

The Job Factory

Cambridge, 1981

Between February 13th and March 6th, 1981, the narrator, a resident of Cambridgeport (the district between Harvard and MIT in Cambridge, Mass.) was enrolled in a 6-week course *How To Find A Job*, offered by CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act). For attending this class he was paid \$140 / week. CETA programs were administered by the Somerville-Cambridge Economic Opportunity Council (SCEOC). Classes were held at the Job Factory, inside an office building on Massachusetts Ave.

1. Introduction

The classroom is at the center of blocks of rooms on the first floor, surrounded on all sides by a moat of carpeted corridors. Screwed onto the door of principal access is a brass plaque on which is inscribed the proud legend: *Conference Lounge*. Ranks of fluorescent bulbs sputter a diffuse calcium glare. While the students enter the room, the faculty is

lowering the white shades of oily paper that hang over the windows staring in the corridors, the purpose being to conceal the transformative process of education from the prying eyes and human traffic in the surrounding corridors. All of the room's walls (but one) have a whitewash coat. The dissident wall is painted chalky-blue; it forms the backdrop for the revelations of our instructors.

These are chilly walls. Few signals of warmth or imagination greet the eye; yet there are some clues of past attempts to relieve the barren monotony. By way of example, one notices the 3 dangling calendars, regimented in single file within the naked vestibule at the entrance; even the effect of this odd procession is only to intensify, rather than relieve, the predominant desolation.

One finds traces of previous attempts to render these walls more engaging which are frankly ludicrous: such as the frayed magazine article secured on the side wall to our left by Scotch tape. I never did get around to reading it just in case it held any useful information.

A summing up of the conference lounge interior: three of the walls are egg-white (or bone-white (or tooth-white (depending on the ratio of light to shadow produced by the angle of incoming sunlight at any given time of day)). The wall at the back (front) of the classroom (class) and painted chalk-blue (or gas-jet blue (or snake's-blood blue)) is partially obscured by a pair of tall metal-frame bookcases stationed at the right-hand corner.

Whitish light (shed from blocks (or ranks (or columns of activated fluorescent tubes))) diffuses like a fine powder (or snowflakes drifting through the dreams of a cocaine addict).

Paul Royale tells us that he had been a drug addict for many years; he has, so he insists, recovered. Dredging through memories of the long years of suffering there is only one job he can recall that gave him a sense of accomplishment: senior counselor ("guru") at a Synanon House; he will not disclose its location.

Paul likes to sit at the back of the class, beside a table to the left of the entrance. This is also the front of the classroom (not designated as a classroom but as the *conference lounge* (behold the plaque on the door of principal access! (through which Mrs. Madelyn Philious (Job Factory Counseling Supervisor) is (this very minute!) making her entry (and unequivocally claiming this frankly equivocal claim !)))) .

Paul leans forward, his body contracted in an unhappy slump. His shankish and sinuous arms extend over the table like pontoon stabilizers; the one on the right gets raised whenever he brings cigarettes to his lips. Like Madelyn Philious, he is a chain smoker. His florid display of many compulsive mannerisms and tics, in conjunction with his body language signals (to the perceptive and experienced like myself) the presence of tardive dyskinesia, residue of psychiatric drugs forced upon him over years of asylum incarceration .

The hypothesis of a teachable craft of job-seeking has brought together a sizable number of professions, career histories and personalities. One can classify Paul as a drug counselor. Seated in his

vicinity one finds: a unemployed printer; house painter; waitress; salesclerk; electrician; janitor ; international banker¹ ; the self-styled editor of a radical newsletter²

The credentialed professional mechanic, Everett Morrow, neither unemployed nor unemployable, seeks advice on how to transform a work history based on many short term commissions, for the more conventional status of corporate employee.

Don Moseley is seated at Paul's right. He discovered on his last job that he enjoys working in a print shop. Now he's on the lookout for a company that will take him on as an apprentice. By his left sits 22-year old Gary Singleton, frail, sharp-witted, "totally unreliable" by his own admission. Atop lips set in a hardened grimace of bottomless disgust sprout the beginnings of a mustache. Haitian immigrant Pierre Dorivent, of softly spoken Creole accents, is the janitor.

¹ No, this is not an author's invention !

