

**12 CUPS
OF
COFFEE**

A NOVEL BY DAVID GOOSSEN

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Chapter 1

“What we’ve got here is the way you can streamline the aspects of your business work flow that are currently languishing further down your internal demand chain. Integrating and coalescing them into the mix in cost effective and dynamic ways, to, bottom line, increase your effectiveness in today’s rapidly changing marketplace.”

I look around the boardroom. I click to the next PowerPoint slide. No one moves. I am presenting to a room full of deer and I am the high beam headlight on a speeding eighteen-wheeler. I have them right where I want them. Utterly confused. The next slide should read, ‘Don’t Panic’. I put down the clicker and lean confidently on the edge of the boardroom table.

“That’s what the marketing people came up with to help me sell this product to you. I don’t think it makes any sense at all. But it sure sounds good, right? Until you try and figure out what the hell it means.”

I can see the ice breaking around the table. My speeding eighteen-wheeler has passed without any loss of life. People start to breathe again, shifting in their seats.

“You are all smart people, smarter than me, and I’ll tell you the truth here. None of this marketing talk is going to do what the marketing people think it’s going to do. They think it’s going to sell this product to you. I think the only people who would buy this product based on what I just said are other

marketing people. In fact, I think that paragraph won an honorable mention at the North American Marketing Awards last year.”

I get laughs with this. I always do. My timing and presentation today are right on the money. My Sincere & Trustworthy Hat fits me perfectly.

“Here is what I know from my years doing this. This product will help you to make your business more effective, and by being more effective, you will make your business more profitable. Simple as that.”

I pause and take a sip of my water. I was avoiding the coffee crud the rest of the table was served. I saw the coffee room on the way in; abandon hope all ye who enter, seriously. The board glances at each other, waiting for me to continue. I really do have them now. But I have to hear it from them. I wait, confident, assured. I wait and am rewarded. The CFO pulls the cuffs on his Hugo Boss suit and leans forward.

“Tell us more, James.”

As I expected - as I knew - the rest of the meeting goes like clockwork. I had them when they thought I was cutting through the bullshit and telling them the truth. And it was the truth. Mostly. I cannot sell if I do not mostly believe the stuff that is coming out of my mouth. People are not fools, even corporate executives. I have to walk a fine line, a very fine line, between telling the whole truth - the truth that would scare them out of the room and send them cowering underneath their desks for the rest of the day - and blowing so much frozen water crystals up their asses that their stomachs would inflate up like snow globes.

I crossed that line many a time in my early years in sales. But all I lost was another electronics sale, not a high six-digit software sale like now.

I learned to replace the tough ‘Hard As Nails’ sales guy with a ‘Sensitive & Caring’ sales guy. But the bottom line is, I am still a sales guy. If I am in a meeting with you, I am trying to sell you something. I will be in full on sales guy mode. I am not the real Jamie - sorry, you don’t get that. You get the ‘Sales Guy Jamie’ action figure. The guy who will tell you exactly what you want to hear, every time. That is my skill, I guess. I spend my life telling people exactly what they want to hear, not what I really want to say.

I do a lot of research before I go into a sales meeting because no two Wallets

are the same. I learned to take my time, to lure them in, to figure out just what was the right bait to open any particular Wallet. And, of course, the bait changes with each Wallet. Our product doesn't get cracked open until I have gone in and sold myself, sold our company - FireForest Software Solutions, and sold the president - Gregor - to them. I sell a highly manipulative and emotional connection first and foremost. But I sell it with love.

Most of the time, I don't even take my computer into the boardroom because too much can go wrong in a product demo. I have lost sales because the Wallets did not like the color of the buttons on the screens. Yes, pragmatic people would consider that a pretty piss poor reason for not buying a product, but, as they say, the customer is always right. Even in their stupid, infantile decisions, they are always right. And if they do not like the buttons, that is ok with me.

That seems illogical but think about it for a second. Do you really want to have a customer who is willing to make a decision of this size, based on the color of the buttons on the screen of the product? Do you want a customer like this to be phoning you with every little issue they have with the product? Because they will not be phoning the generic help support hotline.

It may hurt at the time - not getting the sale - but if you consider just how many trips you are going to have to make to sooth them down, how many change orders you're going to have to write out for the low level coders in Bangalore, how many midnight emails you are going to get - you get the picture.

Better to walk away and leave one for the competition. Let them have all the fun. And it keeps them distracted while I win all the good clients.

Thirty minutes later I leave the boardroom, actually getting a hug from the Comptroller herself. Yes, the rest of the meeting is that good. The team from Flooje - my esteemed competition for this deal - are waiting to do the next presentation, and see all of this through the open boardroom door. They are toast. I smile, serenely. My life is so good I should sell shares in it.

I know everyone who sells products similar to FireForest so I know the people waiting to do the next demo. I know Garner and Dayne well. So well that when we all meet in Orlando at the next trade show, I will be drinking with

them through each and every night.

But right now, this is war and I know my visible hug from the Comptroller is festering in their guts like a stab wound from a rusty bayonet covered in salt. And that is the way I want it. It is not so much about the products we sell. Theirs is as good as mine, and in some ways it is better. This is about Relationships.

Fortunately for me, Garner does not get that. He is going to go in there and overload them with the product features while Dayne fires cross court volleys at them full of incomprehensible Gant charts and cube analysis. It is very important never to overwhelm the Wallets. They get really grumpy if you do.

I bide my time waiting for them to finish their pitch by flirting with the receptionist.

