

The unhappy buccaneer

THE boss is a conceited old fool, but he knows how to run a business and make money. In fact, he is the business, and as he pays us a generous share of the money he makes, we don't complain. He started up when he was just 20, worked hard, branched out, branched in, branched the fuck knows how and where (though he'll tell you given just half a chance) and when he was 30, he was a millionaire several times over. Sixty-odd years on we're quoted on exchanges around the world. So, keep in with him, keep him sweet and life is yummy. That's where Brendan came unstuck, though I'll admit it wasn't his fault.

It's not that he doesn't brown-nose. Brendan can brown-nose with the best of us, better than many, in fact. Brendan's a winner, but he is also a stuck-up little jerk and doesn't have as many of us watching his back as is healthy for a guy with ambition. Actually, he doesn't have anyone watching his back.

When the boss turned 80 and the business 60, he invited us all to help celebrate. There would be a private dinner at the Rutherford, an open bar, and he booked two of the Rutherford floors to put us up for the night so we could drink just the hell as much as we liked. Partners weren't invited. It was just 60 of his closest executives, from all over, head office, the West Coast, Europe, Asia and the Americas, and some of his junior execs, some of his favoured head office juniors. Not all got the ticket, but many of us did, and that included Brendan.

Brendan doesn't play his cards right and never really has. He's got a lot to learn. If he did play his cards right, it wouldn't have happened, or it wouldn't have happened to him. The Friday we got our invitations, some of us at La Figa Lounge met for our regular session. Brendan didn't usually come (and we didn't like that), but this time he did.

'Get one?' Vaclav asked me.

'I certainly did, hand-delivered by the boss's PA.'

'Yeah, right. How about you, Brendan?'

'I did, yes.'

'And what are you going as?'

'What?'

'It's fancy dress. Well, only if you want to. What're you going as?'

Brendan did not like to be wrong. He didn't want to admit he hadn't known the gig was fancy-dress.

'Er, I've got a few ideas, but I've not decided.'

We caught on quick, so Kyle said he was going as one of the Village People, Bernie was going as the Pope, I said I'd be Adam.

'You can't do that.'

'Why not?'

'You can't walk in naked.'

We laughed.

'I'll wear a body stocking. Any thoughts, Brendan?'

'I've got to think.'

And think he did.

A week later he came to my desk.

'Would you describe the boss as a buccaneer.'

'A buccaneer? In what way?'

'In business. We're pretty much a one-off, seen as mavericks really, no one much likes us, but we make more than a dime or ten, and I'd say that's down to the boss and his personality.'

'I wouldn't tell him that.'

'What, that he's a buccaneer? Why not, I'm sure he'd be flattered.'

And the boss was flattered. The following week at a strategy meeting, Brendan said he thought whatever course of action we took should be bolder than bold to reflect the company and the boss's buccaneering spirit. The boss loved it.

'Exactly, Brendan, well said, mark that everyone, buccaneering!'

That Friday Brendan told us what his costume would be.

'I'm going as a pirate.'

'A pirate? Good for you!'

'Yes, I think it would be appropriate, the business being 60 years old, making more money than ever.'

'OK.'

Over the next few weeks, Brendan kept us informed about how it was getting his costume together.

‘I’ve decided I’m not wearing an eye-patch, too cheesy.’

‘Fancy-dress is cheesy.’

‘Not always, but I don’t care, I’m not wearing one.’

Bit by bit we heard more of Brendan’s plans. He wasn’t going to hire a ready-made outfit, but he and his partner were going to put one together from scratch.

‘She did a design course at Wellesley.’

That surprised no one.

‘It’s not going to be one with garish colours or anything, like at a kid’s party, it’ll be tasteful, something the boss’ll like.’

‘Ooh, a tasteful pirate outfit, look forward to it.’

That’s when Vaclav told him he’d been asked to get the guests in costume to come in one by one so the boss could decide the one he liked best.

‘Whoever he chooses gets \$1,000.’

Guests would be due at 7.30, and Vaclav told Brendan his slot was at 7.50. He’d ring everyone in costume five minutes before they were due.

‘Stay in your room until I call you, and don’t come down any earlier to make sure each outfit is a surprise. We don’t want to upset the boss.’

No one wanted to upset the boss, especially not Brendan.

On the night, we arrived at the Rutherford and headed to our rooms to change. Vaclav had a word with the assistant manager, told him what was afoot and the manager lent him a passkey to Brendan’s room. We met on the sun terrace for a drink and were assembled in the dining suite by 7.30.

At the top table the boss stood up to welcome us and thank us for all our work, well into his spiel when Vaclav made a quiet call to Brendan in his room.

‘Right, you’re on next, Bren, get yourself down here.’

The boss was telling us he was not retiring yet, no sir, but would be making way for younger folk to see through the plans he had made for the company.

‘Your vision?’ his CFO sitting next to him asked. We laughed. The boss hated cliches.

‘I’m immensely proud of what I’ve achieved, but I’m the first to admit it would not have been possible . . .’

It was then the double doors to the suite were thrown open with a theatrical flourish and there stood Brendan in his pirate gear (without that eye-patch). I have to say he and his Wellesley girl had done a fine job. But being faced with a roomful of men, young and old, in very sober, very conventional black tuxes and ties must have been a hell of a shock.

He quickly turned and was leaving again when the boss called out.

‘Brendan!’

Brendan came back into the room.

‘Yes, sir?’

‘What on earth . . .? Brendan! Why are you dressed like that?’

‘I . . . I . . .’

‘You look ridiculous!’

‘Sorry, sir.’

‘Go and get changed.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Brendan left us, but was back about ten minutes later. He was still in his pirate gear. The room hushed as he reappeared.

‘Sorry, sir, someone . . . someone has taken my clothes.’

‘Well, you’ll just have to wear that ridiculous outfit for the rest of the night.’

The boss then returned to his favourite topics, himself and his business success. Brendan was miserable, not at all the happy buccaneer.

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