

T H E
F O R T L I F E

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PRESSURE
& TRUTH

Stress is the curtain. Character is the show.



Unfamiliar
Environments
Reveal Character

Selling
Under Pressure
Exposes Process

Systems Under
Stress Tell the
Truth

Mission
Under
Pressure

Performance
Under
Load

The
FORT
Life



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PRESSURE & TRUTH

Stress is the curtain.
Character is the show.

Timeline: 1998-1999

Location: Hollywood, South Florida

As I sit and share the following story with you, a smile creeps on my face as I fondly remember the morning rides from what is now Midtown Miami to my confidant's house in Carol City, where I would pick him up and commute to work.



DMX was in full effect at the time, and his barks and energetic flows were all the cups of Joe I needed to lock in and perform on my own stage...The classroom!

Due to previous call center management experience gained in between my Costa Rican escapades, I was able to land an interview at a robust call center where roughly 300 dedicated agents worked multiple campaigns for large institutions, primarily from the energy and communication sectors from all over the country.

Humanly written by:
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CVO & Founder
FORT International

The company had hit a slump and was struggling to meet sales targets with the current workforce. Since the entire floor had been trained by one individual, the corporation made the swift decision to change the familiar and bring in someone more adequate to interact with their target sales agents, basically anyone who could make people spend money via the telephone.

Enter the fold, yours truly.

Young, ambitious, and with just enough leadership, but also hubris, to believe I could pull this off.

THE INTERVIEW

I had been working since I was 14 years old, so I had interview experience. However, this one was different.

After the initial screening, Jeff, the Director of Operations, asked me to come back and sit in one of the training rooms, as there was a heavy hitter from New York presenting a new campaign the company was onboarding.

I promptly arrived at 8:30 a.m. to take in the two-day training, which began at 9 a.m. and ended at 5 p.m.

Two days of nonstop information the reps were supposed to absorb and then offer through cold calling on the floor.

The fast talking gentleman was the ultimate teacher. Sharp, energetic, knowledgeable, and clean from head to toe. His confidence, paired with his New York City background, left a lifetime impression on me.



There were two training sessions per week. Monday and Tuesday, then another one Wednesday and Thursday.

At the end of the first session, he approached me and asked what I thought about the material, the offerings, and whether the product could be sold. I gave him nothing but positive feedback, and it was at that very moment he asked a question which eventually changed the trajectory of my life.

Can you teach it?

I didn't hesitate. My answer was a firm "of course," and then, with a clever smile, he proceeded to hand me a binder the size of a textbook and said,

"Great... You are teaching it tomorrow."

That confidence I mentioned became an "Oh, this is real" moment, and I jumped in my Civic up the concrete snake of I-95 and studied that binder all night like my life depended on it.

The next morning, I had roughly 35 individuals of all ages, sizes, and backgrounds sitting in a classroom. Thinking back, everyone there was just as nervous as I was, as they were competing for jobs so they could feed their families.

Amongst the students was my New York teacher, who quickly stood up at 9 a.m. sharp and introduced me to the class. With sweaty hands, I honed in on positive energy and thought to myself, if I can be excited about this and make others excited about this program, the job is mine. The rest is noise.

The first day came to an end. I got some tips from my overnight mentor, went back to the drawing board, made adjustments, and came back as if I was from New York the next day.

I killed it.

At the end of the session, he looked at Jeff, gave me his card, and said, **“You got this. Give me a call if you are interested in the next level.”**

And just like that, the job was mine.

THE NEGOTIATION

Being 20 or 21 years old is a beautiful opportunity for experience to take advantage of youth. But mind you, already being a father of two, a college dropout, and a dreamer all in one had given me just enough street smarts to know that the offer in front of me was nowhere near what they were paying the 50-year-old trainer with 20 years of experience I had just replaced.

So I countered.

“Jeff, I’ll make you a deal. If all the agents I train and hire in the next 90 days perform better statistically than the previous hires, you bump my salary by \$10,000.”

He smiled with pride, agreed, and shook my hand. A gentleman’s agreement and a lesson learned...

I will circle back to this.

THE PRESSURE

The first 90 days were full of excitement, responsibility, challenges, and discovery.

Here I was, a 21-year-old in charge of every person who walked through that door looking for employment. My decision on who could successfully be an asset to the company and, simultaneously, my bank account, determined who was hired and who was sent home after the first day.