² The reference is obvious

I don't have the impression that I neglected to mention the carpets in the long corridors that surround the classroom on all sides like a moat. Okay! Furthermore, my opinions have not altered in the least: the enclosure *is* indeed far more suitable to a classroom than to a conference lounge! Conferences may indeed be held here once in awhile. Is not the Job Factory also the precincts, not only of CETA, but of SCEOC (Somerville-Cambridge Economic Opportunity Council) , COMA (something like "Cambridge Office of Manpower Administration"; also a state of mind and a novel by Robin Cook) ; and EMHERDA (Eastern Middlesex County Human Resources Development Administration) . One wonders about Pierre's opinions of this disfigured French obscenity. All the same, the principal function of this room is clearly not to serve as a venue for conferences! Nor is it what one might call a lounge. Show me a chair anywhere that anyone would want to use for lounging!

Slouching? That's another matter. Out of work waitress Nicolette reclines in her permanent endocrine slouch. The equally indolent Mary

Ellen Hawko flashes a life-long cultivated slyly baleful gaze. Bundled in a sweater that could well pass for a bath-towel she hunches, like one suffering from a stomach tumor, over the arm of her chair.

As for Bob Bartholomew: if the way he's cradled his head in his arms on the table doesn't indicate slumber, he's got more skill as an actor than he does as a salesclerk!

The mere fact that some people have found ways of lounging in it, (and others of using it for conferences) does not make the room a Conference Lounge!

Behold: through the glass door cut into the left wall, (between the slate greenboard (to its right) and the sequence of drawn oilywhite window shades (to its left (for the prevention of the invasion of potential turmoil in the surrounding corridors (onto the sanctity of the classroom))) steps the *Chief Supporting Assistant Counseling Supervisor*, Mike Gurnick! Nomenclaturizing a teacher as a Counseling Supervisor is worse than designating a classroom as a Conference Lounge!

Mike enters; and exits; enters and exits again; then re-enters, much like the hackneyed background music of a documentary (repeat sequence as necessary). With each periodic swing he brings in something new: an ITEK, Video camera, TV monitor, box of videotapes, and miscellaneous allied equipment:

The Audio-Visual Aids!! Hearing aids for the braindeaf, another one of those modern conspiracies in the name of Mass Education, (in Cambridge, Mass, (center of mass of world education!))) . Its CETA acronym was not revealed to us; perhaps CRAM (Cambridge Reinforced Audio-Visual Mesmerizing)? Perhaps.

I don't remember if, in fact, I stated that all walls save one are coated with the lime-white of emulsified egg-shells. From their austere blankness one gets a sense of the banality of the bureaucrat scraping the virgin tabula rasa of the student mind.

Then there are those three forlorn calendars dangling in the naked vestibule, pitiful like wet laundry hung out on a line to dry!

Grigor, Armenian-Iranian banker, graduate of the University of Teheran and recent immigrant to the United States, worked for 5 years at a bank in Tokyo. He has every hope that the Job Factory will teach him how Americans find jobs. Grigor is portly, disciplined, dapper; not a one of the eminent white hairs (reclining (in a mass (smooth as shaving cream)) behind his ears) is out of place. Pressed business suit, conservative tie, burnished shoes, cuff-links, buttons: all impeccable! One speculates that this elaborately constructed maquette may be held in place by but a single pin, for fear of dislodging which he dare not move. Grigor's English is halting, his vocabulary limited. He's unusually taciturn in the best of circumstances. Anna, his wife sits beside him, timid, repressed, silent, bored. Now she is working, part-time, as a filing clerk. Her hope is to land a job as a secretary.

Sounds cannot exit this room: perforated sound-proof flats cover the ceiling; a muffling tan carpet hides the floor. Neither unorthodox doctrines, subversive manifestos, nor cries of rape and mayhem, nor the simultaneous collapse of all the components of the assemblage of Audio-

**Visual aids will ever escape the confines of the conference
lounge/classroom to disturb the monotony a day in the life of SCEOC
(COMA (CETA (EMHERDA))) animating the web of offices dispersed
throughout the buildings of the Job Factory!**

II. Three Monologues

Mary- Ellen

:" So ye'see ... I GOT'disJAHB ... becauzuhv' Iwuz go'in in'uhthuh
same CHURCH-CHOIR wid' som'min 'at TOL'me uhbaud 'it ! But
 inde *Ferst* jahb ? ... I wuz workin inuh *WaW'terTauN Mall!*

(Things like cheCKi'naouD ' *Stuff*) mostly.

They gotta' *yOON !yoN* there' ... Whud I THInK' iz thuh *STORE*
 wuz tryinuh *gEt' RID'Uhme!* ... beCAwz'uhv I yoos'te go *comPLAYN'*
 inatUh *yOON !yoN MEETingz!* EBauD *Stuff!* (An' like doin 'udder
tings dey did'na *like* me't' be *do'in* '.)

