killing them is weak psychologically; there is no further explanation.

Not to mention that the disgusting addiction interferes with the work of the office, and of course it would be foul mouthed and disrespectful Kearny who requests the smoke break, and like mindless drones the other two team members will follow suit and the employment interviews will come to a halt. Their three pairs of eyes are boring into the top of my head awaiting my response.

"Smoke if you must," without looking up I hear all three interviewers rolling back their chairs and leaving the boardroom.

"Nicotine junkies," I say once the door closes there is no sense in insulting them outright. Sifting to the applicant's cover letter, I read that the he has been in the top five percent of producers for the past four years. The linen quality of résumé and cover letter impress me because I used the same paper during my job hunt. Although mine did not consist of cattle-calls, I hand delivered three résumés: one to my uncle, another to the firm my brother started, and the third my father had me bring to Rufus - the Human Resources manager who retired when I graduated.

The applicant's undergrad transcripts show a 3.5 GPA with a solid 4.0 from the Kellogg MBA. This kid looks good on paper, sometimes the cattle-calls

pay off. The applicant really couldn't be a kid: four years of undergraduate work puts him at twenty-one, another two to three years at Kellogg had him at twenty-three or twenty-four, and six years at Morgan Stanley "the kid" was at least thirty, five years older than me.

I slip my feet back into the wingtips preparing to go out to reception and call the applicant in for the first interview. Glancing again at the name atop the résumé, Vincent Murphy, that gives me pause. I look to the address, Southside . . . far south.

An ethnically mixed name from the Southside of Chicago could be a problem. But after three slow muttering cows, interviewing a stellar prospect would be refreshing. I twist my left foot, the larger one, down into my shoe and swing my feet from beneath the boardroom table and bend down to my laces.

As the Human Resources manager, I am aware of the cultural climate of the firm, and before he retired and passed the job over to me Rufus made it clear that the maintenance of the climate was the HR manager's responsibility. The senior partners of Reynolds, Coleman, and Baker are all white Anglo Saxon Protestant males; the next executive tier of management is close to the same with the exception being Patrick Kearny. Front line supervisors and the sales staff contain two women: one Mexican, the other Iranian, and both were hired by me; doing what I can for diversity because this firm, like other financial services, will have to go global to survive and being diverse is a must.

I was not thinking Human Resources when I graduated; the monitoring of new laws, benefits package work, and staffing were the mundane tasks of clerks, not the duties of the top producing broker and the inevitable CEO of Reynolds, Coleman, and Baker that I am planning on becoming. The Global Marketing division with its world travel was for me, but my father, Todd Franklyn Reynolds II, wanted me in Human Resources, so HR it has been for the past four years. What I once thought of as clerk's duties are the tasks that fill my days.

But, my patience has been rewarded. This morning my father laid a proposal on my desk for opening an office in Japan and asked me, "Do you think you can handle the Chef of Staff position? Baker's boy Chad will be Divisional Head, but you will be second in command."

"Without a doubt Father" was my immediate response allowing a smile to break my usually serious face. I have worked on keeping the smiles to a minimal at the office; a focused demeanor works best here.

If the information concerning Japan had come from anyone else, I would have hugged them. The information moved me so, but my father and I don't hug. We never have. We are not a hugging family, but I do hug others . . . well no, I don't hug others either.

Before Todd Franklyn Reynolds II entered the corner of Human Resources which I made into an office with partitions from the office supply catalogue, the pleasant odor of fresh Jasmine was in the air.

The owner of the building's flower shop, a small Filipino woman, whom I thought was Mexican, with large brown eyes dark enough to be mistaken for black pitched me on the elevator last spring about having fresh flowers delivered twice a week to the office. Agreeing to the deliveries proved a good decision because the fresh flowers do promote smiles, but the fresh scent of the Jasmines was bullied this morning. My father brought the pungent smell of sickness to my makeshift corner office. I think the bandage on his abscessing knee needed to be changed.

