

**What a Way to Make a Living:
The Search for Partnership in Organizational Life**

**Book: Barry Oshry
Lyrics: Bruce Reed and Barry Oshry
Music: Bruce Reed**

**"Top Hat"
Music and Lyrics: Maryl Skinner**

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Power + Systems, Inc.
PO Box 990288
Boston, MA 02199-0288
www.powerandsystems.com

Characters

Although some characters in the script are identified as male or female, gender is optional as is sexual orientation or race. Action is driven less by character than by the systemic conditions people are in. Actors double from act to act.

Prologue

Designer
Maker #1
Maker #2
Feeder
Coordinator
Leader
Angel Laurie

Act I

Worker #1
Worker #2
Worker #3

Angel Laurie

Act II

Middle #1
Middle #2
Middle #3
Middle #4

Angel Laurie

Act III

Top #1
Top #2
Top #3
Top #4

Angel Laurie

Prologue

An Organization Self Destructs With Good Intentions

(Mime)

(ANGEL LAURIE is in search of good deeds to perform. She paces to and fro below the stage. She is thoughtful. Where to go? Who needs a willing angel? LAURIE is winged and, despite costume changes in subsequent acts, her wings are never visible to the other players, yet always visible to the audience.)

(Lights come up as a mimed ballet unfolds on the stage. LAURIE continues her meditations unaware at first of the action taking place behind her.)

(There is a mimed ballet involving DESIGNER, two MAKERS, one FEEDER, one COORDINATOR, and one LEADER.)

(DESIGNER is alone at the center of the stage. Off to the far right LEADER sits at a desk facing off stage.)

The Designer is inspired.

(DESIGNER is contemplating. In a flash of inspiration, the product comes to mind. DESIGNER constructs it in the air.)

The Coordinator interferes.

(COORDINATOR and MAKER 1 enter. The DESIGNER attempts to communicate the design to the MAKER, but the COORDINATOR keeps interceding between DESIGNER and MAKER. COORDINATOR insists that DESIGNER describe the product to him and he in turn will describe it to MAKER. So that's how it goes. DESIGNER describes to COORDINATOR who describes to MAKER. MAKER tries to see around COORDINATOR to view DESIGNER directly, while COORDINATOR attempts to block MAKER's view. So long as COORDINATOR stands between DESIGNER and MAKER 1, MAKER 1 cannot get the design right. Both DESIGNER and MAKER 1 are frustrated.)

Designer and Maker Communicate.

(COORDINATOR is called away by LEADER. Once COORDINATOR is out of the way, MAKER 1 quickly grasps DESIGNER's concept

and begins to construct it to DESIGNER's satisfaction. DESIGNER then exits while MAKER 1 continues to construct the product.)

(MAKER 1 moves left and right, front and back bringing needed materials to the center.)

Feeder helps Maker.

(FEEDER enters, watches MAKER 1 rushing back and forth. FEEDER converses with MAKER 1 explaining FEEDER's plan. FEEDER moves from place to place bringing materials to MAKER who is now able to remain centered, all energies focused on making.)

Feeder and Maker share jobs.

(After a period of making, FEEDER and MAKER 1 converse. The dance continues but they now exchange roles, FEEDER making and MAKER feeding. Theirs is a happy partnership.)

Coordinator interferes.

(While MAKER 1 and FEEDER 1 continue their work, DESIGNER enters with MAKER 2. COORDINATOR again tries to intercede. DESIGNER creates the product in the air as MAKER 2 attempts to understand it. With COORDINATOR firmly in the way, MAKER 2 never does get the design right. DESIGNER and COORDINATOR exit.)

Maker 2 feels competitive with Maker 1.

(MAKER 2 begins to create the product awkwardly, moving hurriedly left and right, front and back bringing needed materials to the center.)

(MAKER 2 notices how well the MAKER 1/ FEEDER team is working, stops, gestures frustration, unfairness: "Where's my Feeder!")

Coordinator is in the middle.

(Enter COORDINATOR. Heated conversation between MAKER 2 and COORDINATOR. COORDINATOR is sympathetic but unsure as to whether another FEEDER is possible. COORDINATOR indicates a need to check with LEADER.)

(COORDINATOR attempts to talk with LEADER but LEADER is too busy to talk. Eventually they converse. COORDINATOR communicates the situation gesturing to the smoothly running

MAKER/FEEDER team and to the harried and disgruntled MAKER 2 racing to and fro.)

Increased pressure and no support from Leader.

(LEADER indicates that there is no money for a second FEEDER and that more making is needed.)

Coordinator is the bearer of bad news.

(COORDINATOR brings the bad news to MAKER 2 who continues to be unhappy. COORDINATOR indicates that the attempt was made but the LEADER said no. No money.)

Coordinator has the perfectly wrong solution.

(COORDINATOR has an idea. Maybe the FEEDER can be a FEEDER for both MAKERS. COORDINATOR approaches the MAKER/FEEDER team with that plan. MAKER and FEEDER indicate that they are both MAKERS and FEEDERS. COORDINATOR says No. One of you must be the FEEDER for both MAKERS.)
(Reluctantly the FEEDER becomes the FEEDER for both teams. Making continues but in a desultory fashion.)

(Angel LAURIE turns and now follows with interest the on-stage action.)

A continuing lack of support.

(COORDINATOR is meeting with LEADER who indicates the need for more Making. COORDINATOR indicates that that will be difficult without more MAKERS and FEEDERS. The LEADER indicates No. Sorry, no money.)

The system collapses.

(COORDINATOR brings the news to the MAKERS and FEEDER trio - "More making." They resist. COORDINATOR insists. They madly dash around in a frenzy of making and feeding. Faster and faster. Bumping into one another. Dropping things. Feeding the wrong things at the wrong time. It is chaos. MAKERS and FEEDER collapse in a heap. COORDINATOR tries to raise them. To no avail. COORDINATOR sits in helpless frustration.)

And guess who is to blame?

(The DESIGNER enters and is shocked. DESIGNER looks with abhorrence at the various products. They are awful. What have

they done to my song? DESIGNER rejects one product after another, tossing them away in disgust.)
(LEADER enters. DESIGNER is furious at what has become of the product. DESIGNER and LEADER focus their anger on COORDINATOR who sits helplessly frozen.)

(ANGEL LAURIE brightens. She has found her mission... as the scene ends.)

ACT I, Scene 1

THE WORKERS

(There is a crude hand-printed sign hanging over the workplace reading "HOPELESS, INC." ANGEL LAURIE enters. Work is slow and Workers are depressed. They work in isolation from one another. All work is repetitive and performed in robot-like fashion. WORKER 1 picks something up, puts it into something, tightens a knob, then repeats the process endlessly. WORKER 2 goes to one area, picks something up and brings it to WORKER 1's area, then repeats the process. WORKER 3 sits at a table reading dials, makes an adjustment, reads, makes an adjustment, sometimes reads and calls the COORDINATOR who rushes in, reads the dials, elbows WORKER 3 aside, makes an adjustment and leaves.)

*(The Workers are grousing while they work. One Worker is clearly overheard saying: **Did you hear: They got exercise bikes over in Unit #2? How come we don't have exercise bikes?** The other workers shake their heads, throw up their hands.)*

(ANGEL LAURIE observes the scene, then approaches WORKER 1. The Workers continue their work as the following conversation proceeds.)

LAURIE

(To Worker 1) Hey guy, how do you get a job around here?

WORKER 1

(dumbfounded)

A job?

LAURIE

Yuh, a job. You know. Work?

WORKER 1

Why?

LAURIE

Why? What do you mean why? Because I need a job, that's why.

WORKER 1

I understand, but why *here*?

WORKER 2

Why would *anyone* want a job here?

LAURIE

You work here, don't you?

WORKER 1

Uh huh.

LAURIE

Well why do *you* work here?

WORKER 1

(scratches his head stumped)

Huh?

LAURIE

I say: why do *you* work here?

WORKER 1

(Searches for an answer.)

Uh...the money?

LAURIE

Oh, so the money's good?

WORKER 1

Well..uh, no not really. Um, let's see. uh...the benefits?

LAURIE

Good benefits?

WORKER 1

Well..uh..no...not that good.

LAURIE

So why *do* you work here? You must like the work.

WORKER 1

(Incredulous)

Like the work! Hmm, now that's a good one. *(To the other workers)* You hear that? She asks me if I like the work.

