

Chapter 1

The Meeting

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

RYAN MILLER was 22 years into his career in sales and marketing and he'd hit a wall. He was the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Wolfson Furnishings, a well-established furniture company. An employee-owned company, Wolfson sold office furniture and systems through retail outlets and through its web site. Ryan had led the charge to establish an online presence, and the site was now directly or indirectly involved in more than half of all new sales. For the majority of the time Ryan had been at Wolfson, things had been pretty good. Wolfson had focused on law firms and software companies, and because they were both growing quickly in the 1980s and 1990s, they had seen no need to branch out into additional industries. Their chosen client base had money to spend and there was lots of business to go around all the companies that focused on them. Ryan had been well paid, with stock and stock options, and had figured he had it made.

But now things were difficult. Lately, Wolfson had been struggling. The economy was rough. Businesses were closing—both clients' and competitors'. With massive layoffs throughout the industry, the long-term relationships Wolfson had been cultivating were gone. Everybody had cut back, and the marketing materials Ryan's people were using were having little effect in getting appointments. Even when his salespeople could get appointments, they couldn't close the deal.

Ryan was concerned for the company. He was also concerned about morale. If business slowed any more, the company would have to lay off more people, and they had already reduced staff twice; they were now down by 50 percent from the prior year.

But Ryan was even more concerned for his family. With two boys in high school and college expenses starting the following year, he had been counting on his stock to get them through that comfortably—and his ownership shares were becoming worthless. His wife Christina earned decent money at her job as an underwriter with a boutique insurance company, but certainly not enough to support their home and lifestyle in Short Hills, a well-to-do suburb in New Jersey. If Ryan couldn't get sales and marketing back on track, Wolfson would be on the road to bankruptcy and he would be looking for a job in an environment that was anything but friendly. And Christina's job

wasn't looking all that stable, either, given the big changes in the insurance industry and layoffs rampant in her company.

Sitting at Penn Station, sweating from the summer heat and waiting for his train home, Ryan fantasized about trading it all in and joining the Peace Corps. His reverie was interrupted when he heard someone behind him call out, "Ryan? Is that you my old friend?"

Ryan turned around and saw a portly Hasidic man with a big smile on his face. Ryan had seen Hasidic Jews before. New York was a center of Hasidic life, so they were a common sight in most parts of the city and in many nearby suburbs. Ryan was accustomed to their long black coats, long hair and beards, and of course their trademark broad-brimmed black fedoras. He had often wondered how they could stand to wear all that heavy black clothing in this summer humidity. But Ryan couldn't remember knowing any Hasidic Jews personally. Ryan had gone to Livingston High School (sole claim to fame: matriculated Jason Alexander), which had had a substantial Jewish population, so he certainly knew a lot of Jews. But as a nonreligious Christian himself, he had not interacted with anyone with a serious religious identity in many years.

"Do I know you?" Ryan asked, confused.

"Do you know me?" The stranger asked with a hint of sarcasm attached. "We know each other ten years, go to

high school, I even let you date my sister! I mean, sure, she dumped you, but did that affect your memory? Or did you get a knock on the keppe at that fancy college?"

Ryan couldn't believe his ears. "Lenny? Is that really you?!" After high school, Ryan headed down to Georgetown University in Washington, and he hadn't seen Lenny since. He was shocked that Lenny recognized him 26 years later, and even more shocked at the change in Lenny.

Lenny had been a skinny kid with a buzz cut and an attitude. Now he was big, a lion of a man, with a massive beard covering much of his face and curly sideburns cascading down out of his black hat. Ryan remembered Lenny's family being religious. They were kosher, if he remembered correctly, but this was ridiculous. "Lenny, when did you become, you know, all this?" he asked, indicating the hat, clothing, and hair.

