

The Hunger

by

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CAST

ROCKY, the salesman. A fast talking sports cliché guy. Will go with whatever the consensus opinion is. If he has an opinion, he'll change it to go with the majority. He should play with a football, basketball or baseball during the play.

ASHLEY, the human resources director. She combines human resources psychobabble speak with new age positivism. Sort of a grown up hippie.

FRANK, the plant manager. A blue-collar guy who worked his way up to management. Older than the rest and with a chip on his shoulder since he came up "the hard way and they all were born with silver spoons." Smart, but hides behind a dumb front. He maintains a tough, macho image--tries to intimidate others.

HELGA, director of finance. A cool and calculating person who believes the bottom line is everything. She is not intimidated by FRANK, and enjoys fighting him every step of the way.

MR. JENKINS, CEO, a tired, beleaguered old man or woman who wants nothing better than to ease up and let his staff make the decisions. But deep down, he knows that he will always be responsible for the final decision, whether he wants to or not.

THE TIME

The present. Around 11:30 A.M. on a working day.

THE PLACE

A corporate conference room.

SETTING:

A large table is centerstage. Sitting around the table (but never with their backs to the audience) are the actors described above minus the CEO. Other trappings of a corporate conference may also be on stage. These include an easel or black board, a phone, coffee, etc. On the

easel options one through six are spelled out (i.e. "Option 1, Option 2, etc."). Various documents are on the table.

AT RISE:

ROCKY, ASHLEY, FRANK and HELGA are seated. They are all talking animatedly, and no one is listening. The discussion is somewhat heated. After a moment. ASHLEY stands up, raises her arms and says the following over the other voices. Note: as the play progresses, the actors should be free to stand and roam, as they probably would in a normal corporate meeting.

ASHLEY

People. People! PEOPLE!

(Finally, there is silence.)

We are just not attaining our celestial potential here. There is no harmony, no rhythm, no kismet. I mean, like, we have to reach out and grasp at--

FRANK

Straws, if you think this group can work together.

ASHLEY

But we can, Frank, we can. We just have to get on the same interstellar team.

ROCKY

(Pantomiming with the baseball/football/basketball for emphasis.)

Team? Hey I love teams! I'm a real team player, and I have *come* to play. Prime time, baby. Got my game face on, giving a hundred and ten percent--

HELGA

Thank you for the wide world of sports clichés. Now if we could--

ASHLEY

Let's review our progress.

FRANK

What progress? It's been two hours and--

ASHLEY

See what we've eliminated, see what's left.

HELGA

(Beat, then a resigned sigh.)
So go ahead.

ASHLEY

Well ...

(She looks at notes.)
according to my notes, we eliminated option four.

HELGA

No we didn't.

ASHLEY

We said it's too expensive.

HELGA

I never said that.

FRANK

You didn't say anything.

HELGA

That's because, unlike some of my peers, I don't simply blurt out the first thought that comes to mind.

FRANK

You saying that I--

ASHLEY

Okay, so you *don't* want to eliminate option four?

HELGA

I have not reached a decision yet. I'm doing a cross-analysis paradigm parabolic review, which will provide the statistical validity of the feasibility of option four. As soon as my staff completes said analysis, they'll apprise me of the situation.

ASHLEY

All right, let's hold off on that one.

(To HELGA.)

Did you have a problem with eliminating options one and five?

HELGA

No.

ASHLEY

Good. Now option six.

HELGA

I thought we deep-sixed six.

FRANK

No "we" didn't.

HELGA

We'll never finish this.

FRANK

I love six. Their speed of delivery is unmatched.

ASHLEY

But their -- the quality.

HELGA

It can't compare to --

FRANK

It's passable.

HELGA

This organization has not gotten where it is by accepting "passable."

FRANK

Look, my gut tells me--

ASHLEY

Rocky, what do you think?

ROCKY

Hmmm, six is a toughie. Has lots of potential, gives a hundred and ten percent. But does it have all the tools? Geez, it's like a tie ballgame in my head ... anyone have a coin?

HELGA

No coin tosses allowed.

ROCKY

Then I'm throwing the towel in. You three feel each other out, and I'll jump in on the winning side.

ASHLEY

Well, I think Helga's right. We can't sacrifice quality.

ROCKY

Then I'm on your team.

HELGA

So that's it, three against one, six is nixed.

(Rubbing it in.)

Sorry, Frank.

FRANK

If you're throwing six out, I want four out too.