(The Workers laugh and slap their thighs like this is the funniest thing they've ever heard.)

ALL WORKERS

(Slowly)

Like the work, lady...we...hate...it!

LAURIE

You hate it.

ALL WORKERS

We hate it.

LAURIE

It's that hard?

WORKER 1

It's not hard...

WORKERS 2 and 3

IT'S DUMB!!

LAURIE

What is it you're making here?

ALL WORKERS

Huh?

LAURIE

Making? You know, like what's your product?

(Heavy Worker thinking)

WORKER 1

Gosh, to tell the truth, it's been so long since I've *seen* the product that I've forgotten what it is. Anyone remember?

(2 & 3 think, then shake their heads.)

LAURIE

Well, what do your customers say?

WORKER 1

Gosh, to tell the truth, it's been so long since I've seen a customer that I forget what they look like. Anyone remember?

(2 & 3 think, then shake their heads. They continue their work as LAURIE watches.)

LAURIE

This is boring. We're talking serious BORING!

WORKER 1

Shh! Not too loud. We keep telling them how hard this is.

WORKER 2

Real hard.

WORKER 3

I'm under big stress.

WORKER 1

It stretches my mind.

WORKER 2

It makes me grow.

WORKER 3

Develop talents I never knew I had.

(They all laugh.)

WORKER 1

You see, lady...

LAURIE

The name is Laurie.

WORKER 1

You see, Laurie, if they ever knew how dumb this work really was, they'd replace us with a pack of baboons.

WORKER 2

A pigeon could do my job. *(Does a pigeon imitation.)*

LAURIE

Wow, things really sound bad.

WORKER 1

Bad? Lady...uh, Laurie. Things stink!

LAURIE

If it stinks, what's the problem?

WORKER 1

Now, Laurie, that's a real good question. And I've been giving it a lot of thought lately.

LAURIE

And?

WORKER 1

And I see clearly where the problem lies.

LAURIE

And?

WORKER 1

The problem, Laurie, simply put, is...THEM!

Laurie

Them?

All Workers

THEM!

(The following is delivered with machine-gun rapidity, with the emphasis always on they.)

WORKER 1

They don't give us the tools we need.

WORKER 2

They tell us one thing...

WORKER 3

then *they* tell us something else.

WORKER 1

They don't fix the showers.

WORKER 2

They talk out of both sides of their mouths.

WORKER 1

They tell us we're not workers anymore...

WORKER 2

(Slow and sarcastic)

Now we're *associates*.

WORKER 3

Yeh...associates.

WORKER 1

But we know who we are.

2&3

Yeh...

ALL WORKERS

WORKERS!!!

(All laugh, back to rapid fire.)

WORKER 1

We get no information.

WORKER 2

We get no direction.

WORKER 3

They don't care about us.

WORKER 1

They don't respect us.

WORKER 2

They don't listen to us.

WORKER 3

They don't even know who we are.

WORKER 1

They are out playing golf...

WORKER 2

Or taking two martini lunches

WORKER 3

Or planning on selling the company

WORKER 1

Or shipping it to Tahiti

WORKER 2

They don't give us the big picture.

WORKER 3

They don't give us *any* picture.

(End of rapid fire.)

ALL WORKERS

WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT WE MAKE!

LAURIE

Stop! I have a headache!

WORKER 1

You have a headache. What's *your* problem?

LAURIE

All this whining...and complaining.

WORKER 3

(offended) Are you implying that we should stop whining?

LAURIE

It *is* a possibility worth considering.

WORKER 3

Outrageous!

WORKER 2

Without whining *(puzzled)* what *would* we talk about?

(Song)

Whining and Complaining

We are whining and complaining
On the bottom, no where to go
We are whining and complaining
All my bosses ever say in no.
They give us stupid jobs
We are wearing funny clothes
What we are making, God only knows
That's why we're whining and complaining
On the bottom, no where to go.

Verse 2

We are whining and complaining
Cause that's all we know
Mere background in their painting
We'll never make any dough
We tell them how to fix things.
Try to do your best
They never listen
All they want to hear is yes.
That's why we're whining and complaining
On the bottom, no where to go

Bridge

We are blameless victims
They don't respect our minds
They always push us
All we do is whine

Verse 3

We are whining and complaining
On bottom, nowhere to go.
Just someone for blaming
We'll be the first to go
They'll always try to squeeze us,
To make the bottom line.
They never listen
No, they haven't got the time
That's why we're whining and complaining
On the bottom, nowhere to go.

LAURIE

Whining, whining, whining.

ALL WORKERS

That's just the way it is.

LAURIE

(Sarcastic)

They're your *only* problem.

ALL WORKERS

You got it.

LAURIE

And you are all so blameless.

ALL WORKERS

As innocent as kids.

LAURIE

Can't you see what's happening?

ALL WORKERS

We see it. What do you see?

LAURIE

All I hear is THEM. There's no I, no me. What about you? Never mind Them.

WORKER 3

No I? No me? hmm. I...I...I...suffer *(struggling to find something)* Hah! *(she's found it)* because of Them. *(Big relief as she's solved the problem.)*

LAURIE

(Throws up her hands in disgust.)

I have heard some whining and complaining in my time, but...

All Workers

You just don't understand...

LAURIE

(Interrupts.)

I understand more than you know. *(Angry.)* I have never

been around a bigger bunch of helpless, blameless whining babies.

WORKER 1

Babies? We're not babies, Laurie; we'd be terrific workers if only they...

LAURIE

Stop. DO NOT USE THAT WORD AGAIN.

WORKER 1

Calm down, Laurie.

LAURIE

Listen, I just have one thought for all of you to consider.

WORKER 1

Listen up, folks. Laurie's got a thought for us.

WORKER 2

Hey, just don't make it too hard. Remember, we're only workers.

WORKER 3

Associates! Remember, we're associates now.

2 and 3

WE'RE ASSOCIATES! *(Workers 2 and 3 start a little jig chanting "We're associates, we're associates.")*

WORKER 1

All right, associates. Calm down. Let's hear Laurie's thought.

LAURIE

I want you to just consider this: *(Slowly)* What if you lived your life never assuming that THEY *(gestures upward)* were going to do anything?

(The Workers are stunned; they can't grasp this.)

LAURIE

Pay attention. Focus. *(They strain; slowly)* What if you lived your life never assuming that THEY were going to do anything?

WORKER 2

(To the others)

See, that's just what I *told* you. *They* are never going to do anything.

LAURIE

No, no. That's not my point. They may do lots of things. Good things, bad things. But...what if you lived your life never *counting* on them to fix anything?

WORKER 1

If not them, who, Laurie? *(Begins to get the point.)* Oh, oh. I think I see where this is heading.

(LAURIE is about to lay out a series of challenges to the Workers. These are challenges the Workers would prefer not to hear, not to let in. Their whole beings -- body and soul -- resist. As LAURIE persists, the Workers gradually fall into fits similar to religious mania -- wild gesticulating, shaking, spasms, nervous tics, rolling on the ground, speaking in tongues.)

LAURIE

(Gradually rising in intensity)

What if you unhooked from *them*?

How would *that* change your life?

What if *they* are not the ones to solve all your problems?

What if *they* are not the answer to all your prayers?

How would *that* change your life?

What if you stopped whining and complaining?

What *else* would you do with your life?

What if you stopped talking about THEM and started looking to yourselves?

What if you took all these problems you're whining about and asked yourselves: *How are WE going to make these problems go away?*

How would that change your life?

(The shaking and quaking and spasms have reached a crescendo; the Workers collapse in a motionless heap.)

(Softly) How would *that* change your life?

(She stares at the quivering heap on the ground. It's clear: more work needs to be done.)

Act I, Scene 2

(The following week, the work floor)

(ANGEL LAURIE has joined the work force. There is more energy, more teamwork. There are smiles, occasional back-slapping, joking with one another. The atmosphere is friendly, but this is about to change.)

(Whistles, buzzers and alarms go off notifying workers of an announcement from Top Management which is now descending from above in the form of a large poster attached to a chain.)

WORKER 1

(To LAURIE)

You gotta admit; It gets your attention.

LAURIE

(Disappointed)

It does lack something of a personal touch.

WORKER 3

(Reads.)

"Dear Associates and members of Team 1."

WORKER 2

Oh great, now we're members of Team One.

WORKER 3

The big guy took home eighteen million bucks last year and I'm working on ten fifty an hour.

