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Dubya Moved My Cheese

or Chicken Soup for the Upper Class Twit's Soul

Kevin Carson

February 10, 2005

A wide variety of left-leaning blogs and websites have already pointed to Bush's lame attempt at empathy with someone who actually works for a living:

In Omaha on Friday, a divorced single mother named Mary Mornin tells the president, "I have one child, Robbie, who is mentally challenged, and I have two daughters."

"Fantastic," the president exclaims, and he tells her she has "the hardest job in America, being a single mom."

Later, the 57-year old Mornin tells Bush that she works three jobs, which the president deems "uniquely American" and "fantastic." He asks her if she gets any sleep.

Ha. Ha. And they say this is a jobless recovery. What really caught my attention, though, was this:

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But some of the country's most celebrated hawkers marvel at Bush's gift for selling. They rave about how he connects and inspires. With exclamation points!

"You can tell he has God within him!" says Zig Ziglar, the sales guru and motivational speaker, in a phone interview from Montgomery, Ala., where he is hosting a seminar. "The president walks with his shoulders erect!" lauds Tom Hopkins, a professional trainer and author of "How to Master the Art of Selling" and "Selling for Dummies." "He makes great eye contact! He is buoyant! He walks at a fast pace! You can tell he's a great listener!" These are all the marks of successful salespeople, Hopkins says. Great salespeople like Tom Hopkins, he keeps telling us. "I have had so much success in real estate! I've set so many sales records!"

So Bush is popular among the Barnum-wannabes of the management theory and motivational speaking racket (deliciously parodied by *National Lampoon* in the person of Sphinx Sphincter, author of the motivational classic *Visualize, Actualize, Grasp and Claw*). Who woulda guessed?

I always figured Bush's speeches were written by Tony Robbins. He reminds me of too many of the Young Republicans (complete with identical uniforms of blue blazers, khakis and topsiders) I met in college, who kept a copy of Robert J. Ringer in the glove box and couldn't refrain from using the word "leader" in every sentence.

For an irreverent take on the motivational/management genre, I strongly recommend "Molotov Cocktail For Tom Lagana's Soul":

Snatching hypocritical victory from the jaws of defeat, this electrical engineer turned mind engi-

neer is now complicit with his old “redundancy eliminators.” He now helps “organizations who want to get the most out of people;” and those people would, of course, be the Prozac-plied personnel now doing twice the work they would have at the same position twenty years ago and are too sedated to feel the boss’s whip cracking across their backs. “[Lagana] put a smile on my face and it stayed there even after I went back to work,” gushes one successfully sheered sheep, her organization now getting the most out of her. “I already feel less stress as I apply some of the techniques,” bleated another after scampering from a Lagana seminar payed for by the Firm.

Lagana has repeatedly asked that this “hateful” review be taken down, so you know it must have struck home.

For a more recent and dumbed-down version of the same thing, nothing beats Thomas Frank’s scathing commentary on Spencer Johnson’s wretched *Who Moved My Cheese?* That “asinine” work of “breathtaking obscenity,” as Frank describes it in *One Market Under God*, is designed to “openly advance a scheme for gulling, silencing, and firing workers who are critical of management...” Not only is the mover of the cheese never identified, Frank points out:

...[E]ven to wonder about the logic of the cheese’s movements or to ask the title question Who Moved My Cheese? is to commit workplace error of such magnitude that management can rightly “let” workers who are given to such thoughts “go.” So while one of the “littlepeople” remains stubbornly at the place where he last sighted the cheese, the other sets off through the maze again, running the rat race, but finding along the

way that job insecurity is good for his soul and composing a number of pithy observations about adapting to “change”...

See, “change” is good. It doesn’t matter that it’s the kind of change that’s shoved down our throats by people totally unaccountable to us. The book, in fact, was created as a management tool for dealing with “change resisters.” And naturally, it’s a big favorite of HR departments everywhere. Those managers who applied the lessons of the book in their thankless job of imposing “change” found, to their delight, that it “worked wonders.”

Those who had been fired learned to relish their situation (“there was New Cheese out there just waiting to be found!”) and those were permitted to stay stopped “complaining” and bowed to management’s new scheme.

I wonder if that woman with three jobs relishes her situation? At the close of his review, Frank raises the most subversive question of all:

While most of us must “adapt to change,” others get to make change; while most of us are expected to smilingly internalize management theory, to learn our place in the world from vapid fairy tales, others buy the insulting stuff in bulk in order to cram it down the throats of thousands who have the misfortune to work in the bigperson’s insurance agency or box factory.

Will the time ever come, Americans might well ask, when **we** get to move **management’s** cheese? When the people, “little” though they might be, acquaint society’s erstwhile cheesemasters with this “inevitable” fact: That there is no

social theory on earth short of the divine right of kings that can justify a five-hundred-fold gap between management and labor; that can explain away the concentration of a decade of gain in the bank accounts of a tiny minority.