I learned a lot about measured compassion there. Some people desperately needed to work, but they were simply not a good fit, and finding the words to relay this message became a skill necessary for my own financial and mental survival.

There were single moms, unemployed dads, and people from all walks of life just looking for an opportunity to make amends for previous life choices. Sometimes, although the shoe did not fit, I still hired them, and 99% of the time it backfired in the form of ingratitude and underperformance.

But every once in a while, one individual would grow to be a solid closer. This taught me patience and sharpened my instincts.

Fridays were a day to monitor. I would sit in the quality control room and listen to my trainees navigate, with both precision and accuracy, the questions regarding gas bills and cell phone packages offered through the multiple campaigns, which constantly changed.

Which meant I was constantly studying new binders. I enjoyed the responsibility and took my performance seriously. After all, I had \$10,000 waiting on me. Until one fateful Friday, a colleague around the same age barged into the QC room and shouted,

“WTF is happening in here and who are you?”

I had seen this individual before, but I wasn't familiar with his role.

My blood began to boil, but I kept my composure. I had experienced some bullying in high school, primarily due to my size, as I was a 12-year-old freshman. But now, at 21, loud and direct undeserved disrespect was simply not my cup of tea.

I stood up and, with controlled rage, proceeded to introduce myself. All I could hear in the back of my mind was DMX shouting... **“Get at me, dog.”**

He then followed suit and introduced himself as the owner of the company. He was the owner's son, and before he could say another word, I asked him to step outside so we could talk.

The agents in the QC room were dead silent. The tension was indeed palpable. Across the hall was an empty office. I politely but firmly requested we talk inside. He walked in, I followed, and with the testosterone of a 21-year-old angry at the world, influenced by 2Pac and every other angry rapper of the time, I slowly locked the door behind me, with just enough momentum so he could see.

I then proceeded to quietly but directly demand an apology for the lack of respect he had shown, not only to me, but to the employees in the room.



Image by Yanalva on Magnific

His posture changed. His face was confused, but ultimately, professionalism won. He quickly apologized and stormed out of the room.

We seldom crossed paths after that, as the training room was on the 6th floor, and only during management meetings were we on the same floor above together.

THE CHARACTER

Like a kid waiting for Christmas, I eagerly waited for the 90 day mark.

The Fridays spent in that QC room gave me insight into revenue analytics, and I could see firsthand that the reps I trained had much better overall numbers than my previous counterpart.

Payday came, but change didn't. My direct deposit was financially the same.

I walked over to Jeff's office and directly asked why my payment didn't reflect the extra \$10,000. He assured me it was an oversight and that it would be resolved by the next pay period. I paused and agreed, as long as the previous pay period was also accounted for.

Two weeks later, same outcome. However, I was prepared for the news, as I figured someone from the 7th floor was not greenlighting my increase.

The increase I had worked 60-hour weeks for was the Ghost of Christmas past.

Jeff knew my look as I walked into his office, and with a saddened face, he uttered, **"It was not approved. I'm sorry."**

I smiled, took my access badge from my belt, placed it on his desk, and without saying a word, turned around and headed to the elevator.

My reaction surprised him. He ran after me and asked what I was doing, all while holding my badge in his hand.

I simply replied, **"I'm going home. I can't work here anymore."**

He looked stunned, but immediately went into action mode. He told me to give him the weekend, to which I replied,

"You can let me know by the end of the day if they will honor your promise, and if so, please have a check for the balance of the two past pay periods ready for me on Monday. If not, you will have to teach the class yourself."

That same Friday, the call came. The check was ready on Monday, and my salary was adjusted. Jeff was a good man. Kind and honest. I remember him fondly because, with the years, I learned to appreciate that sometimes your intentions will be limited by your reach.

I don't know if he ever knew what happened in that office. It didn't matter to me. But what did matter was the forward dynamic I would've been subjected to had I stayed under their terms.

THE LESSONS

Taking this job was a beautiful experience.

I learned what decisiveness and compassion look like in that training room. I learned that no matter the circumstances, when an opportunity presents itself, you have two choices; Fold under pressure, or dig deep and believe in your God given abilities. He won't put you in rooms you are not meant to be.

Sometimes the true lesson is not in staying, but perhaps just experiencing something crucial for the next chapter in your life.