LAURIE

So?

WORKER 2

So it seems we got at least *two* teams going here.

(They laugh.)

WORKER 3

(continues reading)

"Certain organizational failures have been brought to our attention in a memo received from a worker."

(Workers glance over at LAURIE who smiles sheepishly.)

"We have taken immediate steps to remedy the situation. First, we have fired four middle managers..."

(Cheers. All except LAURIE who is pained by this announcement.)

"for failing to solve these problems or at least bring them to our attention."

WORKER 2

What, all the phone lines were down in Boca Raton?

WORKER 3

(continues reading) "And, regretfully, one of our top team members will be taking early retirement..."

WORKER 2

That's going to cost a bundle.

WORKER 3

(continues reading)

"due to certain *philosophical* differences."

WORKER 2

(ponderously)

I'll bet they got to arguing about Plato's concept of life being like shadows on the wall of a cave. *(ponders)* Or maybe it was the complexities of post-modern deconstruction that tore them apart.

WORKER 3

Bet that was it.

LAURIE

(still stunned)

Firing four middle managers. That was not what I had in mind.

WORKER 3

(continues reading)

"We are also initiating, as of this date, a new partnership program."

WORKER 2

Great! We are now associates *and* partners working together on Team One.

WORKER 3

In other words...

ALL WORKERS

Grunts!

WORKER 3

(Continues reading.)

"Our plan is to work closely with you to create this organization anew. We want you to meet our customers and work closely with them."

WORKER 1

(interrupts)

That's a start.

WORKER 3

(dismissively)

Big deal!

(continues reading.)

"We need your help in redesigning how work is done in this organization. You are our experts on work; we need to put your expertise to use."

WORKER 2

Obviously they are referring to my Master's degree in tightening.

WORKER 3

I thought it was my Doctorate of Dial Reading.

WORKER 1

(To WORKER 3)

Will you guys let up!

WORKER 3

Oh, what have we here? Maneuvering for one of those vacant middle management slots are we?

WORKER 1

(singsong)

Whiiiiiiiiinniiiiinnngg!

WORKER 3

You got something better?

WORKER 1

Just give it a break; there just might *be* something to this.

WORKER 3

Mm hmm.

(Continues reading.)

"We are working on a new profit-sharing plan, and we'll be setting up a series of worker/management meetings..." *(To Worker 2)* Don't they mean big associate/little associate meetings?

WORKER 1

(annoyed)

Just read.

WORKER 3

"...to begin putting this initiative into practice. We look forward to a satisfying and productive partnership with all of you."

WORKER 2

Partnership, that's a new one. You know what partnership means, don't you.

WORKER 3

More work, fewer workers.

(WORKERS 2 & 3 laugh.)

Same old same old. Say, What ever happened to last year's plan. What was that one called?

WORKER 2

Something about leading.

WORKER 3

Yuh...leading by the nose.

(WORKERS 2 and 3 laugh.)

WORKER 1

I don't know.

WORKER 3

What don't you know?

WORKER 1

I don't know.

WORKER 3

You already said that.

WORKER 1

This sounds a little different.

WORKER 2

That's what those executive seminars are all about: How to make this one sound a little different from all the other ones that didn't work.

WORKER 1

But this *does* sound different. They're talking about working *with* us to redesign work.

WORKER 3

Grow up. This is a trick. Partnership equals more work and less money. That's all they care about. Profits.

(WORKER 3 gives up and moves back to his work station.)

WORKER 1

What's wrong with that? They're not supposed to be interested in profits? Shouldn't *we* be interested in profits?

WORKER 3

All I care about is being left alone.

WORKER 1

You're really being a jerk about this. Maybe these guys are beginning to see the light. Maybe Laurie over there's been talking to them. (LAURIE *gestures "Who me?"*) Maybe they're trying to do the right thing.

WORKER 3

And maybe you're just a dumb fish in their pond. They're dangling this juicy worm in front of your nose, and you're going for it. All I'm saying is: Watch out! There's a hook at the end of that worm. The same old hook they always use.

(The workers have separated into two camps -- WORKERS 2 and 3 are together in opposition to WORKER 1. LAURIE remains apart from both camps.)

WORKER 1

What's the harm in giving it a try? Let's go to those meetings and see what they have in mind.

WORKER 3

Meetings give me headaches.

WORKER 1

They talked about profit-sharing. There could be big bucks in this.

WORKER 3

When they open the books I'll believe it.

WORKER 1

I wouldn't mind looking forward to coming to work for a change. What is *wrong* with that?

WORKER 3

Dream on. They're just using you.

WORKER 1

(getting angry)

There's a challenge here. I'm tired of leaving my brains in the parking lot every day.

WORKER 3

You want challenge, climb Mount Everest. This is no challenge. This is a trap.

WORKER 1

(pressuring WORKER 3)

You like that mindless work you do?

WORKER 3

Yuh, I *do* like it. It takes no brains. It takes no effort. It leaves me free to think about other things.

WORKER 1

(sarcasm)

What big thoughts are *you* thinking?

(WORKER 3 is menacing, he's had enough, he's on the edge of violence. Angry and sputtering, he goes after WORKER 1 and is restrained by the others.)

WORKER 3

Get out of my face, lady!

(uncomfortable pause)

WORKER 1

Listen to me.

WORKER 3
(*dismissive*)

I've heard enough from you.

WORKER 1
(*angry*)

Just listen.

(WORKER 3 *sulks off to the side.*)

You know what goes on around here...

WORKER 3

I don't know what you're talking about.

WORKER 1

Things we get away with...little things...sometimes big things...
things we let slide...things we *could* do something about

WORKER 3

What are you *talking* about?

WORKER 1
(*angry*)

You *know* what I'm talking about...Mistakes we see...we don't
bother to fix.

(WORKER 3 *dismisses her.*)

Ideas we have...we don't bother to tell anyone. It digs at me
sometimes. I go home...I think about these things...I don't like
what I see...I don't feel clean.

The energy we waste...jabbering to one another...poking fun at
them...*Whatever* they do, it's not good enough. Like they're
what? The enemy?

WORKER 3

You got it.

WORKER 1

Uh, uh. I'm not buying it. That's *your* trap. And you are
deep into it. You're so angry at them that you'll ruin your life
just to prove how bad *they* are.

WORKER 3

(dripping with sarcasm)

And you? You are *so* good...*so* noble.

(The split is complete; they move apart. There is a sadness in the following interchange between WORKERS 1 and 2.)

WORKER 1

(Comes over to WORKER 2.)

Where are you in this?

(WORKER 2 is stuck, caught between Workers 1 and 3. Shrugs.)

Does this mean we're not going out for beers?

WORKER 2

(Would like to but... looks at WORKER 3, back to WORKER 1. Shakes his head.)

Maybe it's not a good idea.

WORKER 1

(to WORKER 2)

What about Sunday? You and the family still coming over for dinner?

WORKER 2

(Would like to, but...)

It's probably not a good idea.

(WORKER 1 gives up, throws up her hands; the workers drift away in their two camps, pause)

LAURIE

Hey, what's happening here? *(pause)* We used to be good friends.

(no response)

A team, all for one and one for all. *(pause)* This is stupid.

WORKER 3

Uh, well whose side are *you* on?

LAURIE

I'm not seeing two sides.

WORKER 2

What are you *seeing*, Laurie?

LAURIE

I'm seeing two strategies - one powerful team.

(WORKER 3 drifts off, dismissing her, yet listening. WORKER 2 is curious.)

Here's how I see it. We are two sides of the same coin.

WORKER 3

(sarcastic)

And that coin is?

LAURIE

Survival.

(turns to WORKER 1.)

You see some hope in this partnership plan.

WORKER 1

Yeh! A chance to feel like a whole person, not like some half-wit. There's been talk of the plant shutting down, that we're not competitive. Well maybe we can do something about that. We save the plant, we save our jobs. What's wrong with that?

LAURIE

I'll tell you what's wrong with that. Like he's been saying, you're naive.

WORKER 3

Damn right she is.

LAURIE

We could work real hard, do all the right things, and they could *still* take advantage of us...not give us our fair share, even shut the plant down.

WORKER 3

That's what I've been saying.

LAURIE

(turns to the WORKER 3.)

That's right *(pause)* but let me tell you what's wrong with what *you've* been saying. The world's changing. Things are moving fast. The old ways aren't going to cut it any more. You go on fighting change *and this ship is going to sink*. Guaranteed.

