

THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

With Robert Wilson

This Story has a Happy Ending... I Promise!

I was less than two minutes into my sales presentation when the business owner sitting behind his desk, gruffly said, "Get out of here."



I figured someone must have walked into his office and he didn't want us to be interrupted. I turned around to see who it was; there was no one.

He then said, "I'm talking to you salesman; get your @#%*&, and get out of here!"

I suffered a moment of cognitive dissonance, this wasn't making sense. He had given me the appointment over the phone, I had driven nearly an hour to get there, and even paid for parking. I said, "But, I haven't even shown you the benefits of the program yet."

Then he screamed, "Get out of here now, or I'll throw you out!"

He was a big guy, who looked like a TV mobster; and with his heavy Brooklyn accent, I believed he'd break my legs. I scooped up my presentation notebook, and silently left. Welcome to New York City.

I had accepted that job, selling barter club memberships, before I left Atlanta. It was a cool concept I was sure everyone would love: a member put a set dollar amount of his or her goods and services into the barter club bank, which could then be exchanged for the same dollar amount of any other member's goods and services. Unfortunately, six weeks later, I hadn't sold one. People slammed doors in my face, abruptly hung up on my phone calls, and spoke to me more rudely than ever before. Meanwhile, I received no salary, and was working on commission.

The next week, I finally sold a membership, only to be told by my manager that the company had its quota of that type of business, so they wouldn't be paying my commission. No one told me about the quota. Welcome to New York City.

I quit that job and took one in telephone sales. For three weeks I sold personalized ballpoint pens to small businesses. I was paid an hourly wage, plus a small commission. Payday was every Friday. On the

third Friday, I showed up for work to an empty office. The company had moved in the middle of the night. I learned from the police that it was a Boiler Room, and they were conducting some sort of phone scam. I had naively worked in one of the straight jobs that made the company look legitimate. I would get no paycheck for that week's work. Welcome to New York City.

Before moving to New York, I made a down payment to purchase a co-op apartment that was under construction. It was supposed to be ready the day I arrived from Atlanta. When the moving truck pulled up, my unit was not finished. The builder assured me it would be ready in one week. I put my belongings into storage, moved in with a buddy and slept on his sofa. One week quickly became eight weeks, so I demanded an inspection of the building. Nothing had been done since the first time I saw it. I had to threaten a law suit to get my money back. Welcome to New York City.

I then rented an apartment for four times what I had been paying in Atlanta. Plus, I had to pay the equivalent of three months rent to move in: the first month's rent, a security deposit, and a real estate commission. Welcome to New York City.

One night a hit-and-run driver wrecked my parked car. A neighbor got the license plate number when he heard the crash. I called the police. They asked if the neighbor could identify the driver. He could not; he only saw the car driving away. The police then said the car was reported stolen one hour after my car was hit, and unless we could identify the driver they could do nothing. Welcome to New York City.

My girlfriend thought that my becoming a stockbroker would be glamorous, and I wanted to please her. I sent resumes to dozens of firms; I interviewed with several; but I couldn't land a position. I looked for other high-end sales jobs, but couldn't find one.

I got depressed, which made things even harder. Then I ran out of money. That had never happened to me before. I was too embarrassed to tell my girlfriend, so I borrowed money from my mother. And, I started looking for the type of job I knew I could get: waiting tables. My girlfriend urged me not to do that, but I was in a panic.

Two weeks later, I had a job in a restaurant, money in my pocket, and for the first time in four months New York City didn't seem evil. I can't help but think of these words from the song New York, New York: "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere." I wasn't making it; New York chewed me up and spit me out. And, while I'll always love visiting the Big Apple, I was clearly not meant to live there.

I'm sharing this story because the adversity I experienced motivated me to focus on my most important goal. It made me realize I had been wasting my life. I wanted to be a writer, but I wasn't pursuing it seriously. I did not write every day, and I was not trying to get my work published. When I got back to Atlanta, I cashed in a life insurance policy to buy a personal computer. I used it to write eight hours a day; and each week I mailed several query letters to book publishers, or at least one short story to a magazine. I was finally working in the career I had always dreamed of.

If you are experiencing tough times... let them remind you of what is most important in your life. Then let them motivate you to get back to your primary goals.

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