“Good” was my father's reply to me agreeing that I could run the office. He continued with, “because there were some concerns from the other partners, but I went to bat for you. The appointment is yours if you want it . . . and Son, I am certain this hasn't been an easy three years for you, but you have managed to keep your eyes and mind to the horizon.”

Four years, but I didn't bother to correct him. I watched the slight jiggling of my father's jowls due to the Parkinson tremors, and I remembered my eighth grade tennis coach who introduced my father as a man among men at the Sport Awards banquet. I was receiving a trophy for the most improved player, but my father, the keynote speaker, made no reference to my trophy. He only spoke of looking to the horizon and improving the future with hard work of the present. Would the tennis coach still think of my father with an abscessing knee and jiggling jowls as a man among men? I doubt it.

Hearing my father going to bat for me against the other partners would have been a pleasure because most of the words that come through his whitened and capped teeth in regards to me or my brother are critical. My father's constant belittlement of our deeds as children and teens is what caused my brother Todd to open his own firm in lieu of working for the more established family one, "Father will stop a dandelion from growing, come work with me," my brother encouraged on graduation day. But no, I followed my father's footsteps into Reynolds, Coleman, and Baker. However the payout, Japan with a leadership position, is close at hand.

Patrick Kearny and the rest of the sales staff could kiss my "*daddy's boy*" ass. As Chief of Staff of a division, my work not the opinion of salesmen will speak for me. The prejudiced judgmental thought of me somehow being lesser because I am a partner's son is over. Kearney and his salesman and all their snide and disrespectful comments proved to be fodder for my climb. The proposal has the office opening in three months, ninety days. That is a toilet flush away. Let the smokers smoke, I am Japan bound.

The Southside address under the name on the résumé almost causes me to stay seated, but the chance of a good interview motivates me to stand and walk down the hall toward reception. The pearl face of my Patek Philippe reads 10:30. My brother should be in his office by now. The second smile of the morning is expanding across my face; the conversation we will have about me going to Japan should be interesting. Todd will be both proud and a little envious.

The reception area and the applicant are steps away. Business requires the smile to leave my face. In the doorway behind the reception desk, I look into the waiting area and see about twenty remaining job seekers. Of the twenty, one is black and he is the only one looking in my direction with a smile. He is a weird looking guy with Asian eyes and straight Asian hair with dark brown regular black guy skin.

He is sitting in the arm chair that allows a visitor to see the entrance and the door leading to the bullpen and manager's offices. The applicant's legs are crossed with a foot on his knee. He is wearing a blue Brooks Brothers suit. I am wearing the same suit in dark gray. He has on a crisp white shirt with a blue and gray striped tie, and black wingtips. He continues to look at me smiling.

"Vincent Murphy," I call, hoping it's not the arrogant black guy.

But of course, the black man raises his hand, nods, and stands.

Damn it, the name and the address were indicators. This interview is going to be a waste of my time. Just once in seventy five years has the firm of Reynolds, Coleman, and Baker hired a black broker; Harold Washington was the mayor, and the office joke was that the broker didn't stay long enough for the ink on his business cards to dry. I might be able to hire black woman, but a black guy . . . the climate couldn't take it; people would be too uncomfortable.

"Come this way," I say not offering my hand when Vincent Murphy gets to me. I never shake the applicant's hand until after the first interview. There is no

sense in extending false hope to job seekers who might not be worth a moment's notice.

The boardroom where the interviews are held is large enough for semi-private interviews at the lengthy leather padded table. My suggestion of holding four interviews simultaneously works. It quickly eliminates the unqualified cows and unwanted job seekers such as Vincent Murphy.

The small reception area is deceptive to the true size of our firm; once an applicant walks through the door and down the short hallway they see the broker's bullpen area and the glass doors of the management offices that outline the bullpen. Never do I slow my pace when walking an applicant through. If they make it pass interview one then I give them tour.