I learned to deal with disappointment. Regardless of the late nights I spent studying those heavy binders, my efforts to be the best at my job were initially unrecognized because someone's disrespect was politely but firmly rejected.

I learned to stand up for myself and not compromise my professional worth regardless of need. And trust me, I needed it at the time. But working for someone who could easily dismiss my efforts was a pill too hard to swallow, not because of pride, but because of principle.

Pressure is indeed the curtain. Character is the show!

And when the curtain opens, people will not only hear what you say. They will watch and follow how you move.

I've made many mistakes in my life. I still step in it every single day. But one thing years will teach you is to compromise less and less with those things which no longer align with the person you wish to become.

Pressure reveals character.

Pressure reveals composure.

Pressure reveals leadership.

Pressure is a requirement for growth.

Learn to embrace it! The rest will follow.



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TRAVEL Unfamiliar Environments Reveal Character

Travel has a quiet way of introducing us to ourselves.

It sounds simple at first. A new city. A different airport. A language we do not fully understand. A restaurant where the customs are unfamiliar. A hotel room that does not feel like home. A schedule that shifts without asking for our approval.

Then the pressure begins.

The flight is delayed. The driver is late. The room is not ready. The meeting location changes. The food is different. The pace of the city feels faster or slower than what we prefer. Suddenly, the trip is no longer just about where we are going. It becomes a mirror showing us how we respond when comfort is removed.

Unfamiliar environments reveal character because they take away the protection of routine. At home, we know where everything is. We know how to move. We know who to call. We know which road to take, which store to visit, which person can solve the problem. But outside of our normal environment, we are forced to listen, observe, adjust, and sometimes surrender control.

This is not only true in travel. It is true inside every organization.

When a business enters a new market, takes on a larger client, expands into a new category, or hires people with different ways of thinking, it enters unfamiliar territory. What worked before may not work exactly the same way anymore. The assumptions that once felt safe may no longer apply. The team has to become more aware, more patient, more flexible, and more honest.

Pressure in unfamiliar environments exposes whether we are truly prepared or simply comfortable.

Some people become irritated when the surroundings do not serve them. Others become curious. Some teams panic when the conditions change. Others gather information, ask better questions, and adapt. The difference is not talent alone. The difference is maturity. In business, comfort can become dangerous when it convinces us that our habits are the same as our strengths. A company may believe it is disciplined, until it enters a new environment where the old shortcuts stop working. A leader may believe they communicate well, until they are dealing with a client who requires a different level of clarity.

A team may believe it is organized, until growth places them in a setting where memory and instinct are no longer enough.

Travel teaches us that awareness is a form of preparation.

The person who pays attention adjusts faster. The person who listens learns faster. The person who respects the environment moves better within it. The same is true for organizations. New pressure does not always require panic. Sometimes it simply requires humility.

Every unfamiliar environment asks the same question.

Can you stay composed when the surroundings change?

That question matters in travel. It matters even more in business.



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SALES
**Selling
Under Pressure
Exposes Process**

Image from DC Studio in Magnificent

Sales can look strong when conditions are easy.

When the client is interested, the price is accepted, the product is available, and the timing is favorable, almost anyone can feel confident. The conversation moves smoothly. The follow-up feels simple. The opportunity appears to be under control.

Then pressure enters the room.

The client stops responding. A competitor offers a lower price. The decision maker changes. The budget gets delayed. The order is urgent, but the details are incomplete. The customer asks for proof, terms, pricing history, delivery guarantees, or a better explanation of value.

That is when sales stops being a performance and becomes a process.

Selling under pressure exposes whether a team has discipline behind the conversation. Charisma may open a door, but process keeps the opportunity alive when things become difficult. A good personality can create interest, but preparation creates trust. Energy matters, but energy without structure becomes inconsistent.

Every sales organization should ask itself a hard question.

Are we relying on people to remember, or are we building a system that helps them execute? Pressure reveals the answer.

A strong sales process has clear notes, defined next steps, accurate pricing, documented commitments, timely follow-up, and a real understanding of the client's pain. It does not depend only on the salesperson's mood, memory, or natural ability.

It gives the team a standard to return to when the conversation becomes complicated.