WORKER 2

So what *are* you saying, Laurie?

LAURIE

I'm saying: Either way we go, we're sunk...unless...

WORKER 2

(curious)

Unless?

LAURIE

Unless we go both ways...*together*...one team, two strategies. Produce *and* protect.

WORKER 2

(becoming increasingly fascinated by this possibility.)

Like a football team. You got the offense, you got the defense.

(WORKER 3 looks suspiciously at WORKER 2, like he's a turncoat. WORKER 2 shrugs.)

WORKER 1

(To LAURIE)

Right. And the two teams don't play *against* each other.

WORKER 2

(now in deep thought.)

Which is what we've been doing.

(WORKER 3 continues to eye his one-time ally suspiciously, at the same time he edges closer to the others.)

LAURIE

You got it. We need to get into this partnership thing, use our brains, and do our best to keep this ship afloat.

WORKER 3

(Steps in forcefully.)

And we better protect ourselves, make sure we don't get abused, see to it that we get our fair share.

(Pause. WORKER 1 looks to WORKER 3, she extends her hand tentatively; he lets it hang there for a moment it, then reaches; they shake hands, at first lightly, then enthusiastically. LAURIE and WORKER 2 join in the laying on of hands.)

WORKER 2

We've got work to do.

WORKER 1

We sure do.

WORKER 3

Produce *and* protect.

LAURIE

But how about a beer first?

(Cheers.)

ACT II
THE MIDDLES

Act II, Scene 1

(One day later)

(ANGEL LAURIE has ventured into the Middle Manager suite. MIDDLE 1 sits disconsolately in the center of the room - on one side of him is a phone, on the other a small table with a huge pile of papers. MIDDLES 2 and 3 race continually back and forth diagonally across the stage; they stop very briefly to answer phone calls, then either continue on their ways or reverse direction or hesitate before deciding which way to proceed. Only disconsolate MIDDLE 1 sits quietly. Periodically CLERK races in and deposits more papers on MIDDLE 1's pile. The hecticness of the scene should take one's breath away.

(The phone rings, MIDDLE 1 picks it up, listens, nods his head.)

MIDDLE 1
(weakly)

I'll see what I can do.

(CLERK rushes in, hands MIDDLE 1 a note which MIDDLE 1 reads. To CLERK weakly.)

I'll see what I can do.

(CLERK looks derisively at Middle and leaves.)

(This sequence is repeated twice, each time MIDDLE 1 responds weakly "I'll see what I can do." With each new interaction MIDDLE 1 seems to sink more deeply into depression.)

(LAURIE, who has been watching this, approaches MIDDLE 1.)

LAURIE

You O.K?

MIDDLE 1

I used to be.

LAURIE

You used to be?

MIDDLE 1

Yeh, I used to be O.K. I used to be strong...confident...competent. That's why they made me a middle manager.

(The phone rings.)

Excuse me.

(MIDDLE 1 picks up the phone, listens, then says weakly.)

I'll see what I can do. *(Hangs up the phone.)*

LAURIE

(is puzzled but continues)

You used to be O.K. And now?

MIDDLE 1

And now I'm a mess.

LAURIE

A mess?

MIDDLE 1

Yeh. A mess. Weak. Nothing I do is good enough. No one respects me...*(plaintive)* No one likes me. I can't blame them. I try and try and try, but the harder I try, the worse it gets. Can't please anyone. I'm a total incompetent. Ask anybody.

(Song)

In the Middle

I'm in the middle
Stuck once again
They're all trying to tell me, I'm not one of them
It's a sad story
They all ignore me
A small second fiddle, who diddles around

No time to think,
or take a break
I'm stuck here in the middle, crushed & squeezed just like a
grape
They're constantly calling,
Credibility's falling
A company pawn, I wish I were strong

Whatever happened to my dreams?
When, when did I lose my self-esteem?
I had such high hopes,
I had such confidence
I understood my life, & it made perfect sense

Now I'm in the middle
No place to hide
I'm whirling, spinning twirling
On a revolving ride
Middle tradition
Give up ambition
I'm stuck in the middle, so weak & so small
So weak & so small.

LAURIE

This doesn't sound good.

(CLERK rushes in with a note. MIDDLE 1 reads it, nods his head)

MIDDLE 1
(weakly)

I'll see what I can do.

(CLERK looks at MIDDLE 1 derisively and leaves.)

MIDDLE 1

Everyone despises me. EVERYONE! It's my brain. I've heard about such things. I just never thought it would happen to me. So young.

LAURIE

(incredulous)

You sure it's your brain?.

MIDDLE 1

I've tried everything else. I jog...I meditate...I chant...I eat nothing but grains and green tea...I take pills to calm me down...and pills to pep me up...*(Confidentially)* I'm in therapy. *(Shakes his head.)* Nothing helps. What else can it be? It's my brain. It's shrinking. *(Sinks back into his total despair position -- hunched over, head in hands, moaning. The phone rings. He picks it up, listens, weakly)* I'll see what I can do. *(Hangs up.)*

LAURIE

Who was that?

MIDDLE 1

(gestures upward)

The Tops.

LAURIE

What do they want?

MIDDLE 1

They're looking to me for more production. *(The phone rings. He picks it up, listens. Weakly)* I'll see what I can do. *(Hangs up.)*

LAURIE

And that?

MIDDLE 1

A Customer. Quality's not good enough.

(CLERK rushes in with a note. MIDDLE 1 reads it.)

I'll see what I can do.

(CLERK gives MIDDLE 1 *the derisive look and leaves.*)

LAURIE

What was *that* about?

MIDDLE 1

I promised the workers a new piece of equipment and it hasn't come in yet. Any minute I'll be hearing from Suppliers complaining that ...

(*The phone rings. He goes to answer it.*)

LAURIE

(*Grabs the phone.*)

Let it ring.

MIDDLE 1

Let it ring! Are you crazy? Someone *wants* me.

LAURIE

Let it ring.

(*They watch as the phone rings five times then stops.*)

Now let me see if I understand this.

(*The CLERK comes in with a note.*)

Tell him to come back later. You're busy.

MIDDLE 1

(*weakly*)

I'm busy.

(*CLERK rolls his eyes and keeps coming.*)

LAURIE

(*whispering to MIDDLE 1*)

You need a bit more force.

MIDDLE 1
(with a bit more strength.)

I'm busy.

(CLERK stops, not quite sure what to do.)

LAURIE
(whispering)

More gusto.

MIDDLE 1
(Stands and shouts.)

GET OUT!! CAN'T YOU SEE I'M BUSY.

(CLERK turns and races off stage as MIDDLE 1 sinks back into his chair exhausted and frightened by his outburst.)

LAURIE
Now let's review this situation.

(The phone rings. They both watch it until it stops.)

The Tops want more productivity, right?

MIDDLE 1
Right.

LAURIE
So why aren't *you* producing more?

MIDDLE 1
(laughs)
Me? I don't produce. It's the workers who produce.

LAURIE
I see. And the workers are complaining about not having the new equipment. Right?

MIDDLE 1
Right.

LAURIE

So why don't *you* give them the new equipment?

MIDDLE 1

I don't have the equipment. The Tops have decided to wait until next year.

LAURIE

I see. And the customers are complaining about quality. Right?

MIDDLE 1

Right.

LAURIE

So why don't *you* give them a better quality product?

MIDDLE 1

But *I* don't make the product.

LAURIE

Aren't you beginning to see something here? A pattern?

MIDDLE 1

Yeh, I see that I'm letting everyone down.

LAURIE

Look a little closer.

MIDDLE 1

I'm a bum. I'm incompetent. I'm a weak manager. Is that what you mean?

LAURIE

No. Listen. Everyone wants something from you that *you* don't have.

MIDDLE 1

So I'm letting them *all* down.

LAURIE

You're missing the point. The Tops want productivity, but *you* don't do productivity; the workers do.

MIDDLE 1

Uh huh.

LAURIE

The Workers want the new equipment, but *you* don't control the new equipment; the *Tops* do.

MIDDLE 1

Uh huh.

LAURIE

The Customers are looking to you for quality, but *you* don't do quality...

MIDDLE 1

Yeh, yeh, but they're all expecting *me* to deliver...

LAURIE

They want you to deliver what *you* don't have.

MIDDLE 1

And they're holding *me* responsible...