When Vincent Murphy and I enter the boardroom, two of the interviewers are back from their smoke break; both are sales managers, Patrick Kearny and Troy Akron.

“Vincent Murphy meet Troy Akron and Patrick Kearny,” I say.

Troy Akron, a blond thirty year old who looks and at times acts like a nine-teen year old walks directly to the applicant, “Vincent, man what's up? I didn't know you were looking. I thought Morgan Stanley had those platinum handcuffs on you bro.”

Troy Akron does extend his hand and shakes with Vincent Murphy, “You know we got something for you dudes this year during tournament, ain't gonna be

another blow out. You can bet that bro! We got that big kid from Chase running center dawg. No mo' blow outs."

I see Vincent Murphy's face relaxing with being recognized by Akron. He readily shakes his hand and smiles.

The urban dialect Akron chose to speak in causes my toes to ball up within my wingtips. Akron, a Princeton grad, is grating my nerves. I have never understood why white people think sounding like an uneducated black person is cool. I am sure Vincent Murphy is offended . . . if I were black guy, I would be.

"Wishful thinking Akron, if your squad had Lebron James and a young Larry Bird you guys still wouldn't get the tournament trophy that steel is at home in our case." Vincent Murphy says to Akron.

"No, no, bro nothing is forever in that league, you know this."

'Bro', they are not brothers and I have never heard Akron refer to anyone else as 'bro'. He must be stopped before Vincent Murphy justifiably goes postal.

"Um um um, You two are acquainted, I see" interrupting.

"Yep, Me and Murph are in the same Thursday night Board of Trade league. The one I have been trying to get you to join for two years." Akron says and playfully punches me on the shoulder.

That is his first time touching me in the four years I have been at the firm, and I don't plan on it happening again anytime soon; I step out of Akron's reach.

I detest basketball because people assume since I am 6'3" that I can play the game. I can't play. My father didn't allow me or my brother to play as children; calling it "a coon's game" and insisting we both play tennis, golf, and soccer.

"Murphy's team won the league's finals two years in a row, and he got MVP both years, but times are changing bro. We are bringing the thunder this year," Akron says answering my question but patting Vincent Murphy on the back.

"Thunder without lighting is all noise Akron and that's all I am hearing from you now, noise." Vincent Murphy adjusts his tie at the knot, "history speaks for itself."

"Murphy," Patrick Kearny stands from the table extending his hand as well.

Vincent Murphy shakes it and answers, "Kearny."

"The links Sunday?" Kearny asks.

"Wouldn't miss it for the world."

"Bring your money."

"I won't need mine if you're coming." Vincent Murphy beams a smile.

"You needed it last week."

"That was fluke Kearny, and we both know it."

“Whatever Murphy, your five C-notes comforted me all the way home.”

I pray my mouth isn't hanging open. Several times Kearny has been called to carpet due to me reporting his inappropriate comments about blacks during staff meetings, and each time my father squashed the complaint offering excuses such as, “Boys will be boys,” or “Those are colloquialisms, don't take him serious.”

A man who has made as many hateful statements as Kearny has about blacks shouldn't have black friends or social acquaintances. Being unable to stop myself from asking the obvious I say, “You two are acquitted as well?”

With a toothy grin Kearny answers, “Murphy is the newest member of my country club, and luckily he was placed in my tee off party. Well, lucky at least for me because his golf game is about as good as yours Calvin.”

That is a shock. I would have bet my Bimmer that Kearny didn't play golf with a black guy.

“Calvin, I need the keys out of your office. Can I get them before you begin interviewing Murphy,” Kearny walks for the door.

There are no keys in my office for Kearny; the only things in my office associated Kearny is the pack of cigarettes and a lighter that I took off the bathroom sink while he was in a stall smoking, despite the city ordinance and my memo, but Kearny doesn't know I have the cigarettes. He came out the bathroom

accusing others of stealing them. I am hesitant to leave, but then I figure Kearny asking for the keys is a rouse to speak to me outside of the boardroom.