A weak sales process usually hides behind activity. Calls are being made. Emails are being sent. Meetings are happening. But when pressure rises, the cracks appear. Nobody knows the last promise made to the client. Pricing was discussed but not confirmed. Follow-up was expected but not scheduled. The client's real objection was heard but never documented. The opportunity was alive, but the process was not strong enough to carry it.

This is where many companies lose deals they should have won.

Not because the product was bad. Not because the team lacked effort. Not because the client had no need. They lose because pressure exposed disorder.

In sales, pressure is not only found in rejection. Pressure is also found in opportunity.

A large account can stress a weak process faster than a difficult prospect. Growth creates more conversations, more details, more expectations, and more chances for something to fall through the cracks.

That is why selling under pressure requires more than confidence. It requires discipline.

The best salespeople are not only persuasive. They are organized. They respect details. They confirm what was said. They listen for what was not said. They prepare before the meeting and follow up after the excitement fades. They understand that trust is built through consistency.

Every business should examine its sales process before pressure does it for them. Because pressure will eventually ask the question.

Do you have a process, or do you only have people trying hard?





OPERATIONS Systems Under Stress Tell the Truth

Operations often look better from a distance.

Orders are moving. Emails are being answered. Trucks are arriving. Inventory is being pulled. Customers are being serviced. The company appears to be functioning.

Then stress enters the system.

Volume increases. A key person is out. Inventory is short. A supplier misses a deadline. A client needs an urgent answer. Accounting needs clarification. Sales promised something that operations did not know about. Suddenly, everyone is busy, but not everyone is aligned.

That is when the truth appears.

Systems under stress tell the truth because pressure removes the illusion of control. It shows whether the business has structure or whether the structure is actually one or two people holding everything together through memory, effort, and personal sacrifice.

Hard-working people are valuable, but hard-working people are not a system.

A real system can be followed, checked, repeated, and improved. It does not depend entirely on one person knowing where the information is. It does not require the same question to be answered five different ways. It does not collapse because someone is on vacation or because the day became heavier than expected.



When operations are under pressure, the business learns where its hidden weaknesses live.

It may discover that inventory counts are not trusted. It may learn that order notes are incomplete. It may realize that approvals are unclear. It may see that the team is depending on verbal instructions instead of written standards. It may discover that the customer experience is being protected by heroic effort rather than dependable process.

This matters because growth does not forgive operational confusion.

Growth adds weight. More customers mean more expectations. More orders mean more chances for mistakes. More locations mean more communication points. More people mean more need for standards. Without systems, growth can turn a good company into a tired company.

Pressure does not create that weakness. It reveals it. The answer is not to remove pressure from the business. Pressure is part of growth, service, and responsibility. The answer is to build systems strong enough to carry pressure without turning every problem into a crisis.

That begins with documentation. What is the process? Who owns the step? What information is required? Where is it recorded? How is it checked? What happens when something goes wrong? Who needs to be notified? What is the standard response?

These questions may feel basic, but basic things become powerful when they are followed consistently.

Operations is where promises become reality. Sales can create the expectation, leadership can cast the vision, and marketing can tell the story, but operations must deliver the truth. If the system is weak, the customer eventually feels it.

Every company should study its stressful days carefully.

Not to assign blame, but to find the pattern.

Stress is information. Delays are information. Confusion is information. Repeated questions are information. Mistakes are information.

The mature organization does not waste that information. It uses pressure as a teacher.

Because systems under stress do not lie.



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PHILANTHROPY

Mission Under Pressure

A mission is easy to admire when conditions are comfortable.

It sounds noble in a meeting. It looks beautiful on a website. It feels inspiring in a speech. Everyone agrees with impact when the timing is convenient, the budget is healthy, and the work does not require sacrifice.

Then pressure comes.

Sales slow down. Margins tighten. Time becomes limited. People get busy. The urgent demands of the business begin to compete with the deeper commitments of the organization. The mission that once sounded inspiring now requires discipline.

That is when a company learns whether its mission is part of its identity or only part of its language. Philanthropy under pressure reveals sincerity. It shows whether giving is something a business does for appearance or something it has built into the way it operates. It tests whether impact survives inconvenience.

This is important because every meaningful mission will eventually become inconvenient.

There will be seasons when it would be easier to pause. Easier to delay. Easier to say, “not right now.” There will be moments when the business has other needs, other priorities, and other pressures demanding attention. Those moments do not make the mission less important. They reveal how deeply the mission has been planted.

