

How to Succeed at Trust Falls Without Really Trying
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FADE IN ON:

EXT. FOREST PATH - DAY

A herd of TWENTY-SOMETHINGS in khakis tramp through leaves. Birds twitter merrily their way.

Trailing the group: skinny KYLE. His torn jeans have seen better days.

The only thing Kyle and the others have in common: new Dayglo Purple tees. The logos on the pockets read "ENN".

A cobwebbed VINE grazes his cheek. He yelps, jumps away.

Well-polished BRAD stops Kyle's fall. A pack-mule loaded down with camp gear, a duffle bag hangs off Brad's muscled back.

BRAD

Whoa, dude. You scared of spiders? For me, the Series 66 was worse!

KYLE

Screw spiders. That was poison ivy. Who wants acne *and* a rash?

Kyle cranes his neck towards the crowd.

KYLE

Where's Aaron taking us this time?

BRAD

Who cares? This is an adventure.

KYLE

HR "team building", my ass. This park looks like Modor. The least Aaron could've done is let us bring our phones and play some games.

BRAD

If you gotta be a geek, Kyle, do it right. Pretend it's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Paid for on the corporate dime!

Kyle pushes away. SPLASH. Sinks two inches deep in mud.

KYLE

Correction. Make that Degobah. I'm guessing Aaron didn't wanna lay us off. Instead he's leading us here to drown.

On cue, an over-confident voice splits the air:

AARON (O.S.)

Here's where the challenge gets extra fun!

KYLE

(muttering)

Good. 'Cause it was sheer Hell before.

BRAD

Shhh. Listen to our Fearless Leader.

KYLE

I listen to that yahoo every day.

BRAD

As you should. Aaron built a million dollar business with his bare hands!

KYLE

Inherited from his Dad, you mean. What's next on this dumb agenda: Trust Falls?

BRAD

If we're lucky, once we reach the top.

The herd of campers screeches to a halt. They gather in a circle. AARON (40s), takes center stage:

An American Psycho clone, Aaron bursts with energy and charm. Whether it's fueled by cocaine or ego, he's got the CEO mannerisms down.

Teeth flashing like bleached pearls, Aaron points:

AARON

See where the path splits, over there?

The group nods, obedient sheep they are.

AARON

Accounting squad: you split off to the left. Us investment analysts'll commandeer the right.

Bespectacled nerd RANDY BLUMENTHAL (20s) whips out a map.

RANDY

I like the right side. According to this, it's smoother terrain.

Aaron's merry face contorts into a snarl.

AARON

Leadership isn't about getting what you like. It's taking what scraps Life throws at you - and having balls enough to turn it into Gold!

The accounting clique steps back en-mass, leaving Randy exposed to Aaron's vicious glare.

AARON

Mr. Blumenthal - do you get my drift?

RANDY

Yes, Sir. Completely. Of course.

AARON

Then don't stand around like a limp biscuit. Grow some hair. Like a wolf, not a calculating mouse!

Randy jumps to attention. Saluting, he skitters to the left. His accounting pals follow close behind.

Leaving Kyle, Brad and female camper JENN (20s) alone. Aaron turns to what's left of his team.

AARON

Finally - the deadwood's sawed off. Ready to forge ahead and win this, boys?

JENN

Respectfully, Sir, that's "team."

KYLE

And we prefer the title "men". Not "boys."

Jenn and Kyle eye each other. Aaron grunts - turns away.

AARON

Whatever gender or age is fine with me. Get your corporate butts in gear. Move.

LATER

Tree shadows have shifted. Time's gone by.

Naturally, Aaron leads. He drapes his arm chummily across Brad's shoulder. A winded Jennifer and Kyle drag behind.

AARON

Brad, I've got a minor dilemma at the office. Perhaps you can help me out?

BRAD

Me, Sir? I'm flattered. How?

AARON

As you know, performance evaluations are next week. There's an opening for SVP.

BRAD

You need personnel recommendations?

Brad glances back toward Kyle - smiles.

AARON

No, I've got a particular candidate in mind. You, Brad. You're the guy.

BRAD

(gulps)

But isn't CAM certification required? I came on board two months ago. I haven't even tried all the lunch hotspots yet!

