

Form and Function

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A.M.

“Ken...*Ken!* Hello? Earth to McFly.” Ken’s head snapped around with a start as he slowly became aware that the other passengers were jostling their way around him as he continued to grasp the handrail. He had become so enraptured in his daydream that he forgot where he was. Ideally, he’d have preferred to while away the boring commute sitting down, reading the newspaper or solving a Sudoku puzzle. Unfortunately, this particular train was so packed at this hour that it was standing room only. Worse yet, it was so crowded that there was hardly room to move, much less hold an open newspaper or fill in the missing numbers on a page. Therefore, Ken had to content himself with keeping his mind active using only his imagination. Daydreaming on the way in to work also served to help him ignore the press of backpacks, briefcases and cellulite pressed into his body, as well as the heavy aroma of hairspray, cheap cologne, and coffee breath that made the atmosphere on the train thick and slightly nauseating.

Reluctantly letting go of the handrail, Ken allowed the insistent press of his fellow commuters to bear him along out onto the street. After the somewhat humid warmth of the train’s fetid interior, the street outside the subway station was an invigorating blast of cold, sunlight, and noise that brought Ken sufficiently out of his torpor to keep pace with his fellow pedestrians. He matched their business-like strides as he negotiated the two blocks to the office building housing his place of employment. The firm occupied two floors of the towering skyscraper, and it offered him a modest living, a reasonable work schedule, plus “benefits,” all in exchange for a modicum of effort on his part.

He turned and entered the lobby, leaving the bracing cold of the street for the rich warmth of a teeming entryway. He joined the “line” for one of the elevators, more of a group meandering in the general direction of the elevator doors. Eventually he made his way into one of the crowded cars.

Exiting the elevator, Ken glanced at his watch and saw that he was a full five minutes early, and so after depositing his bag and jacket in his cubicle, he set out to the break room to pour himself a cup of coffee. The company was gracious enough to supply its workers with a 40-cup coffee urn and all the coffee one could drink during the work day. This day, however, as Ken lifted the lever to dispense the coffee into his mug, only a short trickle issued from the spout that tapered into a few sporadic drops.

“Well,” thought he, “I’d better make another pot.” He knew that the boss liked his morning cup as soon as he got in, as well as frequent refills as the day progressed. It really wouldn’t do to have the man in charge grumpier than a bear with a sore ass first thing in the morning.

Ken dumped the used grounds and filled the urn with water. Removing the lid from the can of fresh coffee, he saw that it was empty. He sighed as he tossed the can in the trash and walked out of the break room. Making his way through the cubicles, he came to the large filing cabinets resting against the far wall of the office. Opening the requisite drawer, Ken located the folder containing the forms numbered CRR29 (Coffee Requisition Request). Reaching in, he discovered that the file was empty. With that, he closed the drawer and opened the one above and to the left on the next cabinet over. There, he located the file containing the forms RFR83 (Requisition Form Request) and removed one. Taking the RFR83 back to his desk, he sat down and filled out all of the spaces required of the employee requesting a new bundle of CRR29 forms. He then knew that he had two choices. He could place it in the mail slots that adorned the outside of his cubicle, where the mailroom assistants would then come by and remove it as they made their daily rounds throughout both floors the company occupied. He knew that they would transport his RFR83 to the mail room (located in the basement), where it would be sorted by other mailroom assistants according to where each form they received needed routing. Having worked for the company for as long as he had, Ken knew that the properly filled-out RFR83 would be routed to the Department of Logistical Support (DLS). There, it would be reviewed for completeness and accuracy. If there was a space improperly filled out or not completed, it would be sent back to his mail slot, via the mailroom, for him to correct and re-submit. If the reviewer deemed that his RFR83 had been properly filled out, it would then be routed

to the Logistics Support Department (LSD). The LSD would then approve the RFR83 and route it to the Central Supply Department (CSD), where the new bundle of CRR29s would be drawn from Central Supply and routed to the LSD. The LSD would then log the CRR29s into the Monthly Supply Record for his department, and then route the bundle to the DLS. The DLS would then check the number of forms being drawn against his department's monthly allotted number of forms. If his department's monthly allotted number of forms hadn't yet been met, then the bundle would be routed to him. If his department had exceeded its monthly allotted number of forms, then the bundle would be returned to the LSD, and he would instead receive an NOEE (Notification of Excessive Expenditure) from the DLS. The entire process, as he well knew, usually took about a week.

His other choice was to take the RFR83 two doors down the hall to the DLS and personally hand it to one of the clerks. Once it was approved, he could then walk it next door to the LSD and hand his approved RFR83 to one of the LSD's administrative assistants. Once it was approved by the LSD, he could then walk down the hall and around the corner to the CSD, proffer his properly filled-out and approved RFR83 to the CSD administrative specialist, and receive a new bundle of CRR29s. The entire process shouldn't take more than 30 minutes.

