

Advanced Labor Relations

“Right through here, Mr. Kinkaid,” said the slender man in the lab coat as he opened the door to the observation room. “Dr. Carlson will be along shortly. While we wait, he asked me to give you some background about our department, as well as show you what we’re working on at the moment. I’ve got some briefing notes here for you, in case you want to refer to them later while you’re deliberating.” He handed over a few pages.

“I’m not sure you people fully grasp your situation,” replied the younger man, looking displeased as he stepped into the room. “I’ve been assigned by Tellington herself to go through every division and find out if they’re worth what they cost. Now you tell me that your department head isn’t even here to meet me when I arrive? You’re hardly starting off on the right foot with the man who holds your fate in his hands, Dr. Manfred.” He looked smug.

“I assure you that we understand your importance, sir,” answered Manfred. “Dr. Carlson was unavoidably delayed, but he’ll explain when he gets here. He won’t be long. In the meantime, since you’ve just joined the company recently, I’d like to fill you in on some of our history, if I may? I think the information will be quite useful to you.”

“It had better be. Every minute Carlson makes me wait hurts your chances.”

“Very well, sir. For starters, were you aware that *Dr.* Carlson,” said Manfred, with a slight emphasis on the title, “is the reason why we have this enclave in the first place? No doubt you already know that Tellington Industries was the first corporation to be granted its own

sovereign territory, but it was Dr. Carlson's idea to approach the government with the offer that made it so." Manfred sat in one of the chairs along the observation window. "This was before your time, and mine for that matter, but back then the government was nearing collapse. The debt had soared to a point where it had overwhelmed everything else, and the entire nation was on the verge of ceasing to function. Dr. Carlson realized that this presented us with a great opportunity." He gestured to a chair beside him. "Would you like to join me, sir? This will lead into the research we're about to see through the observation window, here."

Kinkaid sat, still looking irritated. "Well, I confess I hadn't known about that. It seems odd to think about corporations being subject to the laws of nation-states. How could anything ever get done that way? And you say it was Carlson who changed that?"

"It was indeed, sir, and not as long ago as you might imagine. It seems only natural to people today that corporations have their own territories, where they set their own laws and regulations, but it wasn't always so. At the crucial point, Dr. Carlson convinced Mitchell Tellington, the grandfather of our current CEO, to make an offer that the government of the time simply couldn't refuse. The corporation agreed to assume a large amount of the debt, enough to keep the national government operating and give it a chance to get back on its feet. In return, all we asked for was an area of land where we could conduct our business and do our research without being choked off by restrictive regulation. Given their available choices, Dr. Carlson was sure that they would agree, and they did. And so, Tellington acquired its own territory, subject to no laws but our own." Manfred paused for a sip of water.

"Wait, how long ago was this? Carlson would have to be ancient for this to have been his idea. It's a clever idea, I admit that, but how could it have been his?"

“Dr. Carlson was quite young at the time, but it’s also true that he’s older than is commonly known. I’ll leave it to him whether or not he wants to tell you his exact age. It was because we no longer had to be bogged down in red tape that we made some big strides in longevity research early in the company’s history. Many people here at Tellington have benefitted from that research over the years, including him. You might say that one point in favor of the research department being worth what we cost, as you put it earlier, is that we give the executives of this company decades of extra life.” Manfred smiled. “A strong point, I’d say.”

Kinkaid looked interested now. “Yes, I suppose that I’d have to agree. But why haven’t I heard any of this before? A longevity treatment like you’re talking about should be well known, and a hugely profitable product line. Why isn’t it?”

“Partly it is, actually. There are some products on the market in that area, and we own most of them, indirectly. They’re all based on that early research. The most effective ones are still kept secret, though, for a few reasons. First, many of the ingredients needed are quite rare, or expensive enough to produce that they wouldn’t work as mass-market products, since very few could afford them. Second, by keeping the best treatments to ourselves, Tellington gets strategic advantages over other corporations in terms of loyalty, continuity and the experience level of our executives. How many bloodlettings have there been at Weller or Finncorp while we’ve had stable, lasting leadership? Last, while the general population accepts that the well-to-do will have access to things that they don’t, it was decided that they might not accept that for life itself. We didn’t want to risk becoming a target of the masses. Remember, in the beginning we didn’t have our own armed forces and intelligence operatives; those came later as a natural result of having sovereignty. Getting that was the thin edge of the wedge, then the need to protect our research, resources and people allowed us to justify all of the other trappings that come with it.”

Manfred grinned. “Of course, we’d already gotten those things in place before we let the national government find out about them. Presented with a fait accompli, there was little that they could do, especially since when we assumed the debt, we made sure not to take on too much of it. They were still fragile, and since we kept in their good graces with strategic gifts of the longevity treatments and a few other things, they decided that working with us was better than confronting us. Dr. Carlson was consulted on all of these things. Most of them were his idea.”

