

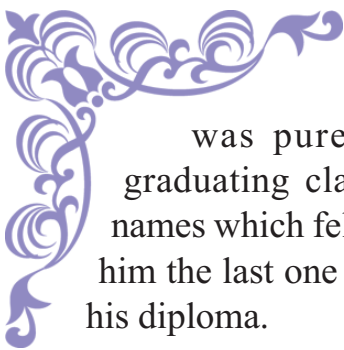


A Fiscal Fairy Tale

*The Tortoise &
The Harried*

By Tom Brown

Thaddeus T. Turtle was slow; he was *always* slow. His mother thought he would *never* be born. As a child, he was always the last one to leave the table. On trips, someone always had to tug Thaddeus to remind him to catch up with the rest of the family. In school, his examination was always the last one turned in; his class projects were always submitted on the final



day; and, though it was pure coincidence, in his graduating class, there were no last names which fell after “Turtle,” making him the last one to come on stage to get his diploma.

Thaddeus grew up with the same words hurled his way over and over: “Well, it’s *about* time!” “*Finally!*” “Thought you’d *never* make it!” “Will you *please* hurry up!”

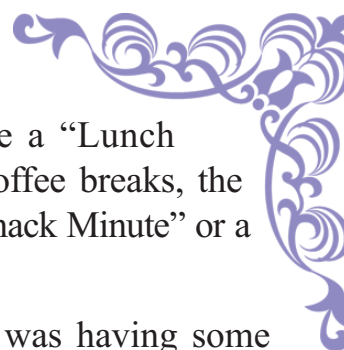
The interviewer at the financial services company had never before had an applicant come to an interview late, but she nonetheless was impressed with the thoroughness and completeness of every answer Thaddeus gave. In fact, Thaddeus had to wake her from a trance as he concluded his final interview question. “Time for lunch!” she rattled off as she awoke. “Very complete answers, Thaddeus, very complete!” she said. “You’re hired!”

No one ever said “Good morning!” to him...

When Thaddeus reported for work on his first day (a few minutes late), he didn’t know what to expect. To his surprise, he found everyone else in his department friendly, but a tad rushed in everything they said and did.

No one ever said “Good morning!” to him; it was always “Good mornin...” or, even, “G’morn!” Often, his peers would just wave as they rushed to their desks.

This behavior was symbolic, Thaddeus soon learned. The company employing him didn’t have lunch hours. It spoke



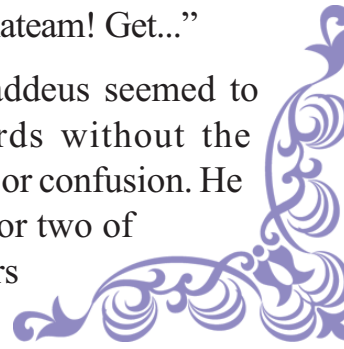
euphemistically of people needing to take a “Lunch Moment.” Instead of coffee breaks, the company preferred a “Snack Minute” or a “Coffee Breaklet.”

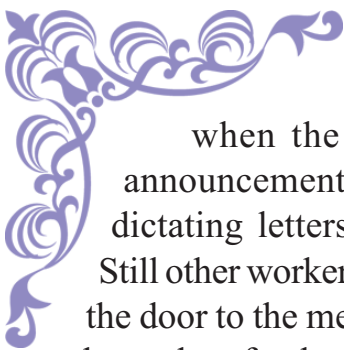
Of course, Thaddeus was having some trouble adjusting. All his co-workers came in early and repeatedly stayed late — rushing through each work day at a frenzied pace yet always bemoaning how little they had achieved. “I’ve just got to learn how to fish faster!” was the stock line most people said on their way out the door at the end of the day; then they routinely said, “G’nite!”

Thaddeus, though, was... well... Thaddeus. He always greeted each and every associate with a “Good morning to you! How is everything in your life today? Got much planned to work on this afternoon?” At first, his fellow workers just stared at him, thinking his behavior odd, quaint, or both. Predictably, they soon just brushed off his polite inquiries. Then, they clipped his overtures with a quick “Gottago” and a smile. Ultimately, they avoided Thaddeus at all costs. He never did understand why no one used the same building entrance that he did.

“People,” said the boss one day at a special staff meeting, which was to occur between 2:00 and 2:07PM. “Let’s get right to point. Contract opportu... Big! World-wi... Big! Must win. Repeat: *Must!* Youwithme? Yes? Lemme hear... You... together... Cooperate! Questions? No? Good. Get ‘em! Whateam! Get...”

Everyone around Thaddeus seemed to digest the boss’s words without the slightest hint of concern or confusion. He thought it odd that one or two of the work team members





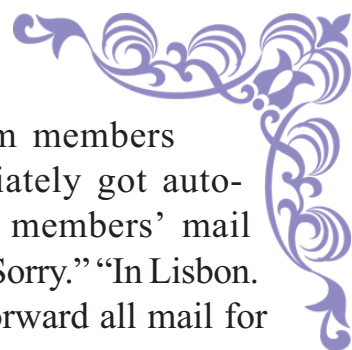
were on the phone when the boss was making his announcement. Others were actually dictating letters into a voice recorder. Still other workers were actually blocking the door to the meeting room, positioning themselves for the fastest possible exit once the meeting was adjourned.