LAURIE

And *you're* holding you responsible.

MIDDLE 1

So what am I supposed to do?

LAURIE

These are not your problems.

MIDDLE 1

They sure *feel* like my problems.

LAURIE

That's because you are doing what *all* Middles do. You're sliding into the middle of *other people's* issues and making them yours.

MIDDLE 1

I don't get it.

LAURIE

Don't you see; they've got issues with *one another*, not with you.

MIDDLE 1

But these *feel* like *my* problems.

LAURIE

(slowly)

Because you're doing the Middle Slide. You're taking on other people's issues and problems and making them yours.

(LAURIE and MIDDLE 1 move off to the side. She sprinkles her fairy dust and gestures to MIDDLE 1 to watch the scene which is about to unfold.)

The Middle Slide Mime

(Top, Middle and Bottom mimes enter -- Bottom is stage left, Top is stage right, and Middle is in the middle. At the outset, Top and Bottom are trying to influence one another and Middle is disengaged - whistling, looking around, checking his clothes, his fingernails.)

(Top shouts over to Bottom. Top wants Bottom to do something. Top insists. Bottom resists, shrugs off Top's instructions.)

(Bottom needs something from Top. Bottom shouts out her demands. Top acts as if she doesn't hear. Bottom insists. Stomping. Demanding. Shouting. Top says no. Sorry. Don't have it. Can't help.)

(Top notices Middle hanging around. Calls Middle over. Who me? Yes you. Top explains what she wants from Bottom. Who me? Yes You. Middle agrees and heads over to Bottom. Top is

satisfied. It is as good as done. Top wipes her hands.)

(Middle explains to Bottom what Top wants. Bottom is having no part of it. Head shaking. No. Bottom explains to Middle what she wants. Middle presses Top's agenda. Bottom says no. Insists that Middle work on Bottom's agenda. Middle understands and races back to Top. Bottom relaxes. Now that Middle is on the case, it is as good as done. Bottom wipes her hands.)

(Middle returns to Top. Top is all smiles. It's done, isn't it? Middle is sheepish. Well no, not exactly. Middle explains what Bottom's needs are. Top is furious. Where does this come from? I send you on a simple errand and this is what I get. Top shakes Middle in frustration. What's wrong with you. Get moving! Middle tries to explain. Top is not interested. Just get moving.)

(Middle heads back to Bottom. Bottom is expectant. Do you have it? Middle is sheepish, apologetic. Tries to explain about Top. Bottom is upset at Middle, uninterested in his explanations. She shouts at Middle, shakes Middle, and sends Middle back to Top. Get what I need! Is that so complicated? Just get what I need.)

(Now the action speeds up. Middle moving back and forth between Top and Bottom, carrying messages, explaining one to the other. Top and Bottom are frustrated with Middle; they see him as weak; they dismiss his explanations; they exhort him to keep on trying, to just get these simple things done. Each time they dispatch

Middle, they relax; now that they've made their demands clear, it's as good as done.)

(Middle now is all movement. Racing back and forth. Stumbling. Heading in one direction, then changing his mind and reversing direction. Middle is confused. He forgets what he's supposed to be doing. His interactions with Top and Bottom become weaker; he gives up even before they say no, and just keeps running.)

(Middle stands frozen halfway between Top and Bottom. Stiff. Robot-like. Only his head moves. First turning left, shaking, turning right, shaking. The whole body then trembles and collapses on the ground.)

(Top and Bottom look at Middle in disgust. What a weakling! They walk off stage, leaving Middle collapsed.)

(LAURIE and MIDDLE 1 move back toward center stage. MIDDLE 1 has been enthralled by the mime.)

MIDDLE 1

(excitedly) That's it. Exactly like that.

LAURIE

Are you seeing some other possibility?

MIDDLE 1

Not really. They *want* me to do that...that...that Middle Slide. All of them. The Tops, the Workers. The Customers, The Suppliers. They *want* me to feel responsible for their problems.

LAURIE

Correct. You slide; and they *want* you to slide.

MIDDLE 1

So what I am I supposed to do?

LAURIE

(A toss of fairy dust, the mimes return.)

Hey, you could do *nothing*. You could just stand back and wonder: How are *they* going to work out *their* issues with one another? How are the Tops going to get productivity out of the Workers? How are the Workers going to get that new equipment from the Tops? You could just watch.

Mime

(Middle steps backward with arms folded - out of direct line between Top and Bottom. Top and Bottom shout their demands at one another. They are non-responsive to one another's demands. Both of them try to get Middle involved. Middle shrugs them off. They keep trying. Middle gestures welcoming them to deal with their issues without him. I'm out of this. Top and Bottom are frustrated with one another...and with Middle.)

LAURIE

That would not be sliding into the middle.

MIDDLE 1

Terrific, and I'd also be out of a job.

Mime

(Top gestures to Middle that he is fired. Middle shrugs and begins to walk off.)

LAURIE

Probably so. So you might ask yourself another question. *(slowly.)* How can *I* help them work out their issues with one another.

Mime

(Middle goes to Top, explaining the situation to Top. Top understands and

instructs Middle to handle it with Bottom. No, says Middle. Here is what you, Top, need to do. Top is not happy with this. Top insists; Middle resists. I'll help you deal with your issue. Top is not happy. Middle is calm. Just a moment, says Middle as he heads off to Bottom.)

(Middle goes to Bottom. Explains the situation. Bottom attempts to get Middle back into the middle. No says Middle. This is not my issue; it's yours. Bottom resists. Tries to send Middle on. No says Middle. I'll help you deal with your issue. Bottom is not happy.)

(Middle moves to the center. He gestures Top and Bottom to begin. He is calm and graceful. He indicates his willingness, eagerness even, to help them with their issues. It is Top and Bottom who are now nervous and uncertain.)

(Middle sits up straight. Something is clicking. The strength is coming back. He stands.)

MIDDLE 1

Wait a minute! I'm getting something here.

LAURIE

What?

(The phone rings. MIDDLE 1 offhandedly disconnects the phone while continuing to speak.)

MIDDLE 1

I'm beginning to see the light.

(CLERK enters.)

OUT!!

(CLERK hastily retreats.)

(to LAURIE)

These are not *my* problems!

LAURIE

You got it!

MIDDLE 1

These are *their* problems.

LAURIE

Exactly.

MIDDLE 1

(*Getting a bit angry*)

And they're blaming *me* for not fixing *their* problems.

LAURIE

Uh huh.

MIDDLE 1

And they're seeing *me* as weak. They're all saying: Hey, Middle, just do it! As simple as that. As if *they* could *just do it*.

LAURIE

I think you're getting the feel of this.

MIDDLE 1

(*Full of energy, rearing to go.*)

My job is to help *them* deal with *their* stuff.

LAURIE

You seem ready to get moving.

MIDDLE 1

They're not going to like this.

LAURIE

It's a lot more fun kicking *you* around.

MIDDLE 1

We'll see. (*Shouts out to the CLERK.*) All right, I'm ready to see you now.

(CLERK *enters as the scene ends*)

Act II, Scene 2

(one month later)

(The Middle Manager suite. MIDDLES 2, 3 and 4 are in hectic movement, criss-crossing one another across the stage as in the previous scene, with the same hesitation dance as they pause briefly to answer and respond to calls. MIDDLE 1 watches this bemusedly, shrugs, then calmly walks off the stage. ANGEL LAURIE enters, a newly appointed Middle. She tries, with little success, to get the attention of the other Middles. She watches the following scene unfold.

[Note: MIDDLE 3 cries for help are the foreground, the actions of other Middles are background. The audience focus is on MIDDLE 3.]

(MIDDLE 3 stops, is desperate.)

MIDDLE 3
(Frantic. Screams.)

HELP!! I NEED HELP.

(The other Middles freeze in place; they've heard something, but they quickly ignore it and resume racing to and fro, answering their phone calls, wrapped up in their own business.)

EXERCISE BIKES!

(The others continue to ignore him, except MIDDLE 2 who flashes a knowing, devilish smile and then continues on her way.)

THERE'S A CRISIS BREWING. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.

(No response.)

I NEED SUPPORT.

(No response.)

(Plaintively.)

I just need to talk.

(No response.)

Anyone?

(No response.)

Well, maybe I should just start talking.

(He comes front and center stage, stands there talking to himself despite the fact that no one is listening. Then he exits.)