“I see. It sounds like Dr. Carlson has been quite valuable to the company.”

“I certainly think so. We realize that when someone new takes over at the top, changes often follow. In the past we’ve always been able to show the incoming CEO the value of our department, and I hope once you finish here, you’ll agree.” Manfred looked through the one-way glass to see people entering the testing room. “Ah, and here we have a chance to show how we’re still contributing today. You mentioned product lines earlier, and I certainly agree that they’re important. The new products that we were able to create in an unrestricted research environment allowed us to pay off that debt we assumed in less than twelve years. But here in research, we think some of our best work comes on the personnel side.”

Kinkaid watched the as the room slowly filled up. “What does research have to do with personnel? I thought that was a separate department.”

“It is, but we work with them in recruitment sessions like this. As you know, Tellington is one of the largest and most powerful corporate states in existence. The largest, if one is able to track down all of our subsidiaries. We have a constant need for new people in virtually any area you can name. Getting people isn’t the problem; we never have a shortage of applicants. Where we can get an advantage is in fitting the right people into the right jobs, and that’s where the

research department comes in.” Manfred looked at his notes. “These people have already been through the basics. What we’re going to do here is put them under certain stresses and see how they react. We’ve developed various drugs which we can use to cause them to feel irritation, fear, safety; whatever we wish, really.”

“You drug the applicants?” Kinkaid asked, surprised.

“It wouldn’t have been possible under the old system, but since we’re able to make our own rules, we can do it. It’s actually stated in the initial agreement that every applicant signs. Suitability testing without notice, if I remember the phrasing correctly. Under our laws, that includes being subjected to stress through environmental factors. All the fancy wording just means that we can do whatever we need to in order to determine whether someone is right for our organization, and where they’ll fit in best.”

Manfred chuckled. “Don’t worry, it’s not as sinister as it might sound. All we’re trying to do is keep people from getting put into the wrong place for them. Did you know that when someone applies here, they don’t get to apply for any particular job? That’s because people don’t necessarily know what they’re good at. Someone who resents authority probably won’t make a good soldier, but they might make a great spy. There’s really not many traits that we can’t use, we just need to know what they are. People aren’t going to tell us if they’re bullies, or easily corrupted, or other generally negative things. So, we find out with tests like this, and we use that to put them where that negative becomes a positive.”

“It sounds strange, but when you explain it that way, it does make sense,” Kinkaid said. “We’ve all run into somebody who clearly shouldn’t be doing the job they’re in. This idea of using character flaws as suitability traits is interesting. Dr. Carlson again?”

“Partly, yes,” answered Manfred. “The idea isn’t entirely new, but most organizations lack the scope to be able to use all traits positively. Simply put, not too many companies can use the bottom of the barrel. Tellington’s operations are so wide that we can almost literally find a use for anyone as long as we know them well. That’s what these tests are for.”

Kinkaid leaned forward in his chair. “All right, tell me about this group. What are you going to do to them? How do you drug them, anyway? The air vents?”

“It’s usually airborne, yes, but sometimes we use food, water, or an injection during a physical exam. Some of the compounds we use work better one way or another. It varies quite a bit. As for what we’re testing, there’s never only one thing. This group has been told that they’ve met the basic requirements, and now we’re going to do further tests for job suitability. When they open the test package, they’ll see this.” He passed a sheet to Kinkaid.

“You must choose one of your group to meet a challenge. You will be given no prior knowledge of this challenge. If the chosen individual succeeds, all of your group will be hired,” Kinkaid read aloud. “The challenge will commence when the clock in this room reaches noon.” He glanced at the clock. “Well, that must seem very strange to them. It doesn’t leave much time, either. Is that the point? To look at what they do when they’re rushed?”

Manfred replied, “The real beauty of a test like this is that we don’t have to look at any specific thing. Oh, we’ll have a factor that the drug will affect. In this case, we’re piping in a low concentration of a compound that will make them all feel a bit anxious, run up their pulse a little, that kind of thing. We’ve lowered the oxygen content a bit, too. It’s designed to make them give more honest reactions. We’ll see how they respond to time pressure when they’re feeling stressed, which is a good thing to know. But we’ll get so much more. For starters, we’ll see who

wants to be chosen, and who doesn't. Who thinks about it first, and who jumps into action. Who is cooperative in a group, who's adversarial, who wants someone else to make the call, who wants to go it alone. Whether they get behind the choice, or resent them, or get the choice made at all. We'll see if any of them thinks about the wording of the note. You'll notice that it doesn't say that if the challenge is failed, they don't get hired; just that if it's passed, they will be."

Through the window, the candidates had opened their envelopes and were looking at each other, confused. Manfred continued, "This is the first time we've thrown anything weird at this group, so we'll see how they react to that, too. We do extensive analysis of the footage and biometrics, and we always find out more about the candidates than we can anticipate when we start. And we'll have a place for all of them, once they show us who they are."