So at 2:04PM, Thaddeus found himself almost alone as he raised his hand to ask for more details. “Sir, what is this contract for? What are the criteria for success? What are our roles and responsibilities as members of the proposal team? How can my skills best mesh with the rest of the workers’ skills? Are there interim deadlines to observe before the final deadline? Who’s going to coordinate the work of the team? If we get stuck on something, can we call you? Will you be assisting us in the final draft of the proposal?”

The boss glared at Thaddeus. “Memo. Out. Soon. G’by.”

Thaddeus did get the memo from the boss; and, in his customary way, Thaddeus read it three times. He even missed his lunch moment because he also read the specifications attached to the memo from the customer, a bank, asking for a new plan to speed up its check-cashing processes. Thaddeus thought long and hard about what his company could do to really help its banking customer function more smoothly and faster. When he left work that night, he was genuinely excited about the new contract prospect. “We can win this job! And that would be good for this company, my work team, and my career!”

That night after his post-dinner nap, Thaddeus was still



excited. He even sent e-mails to all his team members saying so. He immediately got auto-replies from his team members’ mail stations: “Mailbox full. Sorry.” “In Lisbon. Reply later.” “Busy! Forward all mail for me elsewhere.”

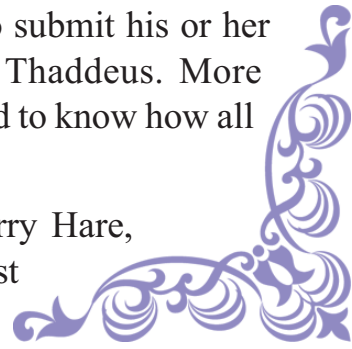
Split-second hallway conferences were happening all the time.

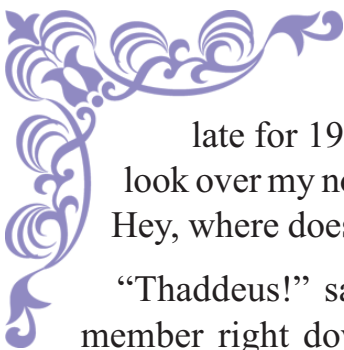
The next morning, and for many days thereafter, Thaddeus saw his workmates move furiously. Papers were literally thrown from one cubicle to another. Split-second hallway conferences were happening all the time. Phones kept ringing, invariably going to voicemail. No one asked Thaddeus for anything, so he sat alone in his cubicle.

He knew from the boss’s original memo what he was supposed to do. He planned each and every work day so that he could do the right proportion of his work and have it ready to be integrated with the others’ work just before the major proposal was to be submitted. Then, typically, he would go to a nearby park and smell the many flowers in bloom; this always calmed him down when he was feeling the least bit frenzied.

The day the proposal was to be sent by Express Mail to the bank, Thaddeus sensed a palpable tension in the workplace. No one, it seemed, was ready to submit his or her assigned work except Thaddeus. More than that, no one seemed to know how all the pieces fit together.

“Thaddeus!” said Harry Hare, the team member closest





to his cubicle, “I’m late for 19 appointments. Can you look over my notes? I’m doing ‘Part C.’ Hey, where does this part go, anyway?”

“Thaddeus!” said Roger Ratt, a team member right down the hall. “I haven’t finished my piece: could you help? I’ve got to catch a plane for Rendoria. Whip it to The Man when you’re done!”

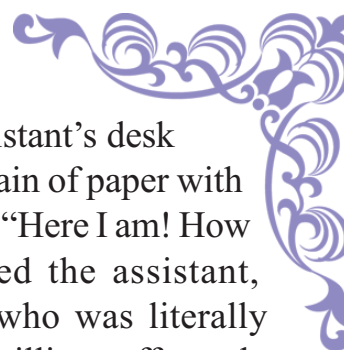
*Pull everyone’s together
and get it to boss.*

“Thaddeus!” said associate Francis Ferret, “No time...talk. Stuck. My part. Looking for notes. Looking for memo-Boss. You rewrite? Can’t mess up worse. Wunnerful!”

“Thaddeus!” said team captain Charlotte Cheetah, “Ohmygosh! Kid’s due at orthodon.... Pull everyone’s together and get it to boss. You’re assigned. Willing? No matter. Assigned!”

Thaddeus soon found himself with a huge stack of partially typed spreadsheets, data logs, e-mails, and proposal copy. Yet, it all made sense to him: the original plan proposed by the boss and the specifications from the banking customer were neatly formed in his head.

So, Thaddeus sat down at his keyboard, reviewed each team member’s chicken-scratched notes, and drafted a *b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l* proposal. It ran just 10 pages, the prescribed length. Since no one else from his team could be found, Thaddeus ambled up to the boss’s office to deliver the proposal.



The door to the office was closed, and the assistant’s desk was covered in a mountain of paper with no assistant to be found. “Here I am! How can I help you?” asked the assistant, Geoffrey Greyhound, who was literally running down the hall spilling coffee as he galloped.

“This is the big proposal for the big bank that the boss needed by 5:00PM today. It’s 4:59PM. May I give it to him, please?”

Geoffrey, however, scowled. “Hey, what! Proposal? Due today? Impossible! Express Mail goes out in an hour. Impossible! No one told *me!*”

“Well, maybe I could just show the proposal to the boss and then send it on my way home?”

“Oh, Thaddeus! Be realistic. It’s five now, right? The boss just started his 3:15. He’s got four more scheduled after this. No time for you! Tomorrow. Tomorrow!”

Head down, Thaddeus plodded back to his cubicle, slowly packed his briefcase, and went to his car. As always, he stopped at the park on his way home.



The End



Illustration and layout by Mac Thornton

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