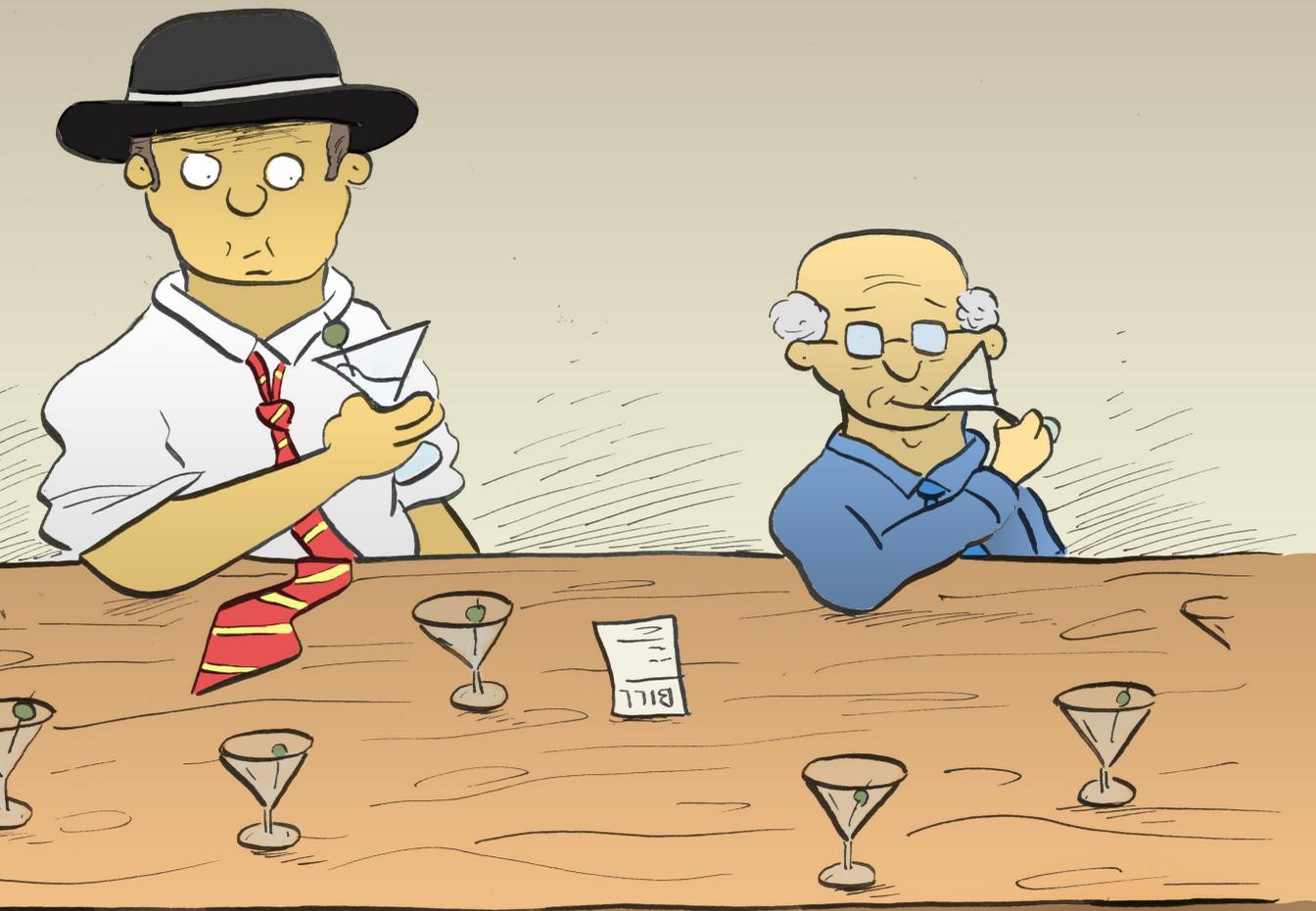


THE CASE OF THE MALCONTENT MOGUL

A
MAX IMPACT
MYSTERY

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IT WAS ONE OF THOSE DAYS. YEAH. THE KIND YOUR MOTHER WARNED YA ABOUT. THE KIND THAT MAKE YA WISH MURPHY'D KEPT HIS LAW TO HIMSELF. THE KIND THAT MADE ME WISH I WAS SOMEBODY ELSE, DOING SOMETHING ELSE, SOMEWHERE ELSE. ANYWHERE ELSE. BUT I WASN'T. THEM'S THE BREAKS. I WAS HOPING TO CATCH A LITTLE R&R AFTER THE TANGLED WEB CAPER.