AARON

Don't be negative, my Man! There's no "Can't" when it comes to CAMS. ENN'll sponsor you for a class. Give it six months, you'll take the test. Call me a sooth sayer, but I see promotion in your future, lad!

BRAD

Sir, may I speak frankly?

AARON

With me? Each and every time!

BRAD

If I were you, I'd pick Kyle. He's got experience and mad skillz. Enough to take the test right now.

AARON

Kyle Davis? That loser? You're the one I've got my eye on, boy.

Aaron leans closer to his chosen protege.

AARON

Not to mention, I owe your dad some favors. We had a few college... scrapes in our time.

BRAD

Sir, I just don't think it's fair.

Several feet back, Kyle and Jennifer trudge along. The path gets stickier every step they take.

JENN

You've been at ENN forever.

KYLE

Three years. Not forever - yet.

JENN

Level with me, Kyle. You think a girl like me can spread career wings in this firm?

KYLE

Maybe. If you work hard.

JENN

And? Gimme insider tips. I need every competitive edge I get!

KYLE

It's not rocket science. ENN's a meritocracy. They recognize folks who pay their dues.

JENN

Then why aren't you a VP yet?

Kyle stutters. She's got him there.

KYLE

Aaron needs to see more from me, I guess?

Up front: Brad glances back at his friends. Thanks to CEO Aaron's cocaine strides, the two have fallen behind.

BRAD

Maybe we should wait for them to catch up?

AARON

Nonsense! Time waits for no man!

BRAD

And woman.

AARON

Diversity, rainbow and unicorns. Sure. But what's important is, we've had our talk. We understand each other as MEN - don't we, Brad?

Aaron stops in his tracks. Clutching Brad's shoulders, the CEO stares deep into the boy's eyes.

AARON

Tomorrow, we'll sign you up for the pre-test, right?

BRAD

Sure. And Kyle, too?

AARON

ENN's not in the business of doling out "free ponies." If David wants to compete, let him pay for the test himself!

BRAD

The one with a \$10K entry fee?

AARON

Yep. Hope his old man's saved!

Dark laughter propels Aaron along the forest path. Brad stops, watches him go - dismayed.

BRAD

(whispers)

That's "Davis". And his dad died when he was ten. Kyle's worked real hard. He deserves this more than me.

Suddenly: Jennifer and Kyle catch up - foot soldiers at Brad's side.

KYLE

Hey, my ears were burning. You guys chatting about me?

BRAD

Er, kinda.

KYLE

Good stuff, I hope?

Jennifer squints at Brad's face, sees the doubt.

JENN

Did Aaron mention me?

BRAD

Yeah. He said Diversity's... nice.

At the top of the path's incline, Aaron points:

AARON

And voila. Here we are!

The three trot up to see what he means.

TOP OF THE HILL

At this vantage point, there's tons to see. Like "hindsight", this ravine's 20/20.

20 feet down to a murky pond. The cliff fringed by trees.

Twenty feet across the chasm: a SWAMP.

In the middle of that, skinny arms wave an SOS.

Though barely more than a pasty blur, they belong RALPH - stuck waist deep in SLUDGE.

The rest of the accounting team gather around their trapped friend and pull.

Ralph's ENN shirt RIPS off. Ralph's mired, doesn't budge.

AARON

God damn!

JENN

Ralph's drowning. This is horrible!

AARON

That shirt was cotton, double stitched! ENN's no charity. Blumenthal's gonna have to pay \$70 to have that replaced.

KYLE

You're kidding, right?

AARON

Not at all. One-offs ain't cheap these days.

Poor Ralph tries to breast stroke to the shore. Swallows mud, can't get far.

AARON

Can't that goof think outside the box?

JENN

We have to save him!

AARON

And let him dodge his own mistakes?

KYLE

But Ralph wanted to take the right path.
Did you know there was swamp to the left?

AARON

Sure. Ralph had the map; he did, too.
Which makes this even more pathetic. He
knew the terrain - but didn't adapt and
learn.

Aaron rolls his eyes. Whips out his phone. And laughs.

