

# How the Business Man came to wear a Tie

A “Just So” Story for the Modern Age

*Mark Bolotin*

There was a time, almost forgotten in this hot dusty age, when the Earth teemed and thrived with enterprise, and Man dreamed and strived for the acquisition of money. It was a time when money was regarded with a certain benevolence: a currency of innovation that came to those who thought much and sought much, who were diligent and just in their pursuit. This pursuit became known as Business and the man who engaged in this pursuit was named the Business Man. He was to be found in all corners of the world - upon the high seas there was Business in the trade of silk and exotic spice; in the lowlands there was Business in the trade of wine and merchandise; in the Polar regions there was Business in the trade of coals for heat and in the Deserts there was Business in the trade of ice. In short, a great exchange of wealth took place. And the Business Man - who was as varied as the vivid plants in a jungle - dressed as he pleased and in the manner which most suited his particular pursuit. The merchant on the high seas dressed in light canvas cloth to keep the salt from his skin and the sun from his back; the trader in the lowlands wore an elegant linen shirt and breeches ideal for journey; the entrepreneur in the Polar regions wrapped himself in luxuriant soft furs, whilst the man who braved the Desert wore as little as decency allowed.

Now there came one time a man - a Business Man - who went by a name that posterity has cared not to remember. What was known, however, was that he was thin and tall with skin that sagged in inconvenient places and eyes that dared one to make such an observation. He worked in one of the bustling towns that dotted one of the bustling lands and he was claimed to be fairly well off - in a bustling sort of way. As the years hissed by, however, he had become fed up with his pursuit of Business. On one particular afternoon, worn down and worn out, weary and dreary, strained and drained, he came to voice his displeasure:

“I am worn down and worn out, weary and dreary, strained and drained and what’s more I’m filled with displeasure. Why should one have to work so hard, so much, so long? Is there not a better way, a quicker and easier way to make more money? Surely a way is there. There surely is a way.”

Yet there was none nearby to hear such grieving words or puzzle at such unheard of grievances. At the docks the merchant continued to unload his heavy crates, on the street kerb the trader continued to shout his bargains with a croaking voice, in the attic the entrepreneur continued to slave upon his daring enterprise. The Business Man passed each and every one in turn and became increasingly resentful of his own labour. And every time he passed and saw the toil of others, he’d stop, recoil and repeat to himself..... “more, quicker, easier. Surely a way is there. There surely is a way.”

And there was.

It was a scheme so simply delicious, so purely malicious that when it came to the Business Man one day he danced and he pranced in excitement. “I have done it!” he cried. “Clever I! Clever me! Clever I!.....” It was to become known as the first Corporate Theft.

Now on the outskirts of the bustling town was a place where the Business Man had once worked and in this place, guarded by five high walls and nothing more, the town’s money was stored. What could be more convenient for my scheme, thought the man as his nose twitched with anticipation, and indeed one had to admit the extraordinary convenience of its convenience. It was to be on one of the darker moonless nights that the Business Man finally climbed one of the walls (for being of thin and skinny frame he could do as such), opened the door of the compound and took one gold coin from the glinting mountain. “I’m poor and it’s simply to borrow - look at their wealth, it’ll cause them no sorrow,” he murmured.

And placing the coin into a small silk pouch tied round his neck so that his hands could be free to climb, he returned to his abode. On the second night the Business Man could not resist or desist from returning to the place where money was to be had with such ease. “I’m poor and it’s simply to borrow - look at their wealth, it’ll cause them no sorrow” he said as he lovingly dropped two gold coins into his pouch. The third night saw a similar occurrence take place except that the coins in his pouch numbered four. “I’m poor and it’s simply to borrow.....” On the fourth night the number had reached eight, on the fifth it was sixteen. And so for nine days - or more accurately for nine nights - the amount of coins that were permanently “borrowed” continued to double. It was to be on the tenth night that the problem occurred.

That night the Business Man, through his own calculations and his own manipulations, was planning to fill his silk pouch with in excess of a thousand coins. No sooner had he begun to do so, however, than the silk pouch began to stretch and sag under the enormous weight. Yet the Business Man felt nothing in his haste for more. By six hundred, the silk pouch had drooped to the level of his ribs, by seven hundred it had elongated to such an extent that it banged against the buckle of his belt. Still the Business Man felt nothing. It was around the eight hundred mark that the pouch reached its terminal point of elasticity and the string around his collar began to slowly tighten. By nine hundred coins of gold, the Business Man, feeling a sharp tug at his collar, realised that he might have a problem. The piece of cloth had so tightened around his neck, that he whitened and choked and spluttered and stuttered and wrangled and mangled and strangled. In short, he found it difficult to breathe.

It was to be the other kind of Fortune that night that saved the writhing Business Man. Passing through the neighbourhood at that critical time was a Wise Man - as Wise Men tend to do at critical times - and hearing the contorted pleas from the compound he decided that he may as well investigate.

“Well, well, well. What’s happened here, hey?” he announced as he came upon the scene. The Business Man, who by this time was twisting on the ground attempting to breathe, could only gesture at the stretched silk pouch clogged full of gold coins that choked at his neck.

“HMMMMMM. You seem to have got yourself in a bit of a knot, old son, wouldn’t you say?”

The Business Man nodded frantically and did not answer. The Wise Man however had quickly understood the matter. At length, he continued:

“You know what? After some contemplation I have decided to help you - I being such a generous man, no less. But firstly...”

Again the Business Man frantically nodded not caring for the conditions that he knew followed a Wise and Generous Man’s help in any parable.

“Firstly,” continued the Wise and Generous Man calmly and unperturbed “henceforth if you make too little money you will become poor and starve but if you make too much it will become a far greater burden that strangles away your Life - as you have no doubt already observed.” He paused delighted at his own analogy. “Secondly, from this day forth you shall put on this piece of ‘cloth’ each and every morning... to your own discomfort... as a reminder that it is only through hard work and integrity, no less, that one will succeed in Business. Now, have I forgotten anything else?”

By this time the poor Business Man was so close to suffocating that his sagging skin turned purple. The Wise and Generous Man paced up and down for a few more minutes, scratching his hair, twisting his beard, then at last muttered: “No, I think that must be it.” He reached into his pocket, pulled out a small knife - such as Wise and Generous Men tend to have - and cut the bottom of the silk cloth in a triangular shape. The Business Man gasped in relief as the wretched coins spilled out - or rather the relieved coins spilled out and having done so the wretched Business Man gasped. And then the Wise and Generous Man walked away, head held high with importance, almost slipping on a coin.

And so it came to be that the Business Man from that time on, no matter how inappropriate the occasion or the clime: from the high seas to the lowlands, from the Polar regions to the deserts, was made to wear a Tie. However, as the ages withered and dried, it was all but forgotten what that bizarre piece of cloth was meant to represent.

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