BUT THE ONLY R&R I WAS GONNA CATCH WAS ROTSA RUCK. SOMEBODY WAS KNOCKING ON MY DOOR. AND IF IT WASN'T THE DUDE FROM PUBLISHER'S CLEARINGHOUSE WITH THE BALLOONS AND THE BIG CHECK COMING TO TELL ME I COULD TAKE THE REST OF MY LIFE OFF, I WAS GONNA HAVE TO GET BACK TO WORK.



I DIDN'T KNOW IF IT MEANT I WAS LOSING MY EDGE OR SOMETHING. BUT I KINDA FELT SORRY FOR THE LITTLE GUY. AND WHILE IT DIDN'T MAKE ME FEEL CHARITABLE TO THINK THIS WAY, HE LOOKED SORTA PITIFUL. I PEERED DOWN THE HALLWAY TO MAKE SURE NOBODY SPOTTED ME LETTIN' THE SAD SACK IN. IF WORD GOT OUT THAT I WAS TAKIN' ON HARDSHIP CASES LIKE THAT LITTLE FELLA SEEMED TO BE, I'D HAVE EVERY UNDERPERFORMER IN TOWN LOOKIN' FOR ME TO WORK MY MAGIC. I DON'T MIND PULLIN' A RABBIT OUT OF MY HAT NOW AND THEN. BUT I DON'T WANT TO START BREEDIN' THE BIG-EARED VARMINTS.



DUDE. I DON'T RATTLE EASY. BUT YOU'RE STARTING TO MAKE ME NERVOUS.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN IT, MR. MAX. BUT I LOST A SALE THIS YEAR.

WAIT. YOU LOST ONE SALE? ALL YEAR?

I'M SORRY.



YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE TO ME. WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT ONE SALE?

WE LOST IT TO OUR SMALLEST COMPETITOR. THEY UNDERCUT OUR PRICE TO WIN THE BUSINESS.

HOLD ON. ARE YOU SAYING YOU'D BE WILLING TO LET YOUR VALUE EQUATE TO YOUR PRICE?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.



THIS NUT'S SHELL MIGHT HAVE APPEARED TO BE SOFT. BUT HE WAS GOING TO BE A TOUGH ONE TO CRACK. IF HE HAD HIS KNICKERS IN A TWIST BECAUSE HE LOST ONE SALE, HE WAS IN TROUBLE. IF HE LOST THAT SALE ON PRICE AND WAS THINKING ABOUT CUTTING HIS, HE WAS IN EVEN DEEPER TROUBLE.

AND IF HE WAS WILLING TO CUT HIS PRICE AND LET HIS PRICE REFLECT HIS VALUE, IT MIGHT NOT BE THE END. BUT IT DEFINITELY WOULD BE THE BEGINNING OF THE END. I HAD TO ACT FAST. SO, I TOOK HIM TO A BAR.



WHY WOULD LOSING ONE SALE UPSET YOU SO MUCH, GENE?

WE LOST IT TO A COMPANY THAT CAN'T EVEN COMPETE WITH US. THEY ONLY GOT THE DEAL BECAUSE THEY'RE LESS EXPENSIVE.

AND YOU THINK YOUR ONLY RE-COURSE IS TO CUT YOUR PRICE TO COMPETE WITH THEM?

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO? IF THEY DID IT ONCE, THEY'LL DO IT AGAIN.



WHAT IF THEY'RE ACTUALLY HELPING YOU BY SELLING AT A LOWER PRICE?

I DON'T FOLLOW. IF THEY UNDERSELL ME, HOW CAN THAT HELP MY BUSINESS?



MEET ME AT MY OFFICE AGAIN TOMORROW. I'LL SHOW YOU. YOU MAY END UP CONSIDERING THEM YOUR BEST FRIENDS.

I DON'T SEE HOW YOU THINK THAT, MR. MAX. BUT AFTER ANOTHER ONE OF THESE, I MIGHT NOT CARE.



I HAD TO HAND IT TO THE GUY. HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN SMALL, BUT GENE POOLE COULD DEFINITELY HANDLE HIS BOOZE. AFTER OUR FIFTH MARTINI, I WAS JABBERING INCOHERENTLY AND DROOLING ON THE BAR. (I KNOW THAT BECAUSE THE BARTENDER CALLED ME THE NEXT MORNING TO TELL ME HE'D FOUND MY FEDORA. I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT WAS LOST.) GENE, ON THE OTHER HAND, WASN'T EVEN SLURRING HIS SPEECH. THE ONLY REASON HE DIDN'T HAVE A SIXTH POP IS THAT HE HAD TO DRIVE ME HOME.