AARON

Kids, here's the essential lesson in
leadership. Hardball negotiation 101: an
opponent's vulnerabilities can and should
be exploited to your advantage. No mercy
at all allowed.

With those words, Aaron dials.

Across the ravine: An accountant lets go of Ralph, grabs
his phone.

BRAD

You let *Kreiner* keep his cell?

AARON

I had to make one exception. I knew this
would happen with those nuts in charge.

(into the phone)

Hey K! Yeah, I see you guys. Quite a
view. I guess Ralph hasn't learned to
look before he leaps? I got a
proposition.

Aaron winks at Kyle, Jenn and Brad. They frown.

AARON

(still into the phone)

It just so happens good leaders are
prepared. Thus, I hid a rope nearby. If
everyone on your team agrees to work
weekends for the rest of the month - no
overtime - I'll tell you exactly where it
can be found.

Across the gully: KREINER bounces around like a pissed-
off bee. Though it's hard to tell from here, he seems
ungrateful - and alarmed.

Ralph flails his arms. Kreiner flips the bird at Aaron.

Who reddens, snarls into his phone.

AARON

Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps,
then! Don't expect me to drag your sad,
dead weight along!

CLICK. Aaron hangs up. Turns to his team - eerily calm:

AARON

That's it. Let's move along.

KYLE

What about Ralph?

AARON

Kreiner turned me down. Let 'em learn.
Brad - wanna reboot that stroll?

Brad hesitates.

BRAD

After that? Call me a slacker, but no
thanks.

AARON

Man up. ENN needs leaders. No wusses
allowed.

The CEO takes a commandeering step. The ground CRUMBLES.

A screaming Aaron tumbles down the ravine. His cell stays
behind, drops to the ground....

MOMENTS LATER

Jenn and Kyle peek over the cliff. Twenty feet down,
Aaron wallows in mud, up to his neck.

Brad rummages in his duffle bag. Locates GLOVES. And
something else.

AARON

What are you waiting for? Help!

Brad shuffles to the edge. Aaron struggles in mud. GLUB.

BRAD

Sir? Good news. I packed a rope.

He holds up a coil. Aaron beams. Score!

AARON

Good man! Now, throw one end down!

Brad hesitates. Aaron's recent words echo in his mind.

AARON (V.O.)

Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps,
then! Don't expect me to drag your sad,
dead weight along!

BRAD

(to Aaron)

If I help you - what do I get?

Aaron stops treading mud, sinks in shock:

AARON

Excuse me? Did I hear that right?

BRAD

Hardball Negotiation 101: No mercy at all
allowed.

KYLE

(hisses)

Brad, that's our CEO!

BRAD

Then it's high time he earned respect!

Aaron struggles. Brad lowers the rope, waves it just out
of reach, in his face. Toggles Aaron's cell to "record".

BRAD

Here's the deal. You agree to sponsor
Kyle for the CAMS certification and
promote him to SVP.

AARON

This is blackmail!

BRAD

No - tit for tat: a fair deal. I'm not
the one who made you step off the cliff.
You gotta pay for your own mistakes.

JENN

We're gonna get in trouble!

BRAD

This trip is to demonstrate leadership
skills, right? Then it's time to play to
business strengths. Aaron - you're also
gonna promote Jennifer to Kyle's old job?

Aaron puffs up with rage. Brad smiles into his boss's mud-
clogged eyes.

BRAD
And don't you owe my dad a favor?

AARON
(sighs)
Okay. You win. This time.

BRAD
CEO's honor - hope to die?

AARON
Just throw the damned thing already!

BRAD
If you insist! 3, 2, 1... and go!

Brad tosses the rope. Across to Ralph and pals!

AARON
What about me?

Brad grins and straps on his gloves. He trots over to a POISON IVY PATCH and plucks a vine.

BRAD
Here ya go, Sir - grab on!

Jennifer and Kyle shoot Brad a look: are you sure?

BRAD
(shrugs)
Aaron knew the terrain. It's best he learn from his mistakes.

Jen and Kyle nod. Lesson learned. Brad pulls. Aaron yowls.

AARON (O.S.)
What the hell? That burns!

FINAL FADEOUT: