Slick Stairwells and Subversive Hallways

Jamie Allen, March 2019

Lets talk about a situation, and a premise.

Let's say, I work for an arts institution. Maybe it's an art school. Let's say am trying to get something done, something that is, for various reasons a little "out of the ordinary" and therefore requiring of thought and not habit, and therefore — a little bit hard.

Let's say I'm trying to hire a foreign student on a project, and, let's say, I want to shift some funds over from an equipment budget in order to do this.

I start by emailing around a bit. Let's say I write the HR director — let's call him Mike. "Hey Mike," I write, "We've got some money leftover in the budget for project #4951 that we'd like to use to bring Fwad Elkateeb aboard for a little while, maybe 6 months, 3 days a week. He'll be working on documentation and a few technical archiving loose ends. What do you think is the best way to make this happen?"

I have now created what we could call "a situation".

Mike writes back, concerned and professional, understanding the request, and, it would seem, wanting to help. Mike and I have a good working relationship. Mike likes me. Mike likes Fwad. Fwad likes Mike. I like Mike. Mike's reply, however, is:

> "The terms of the funding you have received for project #4951 do not allow you to use these resources for personnel hires. Please seek out other means for resourcing Fwad Elkateeb's activities, if you choose to engage him in employ."

I receive this email, we might say, with a tacit frustration — and a familiar one. I know, as I think Mike does, and maybe even as Fwad would, that this little exchange is not a definitive or determed conclusion to the question and problem I have posed. If it is anything, it is more like the "serve" and "return" in a first round of tennis. It is, indeed, not an end, but a beginning.

The problem is, although it is not really a problem but a necessary processsual process, that we are playing this game in the wrong place. We are in the wrong premises. Where we need to be playing is, it turns out, is in the hallway. There is always the hallway.

It is, let's say, two days after these initial electronic mail salvos, and I instinctively feel the desire to create an excuse to loiter near Mike's office. I am having an extended visit with our research manager, whom I lunch with occasionally, and who I also, really, really like and who's desk is outside of Mike's office.

Mike leaves his office, presumably, for a late lunch. I catch this egress out of the corner of my eye. I excuse myself from the Research Manager friend — looping around a desk, through a second door that exits into — *the hallway.* And there we are, Mike and I, we could say, *centre court*, and he seems, poised even, to receive the next volley…

"You know, about that Fwad situation — do you think there's some way of having him invoice the school in a way that is worded like a service, and not a human resources hire…?"

"Well, of course — I just didn't want to suggest that in an email…"

"Thanks Mike, I'm so glad we *just ran into each other in the hallway…"*

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