

INSURANCE, ASSURANCE

A corporation is an ingenious device for obtaining individual profit without individual responsibility. Ambrose Bierce

Insurance is an ingenious modern game of chance in which the player is permitted to enjoy the comfortable conviction that he is beating the man who keeps the table. Ambrose Bierce

Life is the risk we cannot refuse. Mason Cooley

I am a businessman and as such I have something to sell and a tale to tell. What I put in the market is 'protection'. Do not get the wrong idea and confuse me with notorious criminals who use coercion to provide protection by assuring their victims that for a specified amount of money they would be left alone by the so called protection sellers. The protection I offer is free of any threats and comes with assured guarantees.

It appears that I am in the Insurance Business. That is partly true. Let me explain. I used to be an actuary in the employ of a large Insurance Company. I also sold policies on the side. This was not done to augment my income. I am very wealthy, having inherited a large fortune. I did not need to be employed or in business. If the truth be told, I became an actuary in response to a challenge from a close friend. He was convinced that I would have amounted to nothing, had I not been born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I was determined to prove him wrong by entering the business world and by a dint of hard work and intelligence, succeed. I did not foresee the consequences of my efforts.

In any case, I was doing quite well in the company. Between my actuarial and sales endeavors, I was being primed for a senior executive position. However, I started to have second thoughts. I knew I could handle any position in the company with complete capability and probably end up as Chief Executive Officer. I just felt that it was not enough of a challenge. Since I did not need the money I wondered what else I could do that would test my mettle. A totally unexpected turn of events occurred.

I was sitting in my office pondering what I should do when my secretary informed me that a rather strange individual had come in asking for me. She seemed to be quite apprehensive about this person and suggested that our security personnel be informed. I usually did not see people without appointments. They normally wanted something that I either could not or would not provide, or had a proposition that was of no use whatsoever.

On this occasion, for reasons that I still cannot fathom, I broke my rule and told my secretary to usher him into my office and that if something untoward happened I would push our panic button. As it turned out, no such need

occurred. He was indeed strange in appearance. His apparel was unlike anything I had ever seen but it wasn't that which really hit me. His eyes were most remarkable. They seemed to be a mixture of black and red and pierced right through me. I could not make out his ethnic origin either by his appearance or his speech.

Without being invited he sat down and started with the following remark. "My name; who I am; what I am; where I'm from or anything else that may be construed as personal is of no importance and will not be made available. The less you know about me, the less you can inform others about me. I am sure you all will think that I am a strange personage, which is true from your perspective."

I was nonplussed. "You have some daring. What makes you think that you can waltz in here and lay all sorts of conditions prior to telling me why you are here?"

What passed for a smile crossed his face. "I will inform you about why I am here shortly. First, I know everything there is to know about you. You came into a great deal of money. You were bored and wanted to see if you could be a success at something without using your assets or influence. You did. I am impressed with your integrity, acumen and abilities. It is because of these attributes and more importantly because of your record and noted expertise in the Insurance Business that I am here."

"I am flattered," I replied. "However unless you tell me something of import and with brevity, I will unceremoniously ask you to leave."

"Before I inform you of my intentions, permit me some latitude. As mentioned, I know that your knowledge of insurance is second to none. Please correct any errors I might convey about that enterprise. Ostensibly, insurance is about offering protection to those who think they need it. We both know that is not correct. Insurance Companies offer compensation for damages accrued by their clients under specific circumstances. Profit being the name of the game in any business, compensation is made as small as possible. This means that the client's costs are often not adequately covered. Pity!

What I propose is that you form your own company and offer what the insurance industry pays lip service to, and that is complete protection."

"What do you mean," I asked somewhat sarcastically. "There is no such thing as complete protection."

"Yes, there is and I can proffer it." He replied.

"I do not see how." I rejoined.

"Let me explain. The critical part of Insurance is 'Risk Analysis'. As an actuary, that was your principal preoccupation. I agree that under normal circumstances,

there is a risk associated with any human activity or outside factor that humans have to face. What if I told you that I have the means to reduce all such risks to zero? This implies that an individual existing under such an umbrella would be perfectly safe throughout his or her normal life span. What if you could sell such an 'Assurance'?"

"What you are suggesting is impossible. Assuming that there is an element of veracity in your assertion, what would you have me do? Before you answer I would like you to demonstrate that you have such a talent."

I must admit that I was intrigued by the possibility. If I could sell an 'Assurance Policy' that would provide absolute safety, the Insurance Companies would be put out of business, a prospect I relished.

"Your office is three stories above the street. I am sure that you are familiar with most of the merchants and street people in this vicinity. Please pick one."

I picked one of my favorites, a blind peanut vendor.

"I have a confederate who will accompany him across the street and leave him isolated in the middle of heavy traffic. Under normal circumstances, there is no way he can avoid being hit by an oncoming auto. Watch what happens!"

My blind friend made his way across the street despite the heavy traffic. He seemed to know how to manoeuvre through the traffic effortlessly. I asked the stranger to wait. Whereupon I went down to the street and asked my blind friend if he was aware of his escapade. He professed to knowing nothing except that someone on the other side of the street had asked for a bag of peanuts, which he provided. Upon returning to my office I decided to listen further to the stranger's proposal.

"First what would you have me do?"

"I suggest that you take the next few weeks off to acclimatize to your new situation. During that time you will create your own company, which will be in the business of vending Assurance Policies. I will provide your initial clients. These will be personages who perpetually face high risks and thus cannot get regular insurance at affordable premiums. You will be providing them with a Life Assurance Policy at a reasonable cost to them."

"Does this cover all risks?" I asked. "What if they gamble on business ventures or at casinos or face exposure to harmful agents?"

"The risk would still be zero. However, while they may not be successful as a gambler or business man, they would not lose any money. At worst they would come out even. They would not be affected by any micro-organisms, or tainted

intakes into their digestive tracks, lungs or blood. Their demise would come about due to natural aging. Finally, I suppose you are wondering what I would get out of this since I would be providing the means to zero risk. Let us just say that my curiosity is involved. I do not want or need any reimbursement.”

I was so taken by his weird proposal that I immediately agreed. I went one step further. I gave abrupt notice to my employer and embarked upon a new groundbreaking career.

Suffice to say that my enterprise was an instantaneous success. I had put together an expert marketing team who had no difficulty in convincing my former clientele and many new clients to buy the protection we were offering.

This was a number of years ago. Unfortunately, there were two things I had not considered. The first had to do with the psychology of living a totally risk free life. We humans, like many other animals, are just not programmed for such an existence. The number of attempted but failed suicides amongst my consumers was rather high. Their attempts did not succeed because the zero risk involved invalidated any method they tried. Their mental stability became questionable as many required profound psychiatric care. I was so focused on my Assurance Business I had no inkling of those destructive feelings. I even neglected to buy the Assurance Policy I was selling. As I lie in my hospital bed after a severe accident, I wonder about it. You see, my risk was far from zero. As a result, my future as a healthy male is quite tentative.

EPILOGUE:

The stranger who was responsible for the Assurance Policy Industry has disappeared. His powers were such that he may have been an alien from another world. Perhaps he was someone who simply had extraordinary powers. I do not know and I am at a loss as to whether his curiosity was ever satisfied. I know that mine was not.

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September 19, 2008
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