Jak and his mother were poor — well, maybe not poor; they were just badly overextended. It wasn’t the overpriced apartment they shared, or their trendy minivan, or even the booming, eye-busting home entertainment center. It’s just that one too many tickets to the N.B.A. playoffs (and plane tickets and hotel) can really strain one’s line. Jak and his mother ultimately found themselves with zero available on
I wonder if anyone holds a patent on those beans?

and see what you can get for it. Maybe we can exchange it for a couple of filets.”

Jak was beside himself but had to concede the need. He, too, couldn’t see any other way to replenish their dwindling supply of frozen twice-baked potatoes. So, off he went.

On the way to town, he encountered a strange man. “I’ll give you five magic beans for your preamp,” the wizened oldster offered. “Do you know how many that is?”

Jak took affront. “Sure,” he shot back, “it’s five more beans than I now have.” The elder paused, struck by the youth’s, well..., youth.

Jak headed home feeling exceedingly smug. “Ha! That old geezer didn’t even ask me to sign a bill of sale! Boy, if that preamp blows when he hooks it up, that’ll just be too bad!”

Mother felt otherwise.

“Five lousy beans — for a brand-new preamp? Are you DENSE? It’ll be no filet and double-baked potatoes for you tonight. Go to your suite.”

Jak was miffed but he knew his mother’s punishment was moot; the fridge was bare. Hmm, did he cut a bad deal with the old man? On the one hand, he might have held out for a gift certificate to a fine in-town restaurant along with the beans. On the other hand, hey, they were magic beans! “Ahhhhhhhhhh...”

So Jak tossed the beans out the apartment window; they landed in some rich loam coincidentally roto-tilled by another tenant that same afternoon. Then Jak snoozed.

When he awoke the next morning, there was a mammoth beanstalk growing outside his bedroom window, growing all the way into the clouds. “I wonder if anyone holds a patent on those beans?” he thought to himself. However, there wasn’t time for speculation; the beanstalk (and its unknown destination) beckoned. With mom asleep, Jak climbed. And climbed.

And climbed.

He eventually found himself standing in front of one heck of a corporate headquarters. “Huge,” he thought, not being one to embellish the obvious. In he went, only to find that “huge” understated things.

The entrance to HQ led Jak to a receptionist desk immense and daunting. The receptionist towered over Jak as, say, Jak towered over an ant. “What do you want?” she shrieked. “Got any espresso? Perhaps an eclair?” he replied.

Not amused, the receptionist was nonetheless challenged by the youth’s, well..., appetite. Yet they were interrupted in their discussion of Jak’s hunger by the thudding noise of The Giant, who huffed past
Jak and plodded down the hall right into the CEO’s office, where he sat down in the CEO’s chair, thumped his chest, and chanted the oddest poem:

*Fe-fi-fo-fum*

*Glad I’m not an ordinary one!*

*I know numbers up and down:*

*That’s why I command this town!*

Jak, however, slipped past the receptionist (who was on the phone trying to find a nearby source for eclairs) and introduced himself to The Giant. “Where’d you come from?” the CEO bellowed.

“Well, I know you won’t believe this, but I climbed up here on a beanstalk,” Jak yelled, as loud as he could, noting that The Giant had to cup his hand over his ear to pick up Jak’s tiny voice. What Jak said mattered little. The Giant took the gist of his response and just kept firing more questions.

“How high did you climb? How many branches did you actually engage? How many others could climb that same beanstalk in an hour? What could we charge each climber? Are there excessive maintenance costs attached to the beanstalk? How was this number calculated? How many other climbing beanstalks are there? How many others hold the rights to them? What’s the lowest bid we could submit to win these rights? Do you expect mileage reimbursement for your travel today? If so, how much? Would you accept a flat *per diem* instead of variable mileage? What is your employee number? What are we paying you now? To the penny, what is the smallest raise this year that would keep you from quitting?”

Jak was agog. He had never been asked so many questions at one time. While the fusillade of question marks kept spewing from The Giant’s mouth, Jak noticed that the wall was ornamented with hats, *all kinds of hats.* Then he saw framed documents on the wall, revealing that The Giant was chief of the company which made all the hats for all the people down below. Dress hats, baseball hats, beanies, all the hats at all the amusement parks — why, The Giant even oversaw the design for the new virtual reality helmets.

The Giant, however, was oblivious to Jak’s spying, and just kept asking. “How much return could we yield if we controlled the beanstalk only five years — then spun it off with no tie-backs? *With* tie-backs? After aggressive amortization, would the tax write-offs, plus projected cash flow, achieve the minimum corporate hurdle rates for business profit?

“Are you demanding a finder’s fee for bringing this idea to the company? How many relatives do you have? How many hats do they own? Would you be willing to relinquish all claims to the beanstalk for a year’s supply of hats for your entire family? Two years’ supply?”
Jak couldn’t help but notice that the questions were now directed up toward the ceiling, where The Giant was staring at a twinkling chandelier — completely oblivious to Jak’s presence or movements.

“What if we trimmed every other branch off the beanstalk? How much would we save in annual upkeep versus the costs of maintaining those extra leaves? Okay, okay... now what if we chopped off two of every three leaves? Oh, yessssssssssss... now the numbers are starting to work for me!

Okay, okay... now what if we chopped off two of every three leaves?

“Maybe this will reverse our current profit slide!”

Jak ambled back to the receptionist’s area, overhearing her debate with the bakery’s policy that it would simply not deliver only one eclair — no matter who the buyer was. Jak, pretending not to take any notice, took in every word. “But this is The Giant’s office!”

Quickly tiring of the give-and-take over the estimated costs of having the eclair delivered by the baker, sent by taxi, or picked up by the receptionist herself, Jak slumped into a chair.

He noticed a manila envelope about the size of a long legal pad sticking out from under a stack of magazines and journals on the waiting room table.

The envelope was starkly labeled “PROPRIETARY! URGENT! FOR THE EYES OF THE GIANT ONLY!” Yet the parcel was unopened; the seal of the envelope never broken. In fact, so much dust had accumulated on it, a small cloud fell to his feet as Jak accessed the contents: a single sheet of letterhead.

It was a legal document of some sort, with a strange entreaty from the founder of the hat company to his yet-to-be-named successor:

“The person who signs below will own outright all assets of this firm, but by his or her signature he or she must pledge forever to honor our workers as if they were family and to recite each day that the best way to earn our customers’ business is by winning their hearts.”

Though Jak took an “Incomplete” in his second semester of Business Law, he was nonetheless savvy enough to know what he had to do — and fast: “I gotta find a notary!”

Jak scurried back to his beanstalk, rapelling down the vine with The Giant in hot pursuit. “Hey,” he bellowed, “would you sign this non-compete?”

The End

Illustration and layout by Mac Thornton
©2001 Management General
www.mgeneral.com