For an organization, the question is not only, “What do we support?” The greater question is, “What are we willing to protect when pressure rises?”

A mission that disappears every time business becomes difficult is not yet a mission. It is a preference.

A real mission needs structure. It needs rhythm. It needs ownership. It needs a clear connection to the daily life of the business. Without structure, even good intentions become inconsistent. People may care deeply, but caring is not enough if there is no system to carry the commitment forward.

This is why mission-driven work must be connected to operations, not separated from it.

When impact is treated as an extra project, it becomes vulnerable. When it is built into the business model, the culture, the calendar, and the decision-making process, it becomes harder to abandon. It becomes part of how the company measures success.

Pressure also protects a mission from becoming shallow.

It forces a company to ask whether the work still matters when applause is absent. It reveals whether leadership is willing to continue when nobody is watching. It reminds the organization that meaningful impact is not always convenient, efficient, or easy to explain on a spreadsheet.

But it is still worth carrying.

The King Solomon Award was built on the belief that business can be more than transaction. It can become a vehicle for opportunity, education, and legacy. That belief becomes most important when pressure rises, because that is when the temptation to separate profit from purpose becomes strongest.

Every organization with a mission should examine what happens to that mission under stress.

Does it remain funded?

Does it remain discussed?

Does it remain protected?

Does it remain part of the company’s decisions?

Pressure will answer those questions honestly. Mission under pressure reveals what we truly value.



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TECHNOLOGY

Performance Under Load

Technology should not only be judged when everything is calm.

A system can look impressive during a demonstration. It can feel efficient when the volume is low. It can appear organized when only a few people are using it. The screens may look clean, the reports may appear useful, and the promise may sound convincing.

Then the load increases.

More users enter the system. More orders are processed. More data needs to be captured. More exceptions appear. More departments depend on the same information.

More customers expect faster answers. What looked smooth in a controlled environment now has to carry the weight of real business.

That is when technology reveals the truth.

Performance under load is not only a technical idea. It is an operational reality. Every company eventually learns whether its technology is actually solving problems or only creating the appearance of progress.

Good technology reduces friction. It helps people make better decisions. It captures knowledge. It improves visibility. It makes important information easier to find, easier to trust, and easier to act on. It should support the team when pressure rises, not add more confusion.

Weak technology does the opposite.

It creates duplicate work. It hides information in too many places. It requires manual

corrections. It produces reports people do not trust. It forces employees to build side systems outside the system, such as spreadsheets, notes, text threads, and memory-based shortcuts. At that point, the business may have software, but it does not truly have a system.

Pressure makes that difference clear.

A process that works manually at a small size may collapse when the company grows. A spreadsheet that helped one person stay organized may not support an entire team. A platform that works for ten orders may struggle when there are one hundred. A reporting habit that was “good enough” yesterday may become dangerous when leadership needs accurate information quickly.

This is why companies must be honest about technology before growth exposes the weakness.

The question is not simply, “Do we have software?” Most businesses do. The better question is, “Does our technology carry load?”

- Can it handle more customers?
- Can it support more users?
- Can it produce reliable information?
- Can it reduce dependence on memory?
- Can it make the business easier to manage as volume increases?

If the answer is no, the company should not ignore the warning.

Technology is supposed to increase capacity. When it is designed well, it gives the organization more control, more visibility, and more speed. When it is designed poorly,



Image by QC Studio on Freepik

it becomes another source of pressure for people who are already carrying too much. The goal is not to chase every new tool. The goal is to build systems that match the weight of the business.

Artificial intelligence, automation, dashboards, portals, and integrated platforms can all be valuable, but only if they serve a clear operational purpose. Tools without discipline create noise. Tools connected to process create leverage.

Every business should ask what happens when its technology is placed under load. Because growth will test it.

And when it does, the system will reveal whether it was built for appearance or built to perform.

Word Search

Entertain yourself for a while and solve this word search as quickly as possible. If you prefer you can click on the link below and solve the challenge from your cell phone or computer.

world of work

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- TEACHER
- CLEANER
- SHOP ASSISTANT
- NURSE
- SECURITY
- BAKER
- DRIVER
- POLICE
- PACKER
- DOCTOR
- FARMER
- PARAMEDIC
- DENTIST
- CHEF
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