Don't get me wrong, I do not want to go out with the receptionist, I do not want a relationship with her, I am not going to sleep with her, and I am certainly not leaving Ellen for her. I flirt with her because she is almost as powerful a person in this company as the CFO, the President and the Comptroller combined. She is the only person who knows the big picture on everything that is going on. I have been flirting with her over the phone for almost four months while locking down this sale. And, when I came into their offices an hour ago, and met her for the first time in all her middle-aged, overweight mid-west glory, I flirted with her, in person, shamelessly.

These months of telephone flirting pay off because Garner cannot flirt. He comes from a Computer Sciences background and sees life as a series of 'IF – THEN – ELSE' statements. Which is great for a computer programmer, but it really blows for flirting. 'IF I complement your body, THEN you come home with me, ELSE I get slapped.'

Dayne is a great flirter, she can flirt with the best of them. She could be a gold medal flirt for the United States in the next Olympics, but in this situation, with the receptionist, all she stands for is competition. She's another woman. She is younger - strike one, she is cuter - strike two, and she is getting on a plane at the end of the meeting and going some place nicer than Des Moines - big strike three from the woman behind the desk with the stuffed Mickey Mouse sitting on top of her computer monitor and a calendar of cute kittens on the wall.

"I'm heading to Orlando in a couple days. Is there anything, anything at all, I can send you from Disneyworld?"

She smiles, huge dimples forming on either side of her wide mouth.

"Oh, Jamie, you're bad."

"Bad? How can I be bad? Maybe a Minnie to go with your Mickey?"

She giggles. For months now, she has been talking me up around the company, how funny I am, how attentive I am, how considerate I am. Most importantly, that I am not a usual salesperson and I care. Because I do care. I care a great deal. Mostly about my commission, but that is still a form of caring.

My dad used to tell me stories about greasing the skids in a company. Not bribing anyone, although he was not above that, but about making sure you have a good relationship with the office staff - who my dad called them The Skids.

Garner and Dayne, they do not do that. Garner ignores The Skids in his quest for The Wallets, and Dayne is so stunning that she is instantly hated by any female Skid as soon as she struts through the front door all hair, legs and heels.

The receptionist tells me about her kids, about how they have been trying to get down to Florida to take them to see Minnie and Mickey but the cost and the time... I have heard it all before. It seems just about every company I have ever been to has one of them, a Mickey Junkie. Someone who has never gotten over either their only trip to Disneyland in Fifth Grade or has never gotten over never going to Disneyland in Fifth Grade and is now over compensating in a big way.

I will send her a plush Minnie to go with her Mickey and she will be mine forever. Then I will write off the purchase as a business expense and deduct it from my taxes. It is a win-win for both of us.

The boardroom door opens, twenty-seven minutes later, to some quiet talking, some terse shaking of hands. I notice that the Comptroller does not even shake Dayne's hand. Not quite the same level of frivolity as my exit. Even worse for Garner and Dayne, when the CFO sees I am still there, he ushers me back into the boardroom.

"James! Could you come back in for a moment, and then I'll get you to the airport."

I smile at the receptionist and head to the boardroom. Passing Garner and Dayne, I grin.

“Kids.”

They smile back politely. Knowing I have won. Again.

Inside the boardroom, we all sit down and the Comptroller leans forward.

“We have decided to go with your product. To go with you.”

“Well, that’s great. But I don’t want to push you into anything. I want to make sure you’ve done your due diligence, you’ve read all the product specification sheets. You know, I don’t want you to make a rushed decision. In a couple days, I can stop back and we can talk then.”

They are stunned. I have flipped their minds and put the final lock on the deal by saying no. It takes a truly honest sales person to say they aren’t ready to sign a contract. Or a truly sadistic manipulative one. Your average sales guy would have had the papers sliding across the table the split second the Wallet said they wanted to buy. He would have pushed them away by being pushy. I don’t do that.

“But we’re ready to sign. Now.”

“Look, this is a relationship we’re creating here. A long, committed relationship. I’m not looking for a one-night stand.”

I get laughs from everyone. Even the dour head of IT. And he has probably never had a one-night stand in his life. I think I have even got a wink from the middle aged Comptroller. She will be trying to trap me in the copier room on the way out if I am not careful.

“That’s the way that we feel, James.”

“Well...”

I hesitate, playing hard to get. Being coy.

“James, give us the papers. We’re ready to get this started.”

I shrug my shoulders, open my computer bag and, with a flourish, remove and slide the contract across the table. One final sales trick. Pen choice for the signing of the documents helps to solidify the deal. I have half dozen pens in my case, from a battered Bic with a chewed top, up to a massive Mont Blanc. The people around the table determine the choice of pen. I do not want to be too above them, nor too below them. Reading the table one last time, I choose a stainless steel and gold Cartier pen that I won a couple years ago at a convention. This pen will do just fine. I offer the pen to the CFO. He takes a moment to

admire it, to feel its weight in his hand and unobtrusively notice the brand.

“Nice pen.”

“A good client gave it to me for my birthday.”

He is thinking I must be very good if I get Cartier pens as birthday presents from clients. I am not just a sales guy, I have moved up and now I am an equal.

Just over an hour later, I am at the Des Moines airport, having been dropped off by the CFO himself, and I have the signed sales contracts in my computer bag. I am going to spend the next four hours on the flight drinking like the champion that I am while working out just what my commission is going to be from the sale I just made.

Yes, it is great to me be.