When I walk out, Kearny closes the boardroom door and pulls me by my suit jacket towards the bullpen stopping at the first sales desk. I have to forcibly wipe his hand from my jacket, “Have you lost your mind?”

Kearny rolls his eyes to the top of his head and ignores the question, “Listen to me Daddy’s Boy,”

Through instantly tighten lips and clenched teeth I say, “I’ve told you about calling me that.”

I am aware that ‘Daddy’s Boy’ is what every sales person in the firm calls me behind my back, but Kearny is the only one bold enough to call me the name to my face.

Kearny takes in a deep breath and makes an audible sigh exhaling, “Ok . . . Calvin . . . listen to me . . . that guy there,” he hikes his thumb back towards the boardroom, “is black Chicago wealth. His personal book of business includes Jordan, Oprah, Kanye, Jessie, and any other spook you can name in Chicago with money.”

Again my lips tighten, “No racial epithets please, you know better Kearny.”

Dismissing my compliant with a nit clearing wave, Kearny runs his hand over the crown of his bald head and gets close enough for me to smell his breath

mint and cigarette and see the sun burned skin crusted atop his nostrils, “Hear this Daddy’s Boy, if you let that black person walk out of here without making him an offer, I will personally shove my whole foot up your ass. I don’t know why he is looking for a new job but whatever the reason lock him in. Give him whatever the fuck he wants. I’m going to pull Akron’s dumb ass out of there, and you go back in and close him like your balls depend on it because they do. I am going to send in your daddy in about ten minutes, don’t fuck it up. That guy in there is flown to DC once a month to play basketball with Obama. He is not your run of the mill BET black guy. Handle it the right way Calvin.”

There is heat at the nape my neck which is always present when talking to Kearny, but this time the warmth is spreading and moving up to my cheeks. I must be turning red. Kearny is a small minded antiquated 1950’s throw back, I know that, but knowing doesn’t stop me from reacting to his callousness.

The smart thing to do in this situation is to smile and nod which is what I do.

“Thanks for the advice. I will do my best.”

As long as Kearny is the number one producer, I have learned he is as much a part of the firm as a partner, and any intervention on my part is pointless

“You do that Daddy’s Boy.” Kearny pokes me in the chest with his index finger, turns, and walks back to the boardroom.

My mind and eyes are on the pressure and smudge Kearny's poke left in my flesh and on my tie.

"You fat, stubby, baldheaded, son-of-a-bitch if you ever touch me again I will have your job."

None of the employees passing hear my heated words. I exhale, adjust my tie, run my hand down my jacket, and walk to the boardroom. When I get to the door Kearny, Akron, and the HR generalist are exiting.

"Good luck," Akron quietly says in passing.

I enter and close the boardroom door. Vincent Murphy is still standing next to the table with attaché case in hand.

"Please have a seat Mr. Murphy."

"Vincent, please," he says pulling out the chair closest to him but not sitting.

I am aware that he is waiting for me to sit first. I do and position his résumé in front myself on the table. Vincent sits across from me.

"Six years with Morgan Stanley, wow, why are you looking?"

When I shift my attention from the résumé to Vincent, I can't read the expression on his face. A smile of sorts, but his brown eyes have a serious cast. He looks as if he is questioning something.

“A number of reasons Mr. Reynolds,” a pregnant pause follows but I don’t give the permission for my first name to be used. I see Vincent’s eyebrows raise and fall in a millisecond.

“The most important reason being upward mobility. I don’t see a clear career path to management in my division. The management above me is five to ten years my senior. Advancement will come only if one of them leaves, and that doesn’t appear to be happening any time soon.”

I nod in agreement, “Understandable. Well, we are growing as I’m sure you are aware.”

Vincent is not really smiling, but I see his teeth. I make a mental to practice such a look in the mirror; it has quite a disarming effect.

