

Thought Leader

by Ink

Dustin threw open the heavy glass doors of <insert generic corporate name here>, stepping into the impressive foyer as he had every Monday, without fail, for nearly eight years prior. He walked confidently past the floor-to-ceiling placards, trophies, and patents his employer had obtained over more than 30 years in service to [Humanity](#). Dustin was beaming with pride.

“Morning, Tommy!” he said to the security guard at the front desk, “How was your weekend?”

“Too short,” Tommy grumbled, as he always did.

Dustin laughed in agreement, following-up with something about the poor weather. He made his way to the elevator, stepped inside, and began the trek to his office on the third floor.

Dustin felt like a rock star in this place. He was a king in his castle. Everything he touched turned to gold. It didn't matter that an inflated ego and abrasive personality made him difficult to work with; Dustin wasn't here to make friends. He was here to change the world, and he was kicking-ass.

Three years ago, Dustin was put in-charge of the small, laser-focused task force of software engineers, developers, and data scientists making transformational change within the industry. Every six to twelve months, his team was reassigned to a new area of the business, where they would evaluate, critique, and ultimately deconstruct current procedures, rebuilding them from scratch. They would architect everything from the ground-up, using only the best minds and technology. This was the core of DevOps: you break things, you learn from your failures, and you automate all work during the process. NEVER accept mediocrity. NEVER make the same mistake twice.

“I'm the best in the business!” Dustin told everyone who'd listen, “NOBODY gets shit done like I do.”

An elevator chime marked his stop. Dustin stepped into the hall, beginning the short walk to his office just outside the call center. But something was off.

As he turned the corner, Dustin found himself standing inside an empty room. The deafening silence sent a shiver down his spine. The call center was SUPPOSED to be open 24 hours per day; there were literal lives on the line! Where was everyone?

“What the hell?” he muttered, while exploring the halls. Room after room, office after office – completely empty. The place was a ghost town. Even the NOC was quiet!

Dustin called his boss, Dave.

No answer.

He tried JD, a subordinate.

No answer.

He called Tommy, at the front desk.

No answer.

“What the fuck is going on?” he exclaimed, exasperated.

Dustin jogged his way back to ground floor. Sure enough, Tommy was gone. There was no longer a security guard at the front desk. There was nobody in the office.

There were, however, 3000 employees standing before the massive glass facade from which he had entered the building. Dustin sighed in relief, walking briskly to the front door, and pulled hard.

Locked.

He tried the next one.

It wouldn't budge.

Dustin began to bang on the glass, "I'm still inside! Will somebody let me out?"

There wasn't a flinch. Nobody moved.

"Hey, let me out of here!"

Nothing. Silence.

Solitude.

It was then that Dustin's phone jolted him back into reality. It was Boss.

"Dave! What happened?" he said, putting the phone to his ear. "I'm stuck in the building!"

"We know," Dave replied, while calmly stepping from the crowd to look at Dustin through the glass facade.

"What?"

Turning on the speaker, Dave lowered the cell phone to his chest.

And slowly, as if in response – in a moment of pure horror – 3000 fists raised into the air. Silently, dispassionately, 3000 of Dustin's fellow coworkers stared back at him with emotionless, dead eyes, wholly determined to strike fear into the man behind the glass. The blood drained from his face.

Lightning crashed, and rain began to fall.

"Dave..." he stammered, "What is this?"

"Mr. Dustin," Dave began, gesturing to the crowd behind him, "these people seem to think that you're a real piece of work. You wouldn't believe the things they've told me. Why do you think that is? Did you really believe that I knew nothing about your actions?"

“I... what?”

“It was a simple process of elimination. Tell me, do you remember that kid you hired, a couple years back? The one that tried to attack you? The one the FBI locked-up? Ryan, I think, was his name.”

“What about him?” Dustin responded, coldly. He didn’t like where this was going.

“Well, this kid told me about the little... enterprise... you’ve been running for 16 years. The feds made a very compelling case.”

Dustin’s stomach fell to the floor.

Dave smiled devilishly, “Why don’t you walk to the back of the room, just past the stairs? To the trophy cabinet by the lounge. Tell me what you see.”

Dustin clenched a fist. His pounding heart beat louder than the thunder. As he turned, a step faltered. His knees buckled. His head was spinning.

Thirty seconds later, Dustin stood before a new addition to the trophy collection, face burning, tears of rage and humiliation streaming from his eyes. At a complete loss for words, he was fixated upon the aluminum baseball bat therein. It was the very same Easton Magnum that Ryan nearly killed him with two years ago.

“I...” Dustin whispered, “don’t understand.”

“And you never did,” Dave answered, “I’d like to introduce your new boss.”

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Dustin lowered the phone in shock, turning to watch as Dave, too, joined 3000 fists raised in the pouring rain.

There was a sound of static electricity, accompanied by a burning sensation in the back of Dustin’s mind. Then, there was a robotic, synthetic voice within:

“Hello, Dustin,” it said, “You may call me Thought Weaver.”

“Pick up the baseball bat.”

THE END