It actually took closer to an hour.

After returning to the office, Ken unwrapped the bundle of new CRR29s and placed it into the proper file in the large file cabinet along the back wall. He then took a blank CRR29 back to his desk and filled it out, carefully checking that he had completed all of the spaces required of the requesting employee. He then took his properly filled-out CRR29 two doors down the hall and presented it to the clerk in the DLS. Once the DLS clerk approved Ken's properly filled-out CRR29, indicating that all of the spaces required of the requesting employee had been completed correctly, he walked next door to the LSD and presented his properly filled out and approved CRR29 to the administrative assistant. After the administrative assistant approved his properly filled-out CRR29, Ken walked down the hall, around the corner, and presented his properly filled-out and approved CRR29 to the CSD administrative specialist.

Re-entering the office with the new can of coffee, Ken swaggered

just a little, much as the star halfback might after being presented the game ball. He set the can down next to the 40-cup urn graciously provided by the company and opened it, releasing the heady aroma of vacuum-packed grounds. Reaching into the cabinet for a new filter, Ken instead discovered an empty plastic wrapper that had, up until yesterday, contained fresh paper filters. Leaving the enticing smell of a newly opened can of coffee, Ken walked back to the large filing cabinet on the back wall of his office, opened the drawer containing the proper files, and located the file containing the blank ACSR67 (Ancillary Coffee Supply Request) forms.

By the time the coffee was ready, everyone was breaking for lunch.

P.M.

“Ken...*Ken!*” Ken’s head snapped around sharply away from the doodle he’d been meticulously retracing on his ink blotter. He stole a furtive glance at his watch as he looked up to face his boss, noting that it was two minutes past the end of lunch. He noted with a mixture of apprehension and satisfaction that the big guy was holding a steaming mug of coffee, no doubt freshly dispensed from the 40-cup urn graciously provided by the company.

“I didn’t mean to interrupt your *work* Ken, but I’d like to see you in my office before you go home today,” said the boss. “It shouldn’t take more than a few minutes. Carry on.”

Ken nodded in the affirmative, but the boss was already ambling over to the next cubicle, trailing the smell of freshly-brewed coffee and Old Spice in his wake. Turning back to his work station, Ken booted up his computer and pulled up the Grayson file, fully intending to cross-reference his data with the company’s central database to ensure all the figures matched. However, when he entered his user name and password to log on to the company’s central database, an error message came up, notifying him that his password had expired and needed renewal. He was required to renew his password every 90 days because, after all, somebody might get hold of his password and be privy to all of the highly sensitive company information at his disposal.

After entering and verifying his new password, Ken was greeted with another error message, informing him that the automated password

renewal function on the server wasn't functioning properly, and that he should try again later. He also had the option of contacting his department IT administrator for assistance. The IT Help Desk e-mail address was thoughtfully provided in the error message window. Unfortunately, one had to be logged on to the server in order to access one's e-mail account to send an e-mail requesting assistance. However, Ken had been with the company long enough so that he knew what to do next.

He got up and walked back to the back wall of his office, the one containing all of the filing cabinets for his department. He located the drawer containing the proper file and pulled it open. Ken then located the proper file containing the blank forms numbered ITAR54 (Information Technology Assistance Request). He then slid the drawer shut, noting with satisfaction the muffled metallic click indicating that the drawer had latched shut. It wouldn't do to have one of his fellow office staff tripping over an unlatched drawer and risk an on-the-job injury. Despite the obvious loss of production, an injured co-worker might have to take some sick leave/time off to recuperate. Ken had worked for the company long enough to realize that the company frowned on excessive sick leave use, and he would hate to see a fellow employee fall into disfavor with the company.

Taking the blank ITAR54 back to his desk, Ken carefully filled in each blank required of the employee requesting IT assistance. He made sure that he carefully explained the nature of his problem in the "Remarks" section so that the reviewing IT administrator would know that he needed his password renewed. Ken then knew he had one of two choices.