AND THERE HE WAS, BRIGHT AND EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED TO EITHER OF US. I HAD A HANGOVER THAT DIDN'T QUITE SEE IT THAT WAY.



WHILE THE VODKA DIDN'T SEEM TO HAVE DULLED GENE'S SENSES IN ANY WAY, IT APPARENTLY HADN'T MADE HIM ANY MORE LUCID OR PERCEPTIVE, EITHER. BUT HE WAS COMING AROUND. I WASN'T SURE I COULD GET HIM TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT HE COULDN'T CONTROL EVERYTHING, LET ALONE WIN EVERY SALE. BUT I KNEW I COULD SHOW HIM AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO GET HIS MESSAGE ACROSS. THE REST WAS GONNA BE UP TO HIM.



ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS CREATE TWO CHARACTERS, ONE TO REPRESENT EACH SIDE OF THE ARGUMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF PENNYWISE AND POUNDFOOLISH

WHAT ARGUMENT?

I DON'T MEAN DISAGREEMENT. I MEAN THE CASE YOU NEED TO MAKE TO COMBAT YOUR COMPETITOR'S PRICE-SLASHING.

THE ADVENTURES OF PENNYWISE AND POUNDFOOLISH

SO, I WON'T HAVE TO CUT MY PRICES?

YOU AND YOUR CUSTOMERS CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE YOU CUT YOUR PRICES.

THE ADVENTURES OF PENNYWISE AND POUNDFOOLISH

WHY NOT?

OUR PRICES ARE LOWER THAN YOURS.

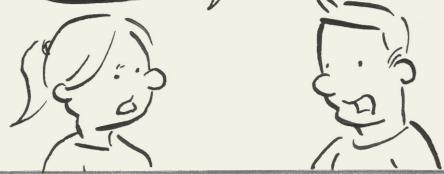
BECAUSE PENNYWISE JUST TOLD EVERYONE WHO'S TALKED WITH YOUR COMPETITOR WHY THEY NEED TO WORK WITH YOU.

THE ADVENTURES OF PENNYWISE AND POUNDFOOLISH

SO, I'VE MADE MY COMPETITOR LOOK CHEAP AND SELF-SERVING. I LIKE THE WAY YOU THINK, MR. IMPACT.

WE MIGHT BE UNDERSOLD. BUT OUR CUSTOMERS WILL NEVER BE UNDER-SERVED.

OUR PRICES ARE LOWER THAN YOURS.



IT SEEMED AS IF I'D MANAGED TO BRING THE LITTLE GUY AROUND. BUT SINCE HIS ENTIRE BUSINESS WAS AT STAKE, I COULDN'T LEAVE THAT TO CHANCE. SEE, HERE'S THE THING: AS SOON AS YOU LET THE VALUE OF WHAT YOU'RE SELLING BE EQUATED TO ITS PRICE, WHATEVER YOU'RE SELLING BECOMES A COMMODITY. I'M NO FREUD, BUT THERE'S SOME PSYCHOLOGY INVOLVED. IF THE SUPERIORITY OF WHAT YOU'RE SELLING IS ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR COMPETITOR'S INFERIORITY BECAUSE OF YOUR PRICE, YOUR VALUE WON'T BE DISCERNED.



WHAT DOES IT COST TO SERVE YOUR CUSTOMERS AS WELL AS YOU DO?

THE TIME AND EFFORT TO RECRUIT, TRAIN, AND COMPENSATE GOOD PEOPLE.

THE ADVENTURES OF PENNY WISE AND POWD FOLLISH

WHAT WOULD IT COST YOU NOT TO DO THAT?

WE'D BE OUT OF BUSINESS.

IS THAT A PRICE YOU'RE WILLING TO PAY TO WIN THAT ONE SALE?

ABSOLUTELY NOT.

I BELIEVE WE JUST HAD A MEETING OF THE MINDS, MY FRIEND.

THANK YOU, MR. IMPACT. BUT WHEN YOU SEND ME YOUR BILL, I WON'T MIND IF YOU SLASH YOUR PRICE.

OUCH! SHOT WITH MY OWN GUN. WELL, AT LEAST THE LITTLE GUY HADN'T LOST HIS SENSE OF HUMOR. IN FACT, IF I'D HAD A FEW MORE MINUTES ON MY SOAPBOX, I MIGHT HAVE POINTED OUT TO GENE THAT HUMOR CAN BE A PRETTY EFFECTIVE MARKETING TOOL. BUT IN THE END, I DECIDED I WAS BETTER OFF NOT PUSHING MY LUCK. THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A CHEAP SHOT. AND IN MY LINE OF WORK, YA CAN'T AFFORD TO BE CHEAP, LET ALONE IMMODEST.



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