In the testing room, several people were now speaking at once, seemingly arguing about who should be picked. One was still looking stunned, one was pointing at the clock and yelling, and one young woman was sitting on her own, looking at the note. She seemed the calmest of the group. Manfred stood, pointing her out to Kinkaid. "We might have a good one here. She hasn't lost her head or gotten tunnel vision about the clock. Time's almost up. Come on, come on, you can do it."

The clock showed ten seconds left. The argument seemed to be down to two men. Both looked at the calm young woman, and she nodded to the one on her left. The other man said something, then reluctantly sat down, and the first man nodded to the young woman, then stepped to the door. As the clock hit noon, the door opened and the chosen man stepped through.

"Oh well. I thought for a moment...still, pretty good." Manfred turned back to Kinkaid. "Did you notice that even though those two men were the ones seemingly competing to be

chosen, they both looked to her for the choice between them? Interesting, isn't it? Who was really the leader there, after things shook out?"

"It's eerily compelling stuff," Kinkaid agreed. "And I see how valuable the information is, like you said. But what were you hoping she'd do? You were waiting for her to do something. What was it?"

"Oh, that," Manfred replied a bit sheepishly. "Well, what we just saw is adapted from an old psychological test. You might not know this, but in colleges the psychology students often run tests like this on others as part of their courses. They'll stand right next to you in the elevator instead of going into the other corner, or use the urinal right beside you when there's an empty one at the end, and see how you react. Things like that. Dr. Carlson's chemistry class in college got this test sprung on them as an exercise, and his response became a bit of a school legend. One of our junior researchers graduated from the same place recently, and he somehow got his hands on the footage. Dr. Carlson was like that young woman, not getting caught up in the argument and still thinking instead of panicking. I was wondering if she'd come up with the same idea he did, although I shouldn't have expected it. Nobody else has, as far as I know."

"Why? What did he do?"

"He unplugged the clock."

Kinkaid looked surprised. "Unplugged the...brilliant! The wording of the note, like you said. If the clock doesn't reach noon, you have all the time you want. It's so simple."

"And yet, nobody ever thinks of it. Like a lot of brilliant ideas, it's quite obvious in retrospect, but because it's not conventional, it doesn't get used," said Manfred. "I don't think I can give you a better example of Dr. Carlson's value than that. He has at least as much education

and experience as anybody else in the field, but his true value is that he *thinks* all the time. He doesn't get wrapped up in any preconceptions, no matter what he's working on. And so not only does he come up with new things, but he comes up with better ways to use what we've always had available, but never taken full advantage of. Time after time, I've seen him do it. He'll keep doing it, if you let him, and all he'll want in return is his department, so he *can* keep doing it."

Kinkaid looked thoughtful. "You know, when I came in here I thought that I'd be seeing how much of this department is unnecessary; how much fat there was to trim. I couldn't understand why you had so many people on staff, especially the psychologists. But there's so much more here than product research. This has been very enlightening. Thanks for that. I'm very much looking forward to meeting Dr. Carlson, now."

"Glad to be of service, sir," said Manfred. "To be honest, if you absolutely must trim some fat, as you put it, Dr. Carlson might be able to come up with something you could show your superiors without cutting our effectiveness too much. He's dealt with corporate politics for a long time, and he understands them, even if he'd rather not have to get involved. You could ask him about it, if you have to. He'd understand."

"Hmm," mused Kinkaid. "Well, I'll think that over. And I do appreciate you bringing it up, too. Like you said earlier, I'm new here, and I might need to make my mark early or not get to make it at all."

"Of course, sir," said Manfred. "And speaking of Dr. Carlson, I was expecting him before now. If you don't mind waiting here for just a few moments, I'll go and check on him. There's another group coming in for testing, so if you like you can observe that while I find out what's keeping him. I had the sound off earlier so we could talk, but I can turn it on for this one. You

can hear all the discussions. The details of the test should be on the last page of those notes I gave you earlier. I always find these fascinating, myself.”

“I hadn’t realized before now just how much you can find out through them,” answered Kinkaid. “I agree, it’s fascinating. Please turn the sound on, and I’ll watch and wait for you and Dr. Carlson.”

Manfred flipped a switch on a panel in the corner. “There you are, sir. It shouldn’t be long.” As he closed the door behind him, the ghost of a smile flickered across his face.

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In the CEO’s office, Dr. Carlson sat across the desk from Coleen Tellington, watching the video feed of the observation room. “Well, it looks like the new stuff works like I thought it would. Kinkaid went in there with a chip on his shoulder so big I didn’t think he’d fit through the door, and now I’m *Doctor* Carlson and he’s thanking Manfred and waiting on me, quite happily by the look of it.” He popped the tab on a can of soda.