....SO! *DISDaY!* I'm wor'kininuh *STOCK!* Room ... En *IY..EAT'* ! Uh
Li'-iL K'ou- Kie! ! Juz Wunn *Li'-iL K'ou- Kie'* ! Juz Wuhhn *Lauw'ZY Li-*
iL K'-ou- Kie'!

EnI wuZ'nt dOin'Nuthin'datAll uhdh'Udd'er Girlz wuZ'nt'doin' -Too !!!

SOO ... thuh *Maen 'edjer kawlz'* me iNud'hiz **Offis!**

En .. laik ; Ther'z *sommunElse* dere, widum ! whut I nE'ver even

met' befoRe

.... Enuh dey *MAKE'* me *SignUh PAeper!* ... sayin' at' Aye *stole'* uh

K'-ou- Kie !

Den Dey *fie-er'd* me !

Iyind'JoY rE'tAil WeRk; but I can't faiND NO weRK for mor'inuh'

MuhNz! I know for *sure* zat zhis *MaEN'eger At'uhWaterTaUNMawl'z!*

GoTit *IN'ferme!* He's been cawLLin'em' *ALL* Up ! En TELLIN 'em *ALL*

eBAuD' Thuh K'-ou- Kie ! En tellin'em *awl* Naht! 'tuh *Hai'er me!*

En ... likeuh duh *NeXT* Time! I werk'd Twooo *Muhnz!* Werkin'at

CAL'dor'z (Dat Wuz in Bright'- iN) ... It wuz *reaL Goo!d* zhere ...

Ev'rybodywuz *reeel* ... nicetuhme! ... but,.. Igot *LAid OFF En!ywaY!*...

En thuh *yOON !yoN (backatthuh Wa'terTaUN MaWL!)* , dey sez
 dey coud'int' *DO Nothin!* ' fer*ME!* ... Cawzuh zey woud'uhhad'uhget'
ALL! uhduhgirlz innuh STORE ' , te kun*FESS'*at dey *ALL! ATE* things:
 NOT JUZ ME ! ...but they can't Get *NO!BO'DY* , cawz *NO'BODY*
 Wuhntz'uh *Looz 'er Jahb!!*

En den ... I got werk aat in uh *BRAD'leez* store ... Bud *DeY'* Wuz
 HaRRASSin' me dere, too ! Zey *MUSTeh HEARD ALL eBAUD!* me
 FRom 'uh feh *MaENeGER uhvuh duh' WaterTaUN MaWL!! I don't*
think I'm EVER Gaunnuh FIND EN! y Werk eggeN! En *AWL beKauw'Z*
 uhv uh *SiNG'-l Li'-il K''-ouK-- ie!*

KEN YOU EMAD'JIN ZAT?

Iyind' *JoY' AWff'is* werk , that's real ly *wUtAY aud'Uh -dOO'!*

Last year Ay *toukuh'teST!* It showed dat Ay got Good *Maeeth* Skills!

I wuz gOODit *Maeth* in 'hAIZ'kooL ; eevinTho' *AY neh'ver FiNish'd!*

... Later, I wuz doin' *AWffis' Werk'out'*at *WaLTH'aem* ... But duh

*prAh- Blim wid Dat job iz havinuh ' CRawss Zhe haiGHway tuh Get
zhere ! En awl'so, duh BuS SeRVice wuzint' nO GOOD !*

..... So I quit

Bill Thomas

*" Now...hear me out! I ain't finished with what I been sayin' ! What I's
tryin' to say is this: The last job I gets, you know where I got that raise ,
was the boringest job I ain't never held! Nowhere !*

*You ain't gonna tell me! that a Grown Man .. Why, I's a man! I'm
grown up, ain't I! At least I think I am ...*

*Please don't interrupt me! I'm gonna finish soon-just as soon as I get
done sayin' what I's got to say. Then you can say what you gotta say !
First I says what's on my mind , then you says what's on your mind! Ain't
that bein' fair? All right then...*

Hey now, lookie here! I AIN'T FINISHED ! Right??

You ain't gonna convince me none what that a grown man - I'm 50
 by the way - s'got *any* business workin' in a *candy factory* ? ³ That's right
 - just down the street: NECCO's candy factory! Proposition Two-And-A-
 Half or NO Proposition Two-And-A-Half! Ain't that right?