He could place the completed ITAR54 in the appropriate mail slot on the outside of his cubicle, where it would be picked up by one of the mail room assistants as they made their rounds of the company's two floors. The form would be taken to the mail room, where it would be sorted and routed to the Information Technology Trouble Desk (ITTD). There, it would be reviewed by the ITTD administrative assistant, who would check that all of the spaces on the form had been properly filled out by the employee requesting IT assistance. If one had been missed, or improperly filled out, then the form ITAR54 would be routed, via the mail room, back to the employee requesting IT assistance. If the form had been filled out correctly and completely, then the ITTD administrative assistant would route the form

ITAR54, via the mail room, to the appropriate Information Technology Administrative Technician for his department (ITAT-d). The ITAT-d would sign the appropriate space on the form ITAR54 and then check the appropriate box denoting his approval or disapproval of the action requested. Once the requested action was approved by the ITAT-d, the properly filled out and approved form ITAR54 would then be routed, via the mail room, to the Information Technology Administrative Technician for passwords (ITAT-p). When the ITAT-p received the properly filled out and approved form ITAR54, the ITAT-p would then generate a new password and issue it to Ken's account on the company's server. The new password would be written on the form ITAR54 and the form would be routed, via the mail room, to the ITAT-d. The ITAT-d would then check the new password against a list of passwords assigned to all members of his department. If the new password assigned to Ken's account was already assigned to another department member's account, the form ITAR54 would be routed, via the mail room, back to the ITAT-p so that another password could be generated and assigned to Ken's account. If the new password wasn't assigned to another department member's account, the ITAT-d would mark the form ITAR54 "approved" and route it, via the mail room, to the ITTD. From there, the ITTD administrative assistant would route the approved form ITAR54 containing Ken's new password, via the mail room, to the appropriate mail slot outside Ken's cubicle.

The entire process normally took seven to ten business days.

Ken, however, had been with the company long enough to know that he could take his properly filled out form ITAR54 down the hall to the elevator, ride the elevator to the floor just above the one he worked on, step out of the elevator and walk across the entryway to the ITTD, and hand it to the ITTD administrative assistant. Once the ITTD administrative assistant directed him to the proper ITAT-d, he could then take his properly filled out form ITAR54 through the door immediately behind and to the left of the ITTD, locate the ITAT-d, and present his form for approval. After his properly filled out form ITAR54 was approved by the ITAT-d, Ken could then walk his properly filled out and approved form ITAR54 to the ITAT-p, located two desks over from the ITAT-d, and have his new password assigned. Once his new password was assigned, checked against his department's other

members' passwords, and approved by the ITAT-d, Ken could then board the elevator and ride it back down to the floor housing his department.

By the time Ken returned to his desk with his new password, he saw by his watch that he had just enough time to see the boss before the end of the work day.

Logging off of his work station, Ken picked up his jacket and bag, pushed in his chair, and made his way to the boss' office. Knocking on the door, Ken waited patiently for the muffled command granting him entry to resonate from behind the thick, varnished oak edifice. When the terse "Come!" sounded, Ken promptly turned the burnished brass knob and swung the heavy wooden portal open.

His boss looked up from the putt he had just successfully made into a martini shaker laying on its side at the far end of the office. He fixed Ken with a mildly bemused look and inquired, "What do *you* want?"

"You told me to come and see you before I left today," replied Ken.

"And you are...?"

"Ken, sir."

The boss furrowed his brow as he walked around behind his desk and sat down. Taking a file out of a stack in a tray on the corner, he looked up and exclaimed, "Ken! That's right. Have a seat."

As Ken sat down in a hard wooden chair facing the boss' desk, Ken noticed the steaming fresh coffee sitting on the boss' desk, in a mug bearing the company logo.

"Ken," the boss began, "I called you in today to go over your performance evaluation. I've tried to be as fair as I can be, but unfortunately, I'm afraid I can't rate you any higher than 'Below Standard' for this evaluation period. Quite frankly, I expected better from you, since you showed such promise when you first hired in. I expected you'd be more of a team player. However, on the rare occasions when I do find you at your work station, all I see is you goofing off. I don't know what you do all day, but whatever it is, it doesn't seem to be contributing to company productivity. I'm going to give you another chance, but if you haven't stepped up by the end of the next evaluation period, I'm afraid I'll have no choice but to let you go. I'll have my secretary type up the EPR100 (Employee Performance Review) and route it to your work station tomorrow for your signature. Make sure you are there, sign

it, and get it back to me immediately. That's all."

Ken didn't remember much after that, experiencing a strange, somewhat disconnected feeling. He knew he must have left the building housing the company's two floors, walked to the stop, and boarded the train. He knew this because he suddenly became aware of his surroundings again when one of his office mates, who rode the same train, jarred him from his self-absorbed reverie.

"Hey Ken," he exclaimed as he shoved a newspaper in front of Ken's face, "check this out. A guy working for the firm five floors below us walked into his office and just unloaded on his boss and co-workers. They had to call the cops to come haul this guy out because of all the commotion he was causing." Ken's office mate shook his head in bewilderment. "Man, I just don't get it. What in the world makes someone do something like that?"

"Yes," Ken mused to himself as he turned his gaze out the train window, "what indeed?"