The new CEO looked up from the screen at the sound. “Another one? Can’t you just drink coffee like a normal person?” she asked, glancing over at the two empty cans already on the desk.

“Sorry, boss,” replied Carlson. “Coffee’s an acquired taste that I just never acquired, I guess. And I’ve got to get my caffeine somehow.”

“Well, I suppose you keep delivering on your promises, so however you do it, I won’t argue,” said Tellington. “Kinkaid has been my most rabid attack dog, and he seems tamed now.

You're sure this stuff of yours can't be detected? How did you get it to him, anyway? Airborne, like the applicants?"

"It can't be detected by anything that I'm aware of, at least not yet. I'm working on our sniffers right now to get them to pick it up, in case somebody else comes up with something similar." Carlson took another pull on his soda. "For the vector, we put a light dusting on the briefing notes. Its natural form is a powder, although we're doing some aerosol testing today too. It will be more effective if we can use it in ventilation. You could have a roomful of opposing negotiators thinking your way, just like Kinkaid. Have to present your arguments correctly for the audience, of course, and let them think it's their own idea. It's all a combination. Our psych people can brief the negotiators and sales force, but they might not need much coaching. Most of those types are practically psychologists themselves. They know how to work people. I guess they should; after all, that's why they got put in sales and negotiations, right?"

"All right, all right, I acknowledge that your ideas about recruitment testing are good. Really good, in fact; I'm honestly very impressed. I always wondered why my father seemed to let you get away with so much, but now I see that there's a lot more to you and your work than most people know." The young executive paused, thinking. "Wait. If it was on the notes, why wasn't Manfred affected? He touched them when he handed them to Kinkaid. Shouldn't he have been swayed by Kinkaid's arguments, too?"

Carlson grinned. "Nice catch, boss. He was affected, but less so since he wasn't handling the papers as much. Mostly, though, I wanted him to be affected too, since I put a counteragent I've been working on into his water. I don't like making stuff that I can't control, if I can help it. It'll make it easier for us to use an airborne vector, too, if we have that counteragent. Fact is, as soon as Manfred gets here I'll want to get him down to the lab. We want these things to

metabolize quickly so there's less opportunity to spot them, but it makes it tougher to test. Got to get on it fast. Ah, hell!" he said as he sloped soda onto his shirt.

"That's what you get for chugging that stuff," said Tellington, chuckling to take the sting out of the words. "Okay, go do your meet-and-greet with Kinkaid, and then tell him to come up here, would you? I want to talk with him about his performance." She frowned. "It was a slip for him to mention worrying about making his mark, and he didn't catch on to the significance of getting let in on the longevity treatments, either. He should have been happy about getting into the inner circle, and he should have realized you and Manfred were in it too, since he found out from you. Maybe I've been giving him too much credit."

"Well, he was under the influence of this new stuff. And he's young yet. Lots of young people just need a little seasoning, and then they do very well. You'll probably find out more by whether or not he asks me about trimming some fat, and whether he brings what I tell him to you, if I say it'll hurt our research. Find out if he values making his mark over what's actually best for the company. Clever of Manfred to sneak that bit in there. There's always more to learn about people."

"Hmm. That's worth considering. All right, go on, Manfred's coming up to the door now. And take your garbage with you," she said, gesturing to the soda cans. "Keep me apprised about this new concoction of yours. And give it a name, will you, so we can stop calling it the stuff?"

"Sure thing, boss," replied Carlson, gathering his empties.

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Walking to the lab, Carlson turned to Manfred. "Good job with Kinkaid. You handled him just right."

“Well, the brash, ego-driven types are pretty easy to read. Thanks all the same. How did it go on your end?” He glanced inquisitively at the soda stain on Carlson’s shirt.

Carlson noticed the look and nodded. “Like we’d hoped. I let the selling job you did with Kinkaid speak for the department, while I made sure she knew I wasn’t a rival for her job. You know how people who have just taken charge can be about that, especially if they’re young. But nobody feels threatened by an idiot-savant.” He smiled. “Makes it easier to have somebody brilliant serving under you when he’s just an eccentric old man who slops on himself. Got to present our arguments correctly for the audience, after all.”

“It’s all a combination,” Manfred responded, grinning. “How about the aerosol testing? How did that go?”

“Quite well, I think,” answered Carlson. “Opening the cans really spread it nicely. Another new boss won over. It gives the soda a funny taste, though. I doubt we’ll be able to use it in food or drinks.”

“Good thing it works so well as a vapor, then.” Both men chuckled.

Carlson handed the empty cans to Manfred. “All right, you run these through the sniffers, then send them to materials analysis. I’ll go meet Kinkaid and send him back upstairs, and we can get back to work for another few decades.”

“Right, boss.” Manfred clinked the cans together. “Here’s to stability.”