(ANGEL LAURIE reaches out to MIDDLES 3 and 4, but they elude her grasp. Finally, she leaps at MIDDLE 4 and wrestles him to a halt. MIDDLE 3 races off stage on an errand. LAURIE talks with MIDDLE 4 whose speech is clipped, robot-like.)

LAURIE

Can we talk?

MIDDLE 4

Who you?

LAURIE

I'm the new middle.

MIDDLE 4

Sorry, don't talk to Middles.

LAURIE

(stunned)

Don't talk to Middles? I don't get it. Why don't you talk to Middles?

MIDDLE 4

Just don't. No time. No point really.

LAURIE

I just saw this other Middle - crying out for help.

MIDDLE 4

Too bad, too bad. His problem.

LAURIE

But you don't talk to him.

MIDDLE 4

No time. No time. Too bad.

LAURIE

I see. Well do you talk to *anybody*?

MIDDLE 4

Oh yes. Lots of anybodies. Almost any anybodies. Too many anybodies.

LAURIE

Like whom?

MIDDLE 4

Tops. Top talk. Lots of Top talk. Different Tops. Tell me lots of things. Different things. Top 1 tells me this, Top 2 tells me that. This and that. Try to do both. *Have* to do both. But this ain't that, and that ain't this.

LAURIE

It must be confusing.

MIDDLE 4

Oh yes. Confusing. That's the job. Confusing.

LAURIE

Do you talk to anyone else?

MIDDLE 4

Oh yes. Bottom talk. Much Bottom talk. Want this. Want that.
Many thisses. Many thats. Complaints. Oh yes. Many
complaints. Complaint complaint complaint complaint No end.
And customer talk. Talk talk talk. Supplier talk. Talk talk talk.

LAURIE

You talk funny.

MIDDLE 4

Midspeak. Saves time.

LAURIE

Well you *do* seem to talk a lot...even if only in short sentences.

MIDDLE 4

Yes.

LAURIE

But no Middle talk.

MIDDLE 4

No, no Middle talk. No point. Not really. Not my job.

LAURIE

Wouldn't there be some value in getting together now and
then, sharing experiences, helping one another?

MIDDLE 4

(Seems panicked by the thought.)

No, not really. No point.
Don't get along, you see.
Competitive you might say.
Don't care much for the others.

LAURIE

You don't like them?

MIDDLE 4

Oh, no. Not at all.

LAURIE

What don't you like?

MIDDLE 4

(points to other Middles around the room.)

That one. Too intellectual. *(mimics thinking)* Too much thinking, thinking. That one. Too emotional. Feeling, feeling, feeling. *(Mimics drama.)* Too much feeling. And see, see. That one. Those clothes. Weird clothes. And that hair. Ha ha. And look at the one. The way he walks. *(Mimics a stiff walk.)* Ho ho. Funny, funny.

LAURIES

(incredulous.)

That's it? *That's* what you don't like. *(Eye roll or shrug.)* Pretty deep stuff.

MIDDLE 4

Yes. deep. Trouble, trouble. They make trouble for me. You make trouble for me. *(Middle 4 starts to walk off.)* Gotta go. *(MIDDLE 4 exits.)*

LAURIE

(Shouts after her.)

How do they do that? How do they make trouble for you?

(MIDDLE 3 enters.)

MIDDLE 3

Just watch.

(MIDDLES 1, 2 and 4 come on stage and stand at different corners.)

(From off stage comes the voice of MIDDLE 3'S Worker, WORKER 3)

WORKER 3

Hey, boss. Where are *our* exercise bikes?

MIDDLE 3

(surprise)

What's this all about?

WORKER 3

Exercise bikes. Over in Unit Two. They got exercise bikes. (M2 *stands proud, struts about.*) What about us? Where are our exercise bikes.

MIDDLE 3
(to LAURIE)

Understand, this is the first I hear about exercise bikes.

LAURIE

From your workers?.

MIDDLE 3

From my workers. Not from my friend over there. (*Shouts across to MIDDLE 2*) Thanks a lot, buddy! (MIDDLE 2 *dismisses him, he couldn't care less.*)

LAURIE

So now what?

MIDDLE 3

So now I got a problem. Do *we* get exercise bikes? If I don't I'm in trouble with my workers. But do we *need* exercise bikes?

LAURIE

So what do you do?

MIDDLE 3

While I'm studying the situation, Middle 4's workers pipe up.

WORKER 4

Where are *our* exercise bikes.

MIDDLE 3

And without missing a beat, Middle 4 says

MIDDLE 4

You want exercise bikes? Fine. No problem. You got exercise bikes.

MIDDLE 3
(to LAURIE)

So now all eyes are on me. What about *our* exercise bikes? I think it over. I look at the budget. I look at our work. I twist it this way and that way. No matter how I twist it, exercise bikes

just won't work in my section. So I tell my people. *(to his workers.)* Sorry, folks. No exercise bikes. *(Moans. Muttering and shouting: UNFAIR! UNFAIR! UNFAIR!)* So now my workers hate me. I hate these other Middles. They hate me. My workers complain to the boss. *(Worker voices: UNFAIR! WE WANT OUR EXERCISE BIKES. To LAURIE)* So now the boss hates all of us.

BOSS

(voice from above.)

EXERCISE BIKES! WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH YOU PEOPLE?
WHY AM I DEALING WITH EXERCISE BIKES?

MIDDLE 3

(to LAURIE; sounds of voices in discussion.)

So now we got committees on exercise bikes. And that's not the end of it.

BOSS' BOSS

(Voice from a distance dripping with sarcasm.)

Hello over there.

MIDDLE 3

It's the boss' boss from corporate. Now he hates all of us.

BOSS' BOSS

(Voice from a distance with continuing sarcasm)

I'm sure you can explain to me how exercise bikes are critical to our bottom line. But just in case you can't... *(switches to anger)*... THERE IS IMPORTANT BUSINESS TO BE DONE. *(Furious.)* WHY ARE WE WASTING OUR TIME ON EXERCISE BIKES!

MIDDLE 3

(winces in pain.)

Now everybody hates everybody.

LAURIE

Just because you Middles don't talk to one another.

MIDDLE 3

(defensive)

That's not it. Middle 2 just stabbed me in the back.

LAURIE

I don't think Middle 2 gave you a thought.

MIDDLE 3

(Starts to go after MIDDLE 2, but is stopped by LAURIE.)
Don't worry. He'll get his..

LAURIE

Great! That's really going to make things hum around here.

MIDDLE 3

You got a better idea?

LAURIE

I do. We Middles need to become a team.

MIDDLE 3

Now there's a good one.

LAURIE

We get together regularly.

MIDDLE 3

(sarcasm)

That would be fun.

(The other Middles come on stage. They start in on one another -- arguing, pointing fingers, blaming, ignoring, dismissing.)

LAURIE

Stop it!

(Tosses a bit of fairy dust. They freeze.)

Come here...all of you. Bring your chairs. *(They come with their chairs.)* Sit. *(They sit.)* Now, form a group. *(They line their seats in a row, barely edging ever so slightly closer to one another, each Middle facing straight ahead. LAURIE rolls her eyes.)* I have a very important piece of knowledge for you. It's a little complicated, so you need to pay attention. Are you ready? *(They nod.)* Here's how it goes.

(As LAURIE lectures, the fairy dust appears to wear off. The Middles listen half-heartedly while returning to their cell phones and report writing.)

You think that the reason you can't become a team is because of how you feel about one another -- you have little in common, you're competitive, you don't like one another, there's no power among you. Right?

ALL

(Looking up from their work, they shout)

RIGHT!

Laurie: And if you felt differently about one another, then you *could* become a team.

(Looking up from work, they shrug indecisively: Maybe we could, but not likely.)

Well I say just the opposite is true. You feel the way you feel about one another *because* you don't work as a team...and, if you *did* work as a team, you would feel very differently about one another.

MIDDLE 2

(looks up.)

Uh...could you run that through again?

LAURIE

I say you feel the way you feel about one another because you don't work as a team, and if you did work as a team, you would feel very differently about one another.

ALL

(dismissively)

NO WAY!

(Then back to cell phones and reports.)

LAURIE

Look. I have flown around the world.

MIDDLE 2

Flown?

LAURIE

(glances self-consciously at her wings.)

Let's just say I travel a lot.

MIDDLE 2

So?