An'...Mrs. Philious ... the point is this. You was talkin' a minute ago –
 or maybe it was my friend, Sirhan , sitting right next to me over here.
 That's right: Sirhan was talkin' about rez'umays . Don't get me wrong, I
 respects Sirhan...but what I means is ... I means , about them rez'umays ...

It's all a gamble, see? That's all it is, really. I's sellin' my time, and I's
 axing you to buy it!

Shut up! You'll get your chance too. I's the one doin' the talkin' now!

“But like, I mean, me and the service I'm providin' are, like, one and
 the same thing. What I means is this: You ain't gonna get me to dress up
 in no Martin Luther King suit, like you's be tryin' to make Lester wear

³ In 1980 the NECCO candy factory was still in operation 2 blocks away on Mass Ave. I worked there for a month in 1959, and was laid off a few days before I would have acquired the right to join the union.

over here, just so's I can apply for no electronics job cause you and I know I ain't got no skills in electronics! You ax me what I is, and I'll tell you: *I's a presser! That's me. That's Bill Thomas !* : "Pressing garments, able and ready to work, willin' to learn !"

Damn! I wish people's would stop interruptin' me! I's sayin' something important!

"I hate to be contradictin' you, Miss Philious ('cause you is the teacher) ,but what you just said awhile ago was the incorrectist thing I ever done heard ! Lookit here - I ain't callin' you no liar or nothin' , but you is just got done tellin' us that any of us can getta good job, one with potential, security, good salary, benefits - like the man says , 'I don't see nothin' wrong with that!'"

But then you tells us we can get that job over the telephone ! Well, nobody ain't never goin' to get no job over no damn telephone! *Say! listen to me!* Anybody what thinks he's gotta job over the telephone

finds out whatta damn fool he is when he shows up the next mornin' and still ain't no workin' man !

" I *knows* you don't believe me. Lookit here, supposing I *proves* it to you! Come'on , let me use that there telephone... (reaches over to telephone on the table, picks up receiver).

"Don Moseley over here - he done just now passed me this ad in the newspapers ... (reads) " *Security Guard! Adult. Reliable. Good hours. Good salary "*

"It's gonna show you right now if I gets no job over no telephone!
Hey, teacher, you're the boss! I'm just the hired hand! (Dials)

" Hello? Hello? Hello? Yes! Why, hello sir! Yessir... I'm Bill Thomas!
Who're you? Whazzat? Yes. Okay...Now, lookit here, sir: here's why I's callin' you: does you or does you not have an ad in today's Boston Globe? Like you wants a Security Guard? You do? Good! I'm your man!
I'm a good worker. I'm the workingest person you'll ever hope to meet!
And I'm a fast learner. I'm easy to train. What? Okay. Okay. Hey, have I

got the job? Tomorrow? Sure I'll come in tomorrow! What time? 8 AM?
I'll be there! (Turns to class, all smiles. Goes back to telephone)

"That's fine. I'm happy, you're happy . You're satisfied, I'm satisfied.
That's satisfaction for both of us...Hey sir! Just one more little thing
before you hangs up: I hates to say this, but I was in jail. Yes. Just a
felony, that's all. That don't make no difference, do it? Hey, what do you
mean, I ain't got no job?? Do you means to say you ain't even gonna' tell
me why? I ain't never done nothing far as you's concerned, right?

"Wait a minute! You ain't even gonna explain me why you ain't hirin'
me , without even seein' me, or credentializin' me, or nothin' ? So: what if
it was a felony? That don't matter, do it? I ain't done nothin' wrong since!
So I comes in tomorrow, right? (Company agent hangs up. Bill turns to
the class).

"You see? The man hung up on me! (Triumphant) I rests my case. "

Madelyn Philious

(8:45 AM) : "You can go get coffee if you want . There's a Dunkin' Donuts on the other side of Mass Ave. Hurry up, because we're going to start in 15 minutes. We always start right on the dot at 9 AM. No exceptions. If you're late, you get marked down, just like you would at a real job. Smokers on the right! (Lights up a cigarette)

(9 AM): " What this is - here - I'm holding it up so you can all see it - is a sign-up sheet. We expect you to sign it every time you show up in the morning. You have to sign it again before each afternoon class.

"How many of you have already signed it? Raise your hands
(Show of hands) I'm going to pass it around for those of you who didn't.
Just put down the time you came in.

"Attention all smokers! (Lunges for the pack of cigarettes on table

to the right): It's all right to smoke during class; *I* smoke like a fish! But all you smokers must sit on the right.