HELGA

But I haven't finished my anal--

FRANK

Let's vote on it. Ashley?

ASHLEY

Well ... I think we should eliminate it.

FRANK

Rocky?

ROCKY

Ummm, out?

FRANK

(Directed to HELGA.)

And I say it's out, so good-bye four.

HELGA

(To FRANK)

Love your little revenge games, don't you?

FRANK

(With a sarcastic smirk.)

Just business, Helga.

HELGA

Watch your back.

Frank

Oh, it's watched. I've learned to walk with my head on backwards.

HELGA

So that explains it--

FRANK

WHAT--

ASHLEY

(Jumping in to avoid a fight.)

That!-- That leaves two options.

HELGA

(Spoken quickly and coldly, as if it's obvious. The audience does not have to catch every word.)

The only reasonable choice left is option three. I've done a three-way cross-dimensional matrix that outlines risks versus rewards, net present value and R-O-I. Now, if you apply Boolean logic to--

FRANK

Oh please.

HELGA

What?

FRANK

A little less Boolean, a little more logic.

HELGA

(Sarcastically.)

Oh, I'm sorry. I thought we were trying to make a rational, balanced decision. Maybe we should just hang options on the wall and throw darts?

ROCKY

Hey, I love darts! Won the northeastern darts champion--

FRANK

So instead you've done enough math to reprogram the space shuttle.

HELGA

Should I get some kindergarten blocks so you can follow along?

FRANK

Where I come from, you learn to trust your gut, your instincts--

HELGA

And since you're obviously choosing option two, your gut works about as well as your brain--

ASHLEY

(Jumping in to end the argument.)

All right, all right, so Helga wants two, Frank three.

(Beat.)

It's up to you and me, Rocky.

ROCKY

Ohhhh man. I like ... I think ... I'll go with ... Let's see, two is better at ... But three does a great job at ... Two! No! Three! Wait! ... Three! Two -- Nine!

FRANK

There is no nine.

ROCKY

God, this is tough! I mean, like, I'm a team player. Don't want to rock the boat.

FRANK

The boat's sinking -- a little rocking won't make a difference.

ROCKY

I don't know, I'm ... I'm not good at decisions. I'm the linesman, not the quarterback. The rebounder, not the shooter. The horse, not the jockey. The --

ASHLEY

Okay okay okay. Here's what we'll do. You and I will write our choices down anonymously.

ROCKY

(Beat.)

Well ... all right. Sounds team-like to me. But nobody peek.

(They write their choices. ASHLEY collects ROCKY's. She then announces the vote.)

ASHLEY

We've got one vote for two--

HELGA

Of course.

ASHLEY

And the other for ... three.

FRANK

Ha!

FRANK

So what do we do now?

ASHLEY

Well, I guess we let *him* decide.

HELGA

(With a derisive chuckle.)

He hires us to make decisions, you'd think we'd be able to do it.

FRANK

We would be ... if you weren't so numbers crazy.

HELGA

Better than your "gut" decisions.

FRANK

This gut has gotten me from the gutter to the boardroom.

HELGA

(Sarcastically.)

The street kid with a chip on his shoulder.

FRANK

And the pampered numbers queen.

HELGA

"Queen?"

(Beat.)

Why don't you just say it, Frank. It's not my numbers that bother you, it's that I'm a woman.

FRANK

Oh don't start that. It's just a phrase.

HELGA

Like "girlie" and "babe" and "broad" and "bi--

FRANK

You hear what she's doing? She's turning it around--

ASHLEY

Hey hey hey! Let's just -- let the boss make the final call.

ROCKY

Sure! We check with coach, we hit the field running.

(ASHLEY calls on phone.)

ASHLEY

We've narrowed it to two ... thank you.

(She hangs up, then to the others.)

He's coming in.

(There's a pause, then Mr. Jenkins walks in sighing and grumbling. ASHLEY presents two sheets of paper to him. He looks at the two sheets, all the time mumbling to himself. After a beat, he says:)

MR. JENKINS

Go with the Chinese.

(He immediately starts walking offstage as ASHLEY delivers the following line.)

ASHLEY

So the final decision is, Chinese food for lunch. Now for phase two of the meeting: should we order Szechuan or Cantonese?

FRANK

Szechuan!

HELGA

Szechuan? You can't be serious.

FRANK

That's what my gut says--

(All four start arguing about what to order from the Chinese restaurant. It becomes indecipherable as the lights fade to black.)

End