LAURIE

So I've seen hundreds of Middles all over the world. There are millions of them out there. *(Gesturing to encompass the world.)* And they *all* feel the same way toward their peers -- us be a team? You've got to be dreaming.

They're all out there judging one another just the way you are. They don't like one another.

They don't get along.

See, You think this is just you. *(pause)* Well you're wrong. This is how most Middles around the world feel about one another.

(pause) It's a puzzle, right? So how do you explain that?

MIDDLE 2

Bad selection processes? The failure lies with Human Resources Departments worldwide.

(LAURIE shakes her head.)

MIDDLE 3

Bad genes? There is a bent Middle gene that's passed on from one generation of Middles to the next.

(LAURIE shrugs.)

MIDDLE 4

I got it. The higher your rise in the organization, the worse a person you become.

MIDDLE 3

(to MIDDLE 4.)

It worked for you.

LAURIE

You don't really believe that, do you?

(The Middles throw up their hands, shrug their shoulders, scratch their heads. It is clear: they are stumped. And it's clear they really don't care. They go right back to their business, talking on cell phones, writing reports, ignoring LAURIE and one another. LAURIE sprinkles some more angel dust, but nothing happens. She sprinkles more. Still nothing. She is puzzled, but she continues although no one is listening, and she is growing increasingly annoyed that no one is listening.)

I'll make it simple. Isolation breeds contempt; and contempt breeds isolation. Whether it's isolation in our organizations or isolation in our neighborhoods.

(No one is listening.)

(frustrated and angry. She has had it with these folks.)

And isolation breeds *(shouts)* POWERLESSNESS!

(The Middles look up, stunned.)

DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION?

(She does.)

(She has had enough of being ignored. She yanks a cell phone away from one Middle, she drags another Middle and his chair closer to the others. She pulls a pen out of the hands of another. She leans into the ear of another and shouts "Listen up!" She has lost her cool and is getting their attention.)

(slowly) WE ARE TALKING POWER HERE. *(pause)* WE ARE TALKING ABOUT HAVING THE *POWER* TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN AROUND HERE.

(With contempt.) WHEN WILL YOU HAVE ENOUGH OF BEING A PACK OF BACK-STABBING, WEAK, CONFUSED, COLLECTIVELY POWERLESS *(She struggles to find the right word)...* NINCOMPOOPS!

MIDDLES
(weakly)

Nincompoops?

LAURIE
NINCOMPOOPS. *(sarcasm)* YOU MUST *LOVE* BEING POWERLESS. *(weakly)* I give up. *(She starts to leave.)*

MIDDLE 2
(Looking straight ahead, but speaking to LAURIE.)
So where do we go from here, Laurie?

LAURIE
(Still angry.)
I don't care where you go.

(All Middles are focused on LAURIE.)

MIDDLE 2
(tries again.)
So where do we go from here?

LAURIE
(Calmly, returning toward the group. The lecturing tone is gone.) It's simple. Connect. Just connect.

(She joins the group, speaking now as one of them.)

Look, If we stop allowing ourselves to be isolated, if we come together and share our thoughts and feelings with one another, if we find common battles to fight, if we support one another and solve problems together..

I promise you, we will feel very differently about one another. We will understand one another... respect one another. Why we might even come to love one another.

(They cautiously steal glances at one another.)

And, together, we will have POWER, the power to innovate, the power to solve problems, the power to make a real difference around here. So that's our choice. Isolate or connect.

*(The Middles look cautiously at one another, at first brief glances, then full face. Gradually they pull their chairs into a close circle, LAURIE joins them, they lean in, and begin to talk. You hear an occasional "I didn't know that," "Interesting!" "Maybe we can do something." You very clearly hear MIDDLE 4: **"I've got some thoughts about that exercise bike business."** As the circle tightens.)*

*(Just as the huddle is getting intense, a voice calls: **"MIDDLE 1, I need you now."** MIDDLE 1 gets up to leave. LAURIE pulls MIDDLE 1 back. Another voice: **"MIDDLE 4, we need you NOW!"** MIDDLE 4 gets up to leave, but is pulled back by all the Middles. The circle tightens, arms around on another's shoulders, heads forward in intense conversation. Voices call **"MIDDLES, WE NEED YOU NOW!!**, but the circle holds as the scene ends.)*

ACT III
THE TOPS

ACT III, Scene 1

(Two months later)

(MIDDLE LAURIE has wandered into the Top offices. Only TOP 1 is present. There are large charts around the room with huge block letters at the top reading TOP BUSINESS. LAURIE approaches TOP 1, handing TOP 1 several sheets of paper.)

LAURIE

You asked for these?

TOP 1

Yes, yes. Let's have a look. *(Studies the first sheet.)* Hmm. All right, I'll just have to think about this.

LAURIE

(hesitant) I was wondering about this.

TOP 1

Yes?

LAURIE

This just seems to be the seating arrangement at the company banquet.

TOP 1

That's what it is.

LAURIE

I was just wondering why *you* were working on the seating arrangement.

TOP 1

(huffy)

The seating arrangement is my responsibility.

LAURIE

(incredulous)

The seating arrangement?

TOP 1

Oh, yes. Very important. (*impatient*) I'm quite busy. What else do you have there?

LAURIE

(*hands TOP 1 a second sheet.*) This is a report from the exercise bike committee.

TOP 1

(*big sigh*)

Oh god, yes. I'll have to decide what to do about those darn exercise bikes. (*Pondering, head shaking.*)

LAURIE

You need to decide?

TOP 1

Of course.

(*LAURIE shrugs.*)

TOP 1

You said something?

LAURIE

(*covering up and going for the next item*)

Ah, let's see. Then there's this matter of scheduling the racquet ball court.

TOP 1

(*Grabs the paper. This is a serious matter.*)

Yes, very touchy business. (*impatient.*) What else do you have?

LAURIE

(*Summarizing the various sheets of paper and handing them to*

TOP 1.)

Well, there are two workers disagreeing about the best use for a piece of equipment.

TOP 1

I'll look into it.

LAURIE

(hands TOP 1 another sheet.)

There's a customer visit tomorrow.

TOP 1

I'll plan the itinerary.

LAURIE

(another sheet)

There doesn't appear to be enough hot water for showers.

TOP 1

I'll call the plumbers.

Laurie:

(looking at the next sheet, incredulous)

The color of the crepe paper for the Christmas party?

TOP 1

Ah yes. One of my traditional responsibilities.

LAURIE

(hesitant)

Excuse me.

TOP 1

(Busily poring over the papers.)

Yes, what is it?

LAURIE

Might I make an observation?

TOP 1

Certainly. We at the top *always* welcome observations.

LAURIE

Well...It's just that you act as if there is no one else in this organization.

TOP 1

(Still poring over the documents, deciding, deciding.)
Come, come. What are you getting at?

LAURIE

The seating arrangements...exercise bikes...hot water...customer itineraries...(disbelief) crepe paper. I don't get it. Why are *you* dealing with these?

TOP 1

It's my responsibility.

LAURIE

(hesitant)

Well...isn't it kind of heavy? I mean dealing with *all* that responsibility.

TOP 1

Of course it's heavy. Heavy is top; top is heavy.

LAURIE

Burdened?

TOP 1

Of course. *(As if explaining a simple equation to a child.)* Top is burdened; burdened is top. That's just the way it is.

LAURIE

And you *like* being burdened?

TOP 1

It's not a matter of like. It's beyond like. *(pompous)* Way beyond like. It's...it's...responsibility. Leadership.

(Song)

Top Hat

It has to be me
It's got to be me
Who else could it be to get things done?
But number one
(two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight)

(Perhaps she'll learn to delegate)
(Or just collapse beneath the weight)

Who else can authorize spending hikes
Revise lunch menus
Avert pending strikes
Be tending to each customer's needs and likes
Expending excess energies on exercise bikes

Not him, not her, not he, not she
Not them, not they
(Not us, not we)
It's my responsibility
Cause the biggest little word in management is me

Top is heavy, heavy is top
Every twenty four seven I'm inspecting the shop
Protecting market share, and restocking the pop
I'm pushing forty and...pushing a mop?

The job's nonstop, but I do it becuz
I'm simply tops and that's what a top does

Who else has the wherewithal that I possess
Who'd care to take the fall, and to bear the load of stress
Who else can make a call on the proper code of dress
(Who else would have the gall to claim all our success)

Not him, not her, not he, not she
Not them, not they
(Not us, not we)
Inevitably, it's inescapable
I am the only one who's capable

Who's knockin' on the door of innovation
Rockin' on the floor of implementation
Yes, I am the core of the corporation

It's me
It's me
C'est moi

*(LAURIE points to the TOP BUSINESS
CHARTS around the room.)*

TOP 1

(notices what she is pointing to.)

