

ICE Girls:

*What Managers Can Learn from
The Story of the Little Match Girl
by One Who Was There*

By Dan McLaughlin

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, PowerPoint demonstrations, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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But who would want to work on a street corner? More precisely, who would want to work on a street corner who was not a prostitute? Who would want to sell matches on the street corner? I felt the answer tugging at my brain. I was so close. Who would want to go out and sell on the street? Who would want to go out? Go out? The people who were already there! Yes that it! The poor. The homeless. They are ALREADY out on the street; it is their natural habitat! What if we used people, poor people as as as as the on-street sales people? And each

interaction would be up close and personal, making them PERSONAL on-street sales people. Hell, we could pay them next to nothing (which would be a big step up for them), there would be no fixed cost of a store and and and, We Would Be Empowering Them And Giving Them A Sense Of Self Respect That Comes From Gainful Employment.

Yes, that was it! Use poor people! Give them the tools to help themselves! Publicity like that you cannot buy!

Well you can, actually, but it costs a lot.

But it's much better when you can get it for free.

And people (meaning people with money) would feel good about using our product and even be willing to pay a bit more because it was an Easy Way To Help The Less Fortunate While Saving A Penny Or So For Me.

And Actually Provide Me With Something I Can Use.

With Very Little Extra Effort on My Part Because I am Already Out on The Street Anyways So I Do Not Have To Get My Butt Out of The Comfy Chair Or Sofa.

It's sorta like the *piken speideren* selling their *piken speideren koke* around the office every year only without the *piken speideren*. Or *koke*.

(Oh, do I have to mention that *piken speideren* is girl scouts and *piken speideren koke* is Girl Scout cookies? I didn't think so.)

And yes, by doing good for our company, we would be would be Helping Society And Our Nation.

Huh, "consultant" or "trainee"? Consultant sounds classy. Trainee sounds like some kid who will get your order wrong.

Go with “consultant.”

Personal on-street sales consultant.

Seldom does marketing offer such rewards.

But when it does, the high is like no other.

I quickly assembled my team and pitched them the idea. Some liked it. Some did not.

The first comment came from the market analysis people.

“So you want to utilize “The Urban Dregs.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Market Segment 001. The Urban Dregs. A highly differentiated and stable market segment characterized by low income, housing, social and spatial mobility. Located primarily in dense urban cores, Urban Dregs are concentrated in business districts and in city parks, libraries, bridges and transit stations and benches. Urban dreggers tend to be well represented in all age groups.”

God I hated listening to the marketing number people, but they always had to have their say so it was easiest to just let them have their time to talk.

“They tend to be single or single parent families but also can form fairly stable non-traditional family arrangements. As the name ‘Dreggers’ implies, Dreggers subsist on very low, variable income streams (less than 20 *kronen* a month). Their interests include observing police patrol activity, chess, monologues and reading.

Oh my god, they had multiplied and now there were two of them. How had that happened?

“For exercise they push heavily laden shopping carts or drag trash bags, and hop into dumpsters. They enjoy discussions, often loud, with real and imaginary friends. Politically they can be characterized as ‘incoherent but occasionally correct.’ They spend little on vacations. Discretionary income is spent sporadically on recreational substances of a non-traditional market nature or cat food. We usually don’t study them much.”

“Why not?” I said.

“Well, once they have a fire lit in a trash can or something they tend to keep it going by just adding more fuel.”

“So they don’t consume a lot of matches?”

“Yes, that is correct. They can go months without lighting a new one.”

Shudders ran through the room. It was time to regain the focus here.

“OK, yeah so the “Urban Dregs” are not our usual focus, but remember people we’re not planning to sell to them but use them to sell something. So people, what is there in this profile we can use?”

That clarified, the discussion continued.

“Well spatially they are perfect. They are where we want to sell and less able to leave.”

“And with income levels this low we can easily double it and look good with little or no effect on our bottom line.”

“ And there are sure a lot of them.”

“Which will also keep whatever we pay them depressed.”

“Which also means we can pretty much pick and choose among them.”

“Yes, Denmark’s Best and Brightest.”

That brought a round of chuckles.

“OK people let’s settle down. Actually that’s a good point, How DO we go about selecting a particular Urban Dreg to use?”

“We could do a contest.”

“Like, ‘Who is the Dreggiest Dane?’”

“No, ‘Who WAS the Dreggiest Dane!’”

“Like a personal makeover show dealing with class issues. In each community in Denmark we select 10 families and teach them middle class, grooming, manners and vocabulary.”

“Then give them a series of tests.”

“Family that does the worst each week cast back into the urban dregland.”

“See ya!”

“Wouldn’t wanna be ya!”

“Last family standing is the lucky winner and gets the local rights to sell matches on the street.”

“And we call it...”

“*Bourgeoisie* Bingo.”

“*Petit bourgeoisie* party.”

“Middle class a go go.”

“Mean Street to Easy Street.”

“And what if we like add a talent portion!”

“You know,” this came from Alan our resident academic who was always quoting Hegel and dialectics, “This always glorifying the pathetic poor is getting rather tiresome. I am getting so sick that every time there is some kinda competition, it seems that each contestant has overcome more tragedy and made more sacrifices than the last. Over came cancer. Gave kidneys to strangers. Gave kidneys to strangers babies. Oh and the always beloved yet inspirational grandparents who have just died. The grandparent who told them told them to never give up. No matter the lack of talent. Always follow your dream. No matter how implausible. And then died. Leaving the grandchild with nothing. No talent. No training. Nothing but a dream.

“And then they SING as their ‘talent.’ They sing about their ‘dream’ as their talent. Sing about hopes and dreams that have to come true. Because it is their hope and dream. So it HAS to come true. And then at the end of the song their voice goes up and down about 3 octaves as they dramatically raise their arm up. And then they make a fist, which they then clutch to their chest. If they are male, then they make a punching gesture as they go to one knee. As the audience goes nuts, obediently”

“And then they cry. And thank God. And then wish that those who were dead could have been there, because this song was for them. And then they cry AGAIN because they have worked SO HARD. And they are so thankful (to God, mostly) they have worked SO HARD. So they cry, again.”

“I say,” he continued