“Yes, the word on the street is Japan, and as my résumé reflects I speak Japanese fluently and spent twelve years there as a child and into my teenage years. My father was career military, and my mother is Japanese; so I, we, visit frequently. I have travel plans at the end of this month. A vacation to Tokyo with my fiancée, she has never been.”

I must have heard him wrong. My eyes are fluttering, damn it. How could he possibly know of Japan? The proposal was dated with today’s date. The blinking has stopped, thank God. It was just a tentative plan that my father spoke to me of in passing. Why would a job applicant be aware of it?

“You’ve heard of our possible expansion to Japan?”

“Yes, I had an early breakfast with a recruiter this morning who was fishing the idea. I figured if she was fishing . . . I would go straight to the source.”

“Which recruiter?”

“The girl from Banner, Beatrice.”

Beatrice is Chad’s sister. He and three other people make up the Global Marketing arm of our firm. It makes sense for him to head the division in Japan. The plan may have been mentioned to me in passing but obviously others have been working on it. No matter, last man on the deal team to know or not, Japan is in my future.

“And Beatrice was searching for management?”

“No, her interest seemed to be sales staff, and that was another reason I answered your employment advertisement. I figured if I came in it would improve my chances for management consideration.”

“Understandable, but at this juncture we are only interviewing for sales staff for this office, the Chicago office. Would you be interested? And please keep in mind that we do offer an excellent management training program.”

“What would be the time-line for consideration for Japan?”

“There is no concrete time-lime. It would depend on your personal development which will overseen by a sales manager.”

“Oh, I see.”

I see disappointment in Vincent Murphy's expression and hear it in his voice and for some reason . . . I am pleased by it.

The boardroom door opens and Vincent and I look to it and see my father entering.

"You know . . . it is the darnest thing, I just got off the phone with Beatrice about a Vincent Murphy and then Kearny comes into my office telling me that there is an outstanding candidate interviewing in the boardroom named Vincent Murphy. Are the two the same sir?" my father asks Vincent.

"Yes Mr. Reynolds," he answers standing and extending his hand.

My father shakes his hand and smiles, "And you know something else, I got a call from Jackson Murphy this morning. We both sit on the YMCA and Culture Center boards. He called me about his son interviewing with my firm. Boy, you pulled out all the stops didn't you?" My father is still shaking Vincent Murphy's hand and still smiling.

"Yes sir, I did."

"That's good, real good to see." My father lets go of Murphy's hand and sits next to me. Vincent also returns to his chair.

"Well from what your dad tells me you have been looking for an opportunity to work in Japan?"

"Yes sir I have."

“And he says you speak Japanese as well as your mother.”

“Not quite sir, but I do speak it a tad better than my father.”

“Well that is a strong plus for you here, and Kearney tells me you have a book of business consisting of some of the city’s most prominent citizens. We could certainly use that with opening a foreign office. Do you think you clients would have an interest in the Asian market?”

“Yes sir and those that don’t will have once I layout the perspectives for them.”

“Good, good, well I see no reason why not to welcome you to Reynolds, Coleman, and Baker.”

What? No. I must not have heard him right. I am look steadily at my father hoping to catch his glance so he can see the disapproval in my expression, but our eyes don’t meet. Who does see my expression is Vincent Murphy, and he shakes his head to the negative in response to it.

“Go on back to Morgan Stanley and do what you have to do wrap things up, but don’t take more than three weeks. We want you involved with the Japan move. Beatrice told me your sales numbers and they’re fantastic. You will be reporting directly to my son as a broker. Preliminary plans have a staff of fifteen brokers, but everyone going over is expected to sell.”

What is my father doing? Only family is hired on a handshake at Reynolds, Coleman, and Baker. My father is smiling as if he has just been given a

new knee or something, He rises from the chair and to me he says, “A fifteen percent increase to the package he had at Morgan Stanley, and we will cover all of his relocation expenses. Again, welcome aboard Vincent and you and your parents have to come out to the house soon for dinner. No is not an option.” He winks at Vincent.