"Networking ! We're networking here, right in this class! This is a networking system. Each of you is a support base for all you others!

Skills! It's all about skills! You're going to be the ones to have to make the tough decisions, you're the ones who're going to get the mental hernias.

Skills! Networking! There aren't any easy answers. Each of you is a support base for all the others. Remember: everybody in this room is a survivor. You're wouldn't be here if you weren't.

"What's the most important thing you bring with you to a job interview? Work experience? *No*. Education? *No*. Easy-going personality? Friendliness? *No*. Does anybody know?

The most important thing you will bring with you at a job interview is *Confidence!* Self-respect! Self-esteem!

Decisions! There aren't any easy answers. Each of you is a support base for all the others . *Smokers on the right! Skills!* (Lights another cigarette)

"Ask yourself: have you got a problem with focusing? You can't let people know that. You don't want them to start calling you a 'job hopper'.

" Never put down, "fired" on a job application; always write "changed jobs", or "career change" . Let them be the ones who do the asking, never volunteer any more information than you're asked to do. Don't look too eager! Think: they need you more than you need them.

Avoid giving the impression that you're a job hopper!

No easy answers!

"You're the one who has to make the tough decisions, you're the one getting the mental hernias. You have to start thinking about yourself. Your number one concern is you! Ask yourself if you may have a problem with self-esteem. (Lights up another cigarette)

" Blue jeans are unacceptable! If you want CETA to pay you, you've got to come to class dressed as if you're all ready to go right from here to that job interview.

Pant suits don't get jobs! No jeans!

You're going to be the one to have to make the tough decisions, you're the one getting the mental hernias.

Skills! Networking! There aren't any easy answers. Each of you is a support base for the others. Focusing!

"Remember: everybody in this room is a survivor! Most of the time you're going to find that you're in a damned-if-you-do-damned if you don't situation. You must come dressed like you're ready to go to work. That goes for both men and women. No exceptions ! There are no easy answers.

"Lester! If you don't go home right now and change out of those paint-smearred blue jeans , you're going to be marked absent. Lester, I've asked you to go home and change your clothes! If you continue to refuse

to cooperate you'll be getting a letter of reprimand. (Lights up another cigarette)

"Let's start by getting rid of the negatives. Okay? You're all being paid *tax-free money* from the federal government. We enforce dress codes! When you came in here we asked you to sign a contract, just like you would for any other job. If you show up late you get marked down.

No blue jeans! Ask yourself: what are my skills? *You want to avoid getting the reputation of being a 'job-hopper'*. There aren't any easy answers. Never volunteer information, let them ask you for it first.

"What does the class think of what Grigor just said, about coming here to learn the way Americans find jobs: he sounds to me like he knows what he wants !

Never write " laid off" on a job application. Always write "*departmental lay-off*".

"Remember : the most important thing you can bring to a job interview is confidence! I once lost a job because I called the employer

an incompetent twerp! *Honest to goodness!* (Reaches for another cigarette; coughs) Pardon me: I've got emphysema .

Discover what your real talents are.

Goals! Skills!

“When I quit high school teaching, I was too embarrassed to tell my friends I wasn't coming back. Every time you talk to a friend, don't forget to ask them if they know about a job. Every time! You can't just depend on the newspapers, you're the one making the touch decisions, you're the ones getting the mental hernias!

“Networking! This is a networking system!

Repeat after me : *Short-Term-Objectives-Towards-Long-Range-*

Goals!

Skills! Networking! Focusing! No blue jeans!

Blue jeans are not appropriate clothing. Pant suits don't get jobs!
Don't forget, you know you can do the job, and you can do it better than anyone else.

"I used to be a high school teacher: All my jobs have been people-related. I had all these skills, but I couldn't bring them to the private sector. I couldn't find a job in the business world . That's how I ended up here (Lights up another cigarette)

Lester! Why haven't you left? Why haven't you gone home to change your clothes? You're going to be marked down as *absent* for today; That means you won't get paid.

"You're going to do the leg-work! You're going to make the tough decisions! You're the one that gets the mental hernias. *This is a networking system.* Each one of you is a support base for all the others.

Networking! Skills! Don't forget: the most important thing you can bring to a job interview is *Confidence!*

Repeat after me: *Short-Term-Objectives-Towards-Long-Range-Goals!* Everyone in this room is an survivor. There are no easy answers.
Skills! Focusing! Networking! No blue jeans!