Lenny laughed. "Yeah, I guess you didn't get the memo. While you were living it up in DC I spent five glorious years at Rutgers University, just an hour from home, though I lived on campus instead of commuting. So while I was there I started going to a religious center called Chabad house, which had the best kosher food on campus. I didn't grow up around many really observant people, and the devotion of the people in Chabad really appealed to me. They spent so much time studying the Torah!" Ryan remembered that the Torah was the Jews'

name for their Bible and other religious tracts. Lenny continued, happy to tell a story he had clearly told many times before. “The Torah scholars I met on trips to New York always impressed me, too. I’d always wanted to spend more time studying Torah, so a few years back I figured, why not go all the way?”

Lenny explained that after college he had built a good packaging business. “I was blessed with success and leisure time,” he said. “I got married, had two daughters and a son, became a family man. Here, take a look.” Lenny pulled out his iPhone and showed Ryan pictures of his family.

“Lovely,” Ryan commented. “I have a couple of kids myself.” Ryan pulled up the picture of his family on his BlackBerry. “Teenagers,” he said, shrugging off any reasonable explanation of the goth-looking boys staring out at them.

Lenny laughed. “Ah, well, family life is a blessing in itself.”

“I guess. But I’m confused,” Ryan said, changing the subject. “Did you sell your packaging business? Is that why you have the time to study?”

“No, no, no, of course not,” replied Lenny. “But we have great people and great systems, so I don’t need to spend a lot of time running it. We make lots of sales, we deliver lots of product, and life is good, kineahora!”

“Your sales are still good? Even in this economy?” Ryan asked skeptically.

“Actually, we’re doing even better now than we did last year.”

Ryan was perplexed. Everyone he knew was having trouble. He had some knowledge of Lenny’s sector—one of his friends used to be in the packaging business before his company went under last year; it was just as tough there as everywhere else. How could Lenny’s company be growing in sales with everyone struggling around him?

Ryan let his skepticism show: “Come on, Lenny. I run sales and marketing for a fifty-year-old furnishing company, and man, it’s been rough lately. How is it, with the slowing economy, that you are doing so well? Is your packaging that good? Is it so different from all the other stuff out there?”

Lenny chuckled. “Well, I like to think our product is pretty good, but no, I wouldn’t say it’s groundbreaking, if that’s what you mean. To tell you the truth, I actually chalk it up to our sales and marketing approach. I think that’s what’s kept us going and growing all these years, through both good and bad economic times.”

Now Lenny had Ryan’s full attention. “Really!” Ryan said. “What are you doing that’s so special and new?”

“I’m not sure I would call it special,” said Lenny, “and it’s definitely not new. In fact it’s a pretty straightforward method that’s been used for roughly 3,500 years.”

Ryan was sure his high school friend was pulling his leg. The only working sales process that had been around that long was “sex sells,” and packaging was one of the least sexy products Ryan could imagine. “I suppose next you’ll tell me that Socrates invented CRM.”

Lenny chuckled and started to answer, then caught the schedule board out of the corner of his eye. “Listen, Ryan,” Lenny said. “I have to catch my train. Why don’t you meet me for lunch at my office on Monday and I’ll show you what we’ve been doing? Give me your card; here’s mine. Come around eleven and we’ll catch up over a nice steak. I know a great place.”

Ryan glanced at Lenny’s card and promised to be there. After all, he figured, the way things were going, what did he have to lose?

As he settled in on the train home he looked at Lenny’s card:

Golden Box Packaging

Lenny Goldstein

Founder and CEO

718-555-1000
len@nonakedproduct.com

4248 18th Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11218

On the back was a URL—www.NoNakedProduct.com.

Ryan smiled and thought, “Hmm, original URL. Geez, you wouldn’t think a guy steeped in religious studies would be going around talking about nakedness. And then he got it: packaging was like covering the nakedness of a product. He smiled, both at the cleverness of the line and at his own thickheadedness in missing the meaning the first time. It must be the heat—and the fact that Wolfson’s business problems were getting him down.

He got on his train thinking about Lenny’s sister Miriam. She was his first girlfriend. They’d had some great times . . . until she dropped him to date that jock when he’d left for college. Ouch!