“Mr. Reynolds, I am more than flattered by your offer, but unfortunately . . . I cannot accept. I do not believe me and” he opens his palm toward me “this Mr. Reynolds will work well together as subordinate and superior. I am uncertain as to why but there is some hostility between us.”

“You two have a relationship before today?” My father asks.

“No.” we both answer.

What hostility? I have been as professional as possible with him. He must be one of those over sensitive black guys who think everyone white is a racist. He is looking at my father and purposely not making eye contact with me. My father looks from him to me back to him and again to me with a questioning look that I can't answer, so I decide to ask Vincent Murphy what is he talking about.

“Vincent, what hostility are you speaking of?”

His eye brows rise, “Are you kidding?”

“No, not at all.”

“Ok, first you refused to shake my hand when we met, and then you walked so fast in hall that I had to almost jog to keep up with you. It was as if you were trying to get the interview process over as quickly as possible. If Akron and Kearney weren’t there, I would not have interviewed. I would have left and never . . .”

My father interrupts with a chuckle, “Ok, now I understand Vincent, please allow me to explain. My son is a very focused person. He is often mistaken for being rude, and he does take a little getting used to . . . with that being said . . . perhaps this will be best, we here at Reynolds, Coleman, and Baker are willing to offer you the Sales Manager’s position. As the Sales Manager you and Calvin would be equals both reporting to Chad. How does that sound?”

What the fuck just happened?

“Yes, as equals I think we could work together.”

No we could not work together because we are not equals; I have been at this firm for four years. I have a vested interest. My grandfather founded the firm. Vincent Murphy just walked through the damn door, and we are equals? The sickness in my father’s knee must have spread to his brain

“Good, very good then Sales Manager it is.”

My father smiles and winks again at Murphy. He stands and so does Murphy and they shake hands across the table. I stand and extend my hand and Murphy gives me a tight grip and a firm shake along with his teeth bearing look.

Every muscle in my face is resisting, but I get the smile out while shaking his hand, “Welcome aboard.”

“Well I am going to leave you two to it. I have some calls to make.” My father makes his exit leaving the boardroom door open.

“What a great guy, it had to be wonderful having such a powerhouse for a father? Shall we move through the paper work now or later?” he asks still showing his teeth but not smiling.

Never is what I want to say to his smug ass, but what I say is “Later, after the offer letter is drawn up . . . and again welcome. I will contact you this afternoon and set up the time.”

Vincent steps away from the table with attaché case in hand as both Kearny and Akron enter the boardroom.

“We heard from the boss, welcome bro! Japan! That means you won’t be playing in the Chicago league see ya!” Akron is joyous. Both he and Kearney are patting Vincent on the back.

The three have huddled together at the head of table. I exit and head to my makeshift office. The walls of the hall seem to be moving past me and it feels like I am walking up hill. Stopping at the water fountain, I actually have to grab the chrome sides to balance myself. I bend to drink and water splashes on Murphy’s packet, but the good paper holds the ink, and the print doesn’t run.

At my desk, the scent of fresh Jasmine has returned. I sit and breathe it in. Equals . . . not in this life time, while putting Murphy's packet in my desk drawer the cigarettes and lighter taken from Kearney catch my eye. Why not? I tap a cowboy killer from the pack and flip the top of the Zippo and spin the wheel. The fire dances forth on the first attempt. The cigarette is in the flame and I inhale. With a flip of my wrist, I snap the Zippo closed. Leaning back in my chair I blow a cloud that lingers over my desk. I inhale and blow another. I put the cigarette out on the corner of my cheap desk and pick the phone up and dial my brother's number.

"Todd Reynolds," he answers on the second ring.

"Is the offer still on the table to work with you?"

"Always Calvin, full partner soon as you walk through the door."

"I am on my way."

There is nothing I need to take from my desk, but I do pick up the Jasmine plant, the lighter, and the smokes.