



The Weekly Man

Episode 17: Tuesday – Jackson

Jackson smiled as he stared at the monitor, not even listening to Jody’s shrill voice.

Yep, I think it’s about time for Jody Blake to become someone else’s problem.

He didn’t like being threatened or bullied and that’s exactly what Jody was doing. He felt like muting the sound (which he wasn’t listening to anyway) and just watching the contortions in Jody’s face as he went on about Jackson’s responsibilities towards him and all the money he’d stuffed into Jackson’s bank account and the suspicious nature of his and Roy’s office conflict resolution courses coming out at the same time (“without any warning”) and how he owed at least a little support to his clients and how there were other people out there who could design the courseware for him and maybe even do a better job and maybe for less money and maybe they would offer more customer support.

Time to take control.

“Well,” said Jackson, “if that’s the way you feel, I can recommend some other designers, people I know whose work is on a par with mine. But I don’t think there’s going to be much difference in the pricing. In fact, I’ve been giving you a preferred customer discount for some time now because of our long term relationship.”

It was hard to tell if Jody’s jaw dropped. His round face, round mouth and lack of a chin made it difficult to determine where his jaw was. But his eyes said it all. He thought he would have Jackson cowering at the thought of losing his business, probably had fantasies about him making all sorts of apologies and finally agreeing to post a rebuttal of Roy’s posting. But it wasn’t working and now he was silent, staring unbelieving at Jackson.

He wore a suit and tie for the meeting. A suit and tie for an online meeting while he was sitting in his kitchen. Jackson wondered if he was wearing pants. Jody’s mouth began to move.

“Is this how much you value my business?” It was almost a plea. “All these years and you want to refer me to someone else?”

“Well, Jody, if you’re not happy with my work and you feel that I’m not offering enough support then maybe you would be more comfortable with someone else.”

“No, Jackson, that’s not what I was saying.”

Starting to worry are you, Jody?

“I just think there should be a little more support when it comes to accusations about the integrity of my courses.”

Beads of sweat blossomed on Jody’s forehead, made all the more visible by the Friar Tuck baldness.

You’re afraid of having to start all over with a new designer, aren’t you? The unfamiliarity of it. The unpredictability of coming out of your shell of comfort and starting all over. So who’s in the driver’s seat now?

“And I wish I could help you with that, Jody, but that would be unprofessional of me. I can’t side with one client over another. That might even set me up for legal action.” Jody was practically squirming. “So, if you were having your courses developed elsewhere, they might be able to help you. And like I say, I can refer you to some very good people. And I can refer you to a consultant I know who is excellent at media rebuttals.”

“No!” he almost yelled. “No...that’s not what I’m saying. Or...yes...maybe I could speak to your consultant. But...yes...I understand...and I wouldn’t put it past that bastard to try to sue you. I think we can work things out.”

“You said you had an idea for another course.” Jackson watched as relief settled over Jody’s face like the tide washing out.

“Yes. I’ve been giving this some thought for quite a while now. It’s based on my extensive experience in building working relationships in...”

They discussed his ideas for half an hour and Jody said he would send more detailed information by email.

Roy’s posting at BetterThanCollege wasn’t brought up again.

Jackson had mixed feelings about his face-to-face with Jody. Things had worked out in his favor but he had a feeling that Jody’s reaction to Roy’s posting and his insistence that Jackson do something about it was more than just a little overblown. In the past, the two had seethed for a while over attacks from the other but the vitriol generally wore off quickly when they settled into working on their next course. But Jody had gone way overboard this time, expecting him to actually work against one of his clients. He was ready to drop Jody and he’d hoped deep down that Jody would have done it in their face-to-face.

He ate lunch as he scanned the news sites. Ham and cheese sandwich and a glass of milk. That had been his lunch menu every day for as long as he could remember, which was most of his adult life. He lived in the NOW like a mystic who was far from believing in mysticism. He lived each moment of his life focused on each task and activity according to an unbending routine. Every moment had its irrevocable slot in the timetable of his days.

Even his relaxation periods were written in the stone of a Gantt chart, a detailed list of projects broken into objectives and time-allotted tasks to achieve the objectives covering every moment of his day from waking to sleeping. He had exactly thirty minutes for lunch and a browse through the news. He never bothered with the weather. It meant nothing to him. He mostly checked the business and education sites. Mainstream news generally didn’t interest him but a headline in one of the general news sites caught his attention.

There was something about the headline that drew his finger to the hyper-linked text and he started reading. Some kid named Timothy had read a book about a girl who hanged herself after her hamster died and then cut his dog's throat and cut his own wrists.

He suspected there was a lot more to the story than that. The kid was probably having some serious emotional problems, or on drugs. He'd cut the dog's throat with a knife.

What kind of normal kid cuts his dog's throat with a knife and then cuts his own wrists? And how does a ten year old kid even think of that? And where were his parents while all this was going on? And why did they let him read a book about a girl who kills herself?

The mother was quoted as saying, "He was a normal little boy. His dog just died and we bought him a new one. He seemed happy."

You let your ten year old read a story about a girl who kills herself right after your son's dog dies and he has a surrogate to replace the one he loved?

"Good luck with your next baby."

He moved on to an article about 9 Trends in Modern Education, but he noticed that he felt a vague chill after reading about the boy's suicide. Something wasn't right about that.