



## Out to Lunch

It occurred to me recently that I haven't written many stories about the years that I was a 'salaryman' - when I worked for a school music business back in Canada. I was with that company for just about ten years (off and on, actually), and that decade is full of episodes that can be mined!

I had started with the company right 'at the bottom' - filing sheet music onto the shelves - and finished my time with them as general manager - a kind of 'right hand man' to the owner. Bill was noted in our industry for being quite a hard-nosed and tough guy, but he always treated me fairly during our years together, and the two of us never had any difficult negotiations about salary or other things like that.

One day though, something happened that caused us to re-evaluate our working relationship. I was standing in the offices talking to Bill and some of the other workers when a phone call came in, and our receptionist called to me (out loud), "Dave, there's a call for you on line three ... from Dick F." Now this instantly raised everybody's eyebrows, because that was the man who owned our largest and strongest competitor. Why on earth was he calling me?

I took the call on a nearby phone, while the others waited expectantly (and *very* quietly). It was indeed something surprising; Dick was calling to suggest that we have lunch together, to discuss a proposal he wished to offer me. It would seem that I was being 'poached'.

Now before we go any further with the story I have to mention that there was absolutely not the slightest chance that I would make a move to that company, even if they were offering more money. Our own company had very much a 'family' feeling, and those guys were the 'enemy', continually copying our policies, offering poor products, and over-charging their customers (as we saw it). This idea was a non-starter completely. But I was *intensely* interested in this offer, for a couple of reasons. It might give us a good insight into plans for expansion that they might be considering, and of course it would also give me another 'valuation' on what I might be worth to employers, even though I had no plans to change.

So without trying to hide anything from Bill, and in fact right there while everybody was watching, I made the arrangement to meet for lunch. "OK Dick, it'll be interesting to hear what you have to propose ..."

As for Bill, he knew that there was no chance that I would switch, but he too was intrigued by this. What were they planning? So off I went, but as I headed out, he and I looked at each other, and we both recognized what was now hanging in the air. What was the 'magic number' that would be on the table? How much were they going to offer me, over and above what I was currently being paid? And what would Bill then do?

The lunch meeting was 'interesting'. Rather than report what happened between Dick and I, perhaps it would be easier to recount the conversation I had with Bill after I returned.

**Bill** (smiling): So, you decided to come back!

**Dave** (also smiling): Yep! You know that it would take an awful lot to pry me away from this place! But you know, I've been thinking about something here. You have no idea what transpired at that meeting; no way to

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tell if I am telling you the truth or not. Would you believe it if I were to tell you that he offered to double my salary, and that even though I doubled the number in my head before I told him, he *still* said, "OK"?

**Bill** (still smiling, but a little less so): I'm not quite sure that sounds like something Dick would have said ...

**Dave:** Well, you're right; he didn't say that. Would you believe it then, if I told you that he offered me a share in their company, starting right now. In a few years, if things go well, I could be quite wealthy ...

**Bill:** That's a family-held business! I don't think that they would ever make such an offer to an outsider ...

**Dave:** Well, you're right. He didn't offer that either.

**Bill** (now extremely curious): Well, what the hell went on? Come on; out with it!

**Dave** (somewhat downcast): They offered me a position as a junior salesman, out on the road in northern BC.

Bill thought this was still another joke, as indeed so had I when Dick first put it on the table at lunchtime. But no, it was no joke. Dick had offered me a basic entry-level job. As for salary, there had been no discussion because I had told him right off the bat that I just wasn't interested. We had finished our lunch as quickly as politely possible, and I had returned to the office.

Bill was too polite to laugh out loud, but it was pretty clear that he wasn't too upset by this. Not only was he relieved that our strong competitor wasn't about to make some major surprise business move, but he now didn't have to think about any kind of raise for his general manager for quite some time to come.

As for me, well it was just another lesson learned. If you are going to gamble, you had better be prepared to lose!