That's Top business. Very important stuff.

LAURIE

I see. This says "Long Range Planning."

TOP 1

Oh yes, long range planning is *very* important Top business.

LAURIE

I'll bet it is. *(looks closely)* But I don't see anything on the chart. It's blank.

TOP 1

Well we haven't quite got to it. You see...what with the exercise bikes...and...and...the showers...and...

LAURIE

And this chart. "Analysis of the Competition."

TOP 1

Also very important. It's critical to understand the competition.

LAURIE

But there's nothing on that chart either.

TOP 1

(embarrassed)

Yes, yes. I know. We've got to get to that. But, you know...

LAURIE

Uh huh, with the showers and the racquet ball schedule.

TOP 1

So you *do* understand. There are all these matter that keep coming up. *Immediate* issues. Things *demanding* my attention. Fires to put out.

LAURIE

(Pointing to another TOP BUSINESS chart.)

And "Strategies for Increasing Market Share."

TOP 1

(humiliated)

Stop, stop. I know. That one is empty too. *(Total frustration, anger.)* Do you think it's easy? Carrying the burden of this organization. Waking in the middle of the night. Palms damp. Heart pounding. Worrying. Thinking about all the things I'm not doing that I *should* be doing. All the things that I'm not doing well enough. Don't you think I know how people feel...that we're letting them down, not doing our jobs. And it's true. We *are* letting them down. We're the Tops. We're responsible.

LAURIE

For *everything*? For the showers? Seating arrangements? The color of Christmas decorations? For every question that comes your way? Every fire is yours to put out? Are you *really* responsible for all of that?

TOP 1

(ponders)

Hmmm...yes. I'd have to say yes.

LAURIE

You don't suppose there are other folks in this organization who could handle those...uh...important issues?

TOP 1

(thinks it over)

No. I really don't think so.

LAURIE

Couldn't the Middles take some of this load off your back?

TOP 1

(Laughing, side slapping, as if LAURIE has just made the most ridiculous joke.)

Ha, ha, ha. That *is* a good one. The Middles. Take the load off my back? You are kidding. The Middles *are* the load. *(biting)* A weak, wishy-washy, back-biting bunch of incompetents. You saw how they handled that exercise bike business. *(sarcastic)* Take the load of my back. Ha.

LAURIE

So let me understand something. When you were hiring Middles, did you intentionally set out to find a bunch of weak, wishy-washy, back-biting incompetents? You thought that might be good for the business? Is that how it happened?

TOP 1

Of course not. We selected highly intelligent, hard-working, competent people with good track records.

LAURIE

I see. *(As if trying to understand.)* And then they caught some sort of disease which turned them into a bunch of weak, wishy-washy, back-biting, incompetents. Is that it?

TOP 1

(Throws up hands. Frustrated.)

I don't know how it happened. It just happened.

LAURIE

I have a thought for you. But I'm hesitant. I don't want to add to your burden...

TOP 1

(frightened)

Please don't.

LAURIE

But you do need to see *your* part in creating those weak, wishy-washy, back-biting incompetents.

TOP 1

(affronted)

My part! I pay them well.

LAURIE

And you treat them like children.

TOP 1

Explain this to me.

LAURIE

Do you really want to hear it?

TOP 1

Is it going to hurt?

LAURIE

Probably.

TOP 1

(opens arms in welcoming gesture.)

All right, hit me.

LAURIE

To put it bluntly. *(Slowly.)* You are one...huge...sucking-up machine.

TOP 1

Sucking-up machine?

LAURIE

Every problem that comes up - critical or trivial - you suck it up. It's like a reflex with you. You don't think about it. It's not a decision you make. You just...suck...it...up.

TOP 1

That's leadership.

LAURIE

Uh uh. That's sucking it up. And here's the thing to think about. The more you suck it up, the more you weaken everybody else. You keep sending them the same message: *(Slowly.) You can't handle this; only I can.*

(Three Middles drift into the background. They are engaged in conversation, apparently attempting to work out some issue.)

TOP 1

(ponders)

So that's what you mean...about *my* part in creating weak Middles.

LAURIE

Exactly.

TOP 1

So where do I go from here?

LAURIE

Get clear about who *you* are.

TOP 1

Well, if I'm not going to be a huge sucking-up machine... what am I going to be?

(Ponders. Looks at the empty TOP BUSINESS charts; studies the papers LAURIE has brought. Illumination.)

Why *am* I dealing with this stuff?

LAURIE

That's a good beginning.

TOP 1

I'd like lots of folks - *everyone* maybe - to feel responsible for this organization.

LAURIE

That would be nice, wouldn't it?

TOP 1

(A light dawns.)

I know what my job is.

LAURIE

Let's hear it.

TOP 1

(enthusiasm)

I am a *creator* of responsibility. My job is to *create* responsibility throughout this system. That's leadership. Right? So now I have to figure out how to do that. How to *create* responsibility.

(ponders)

(The background Middle conversation turns into argument, then stalemate. They are stuck. A Middle picks up the phone and calls TOP 1.)

(TOP 1 picks up the phone, listens, nods, looking increasingly concerned, hangs up, gathers some papers, and rises to leave. To LAURIE.)

I need to go. We'll talk later.

LAURIE

Wait, where are you going?

TOP 1

The Middles.

LAURIE

What?

TOP 1

They're stuck.

LAURIE

So?

TOP 1

So...they *need* me.

(Meanwhile, the Middles have stopped talking to one another and are now waiting for the Top. Various signs of boredom and impatience -- sleeping, filing finger nails, reading the newspaper, etc.)

LAURIE

(incredulous)

Uh huh.

TOP 1

(defensively)

That's what they said. WE NEED YOUR LEADERSHIP.

LAURIE

You are hopeless.

TOP 1
(offended)

Hopeless?

LAURIE
You are just dying to get right in there and suck it up.
(mocking) They need my leadership. Give me a break.

*(The Middles continue to await passively
Top's leadership.)*

TOP 1
But they can't do it.

(Middles shrug in powerless agreement.)

LAURIE
Listen to me. *(slowly)* The *last* thing they need right now...the
very last thing they need...is *your* leadership. *(pause)* They
need your confidence, your belief in *their* leadership.

*(TOP 1 paces, ponders, while the
Middles wait.)*

(TOP 1 picks up the phone.)

*(The Middles come to attention, panting,
awaiting the answer.)*

TOP 1
(a deep breath)
I NEED YOU TO WORK IT OUT.

*(Hangs up the phone. The Middle stares
disbelieving into the phone. They are all
stunned, disappointed, helpless,
abandoned. Gradually they look to one
another, shrug. Clarity hits: "If not him,
maybe it really is up to us" -- they come
together with zest, heads in, tight, and
begin to work.)*

ACT III, Scene 2

(The Executive Suite. TOPS 2 and 3 are at their desks, at maximum distance and facing away from one another, each working a tube-like contraption by which messages are sent down to the organization. TOP 4 is ushering ANGEL LAURIE, now a Top, to her Top location, a fourth desk, situated like the others with its own communication contraption. TOP 1 will enter the scene later on.)

TOP 4

Here you are. And here's your stovepipe.

LAURIE

Excuse me?

TOP 4

Your stovepipe.

LAURIE

I don't understand.

TOP 4

This is how you communicate *your* messages to the organization.

LAURIE

My messages?

TOP 4

Yes, each of us has our own stovepipe. It's neater that way. Less fuss.

(Song)

You've Got Yours and I Got Mine

Laurie

Right here, this is my space

Theirs is a big disgrace
Is that what you're saying my friends?
Stay in your own place
Stay out of my face.
But when is this going to end?

Top #1

My work here is most key
It is all up to me
I make everything happen round here
I am the first to see
What direction we all need
Am I making myself perfectly clear?

Top Chorus

Silos, silos work just fine
Teamwork, it's a waste of my time (a big waste of my time)
The problem with this struggle
It's just not worth the trouble
Cause you got yours and I got mine. You see?

Top #2

I'm on the fast track
No one can hold me back
I know how to make things work here
These others are too soft
Bottom line at all costs
I give the workers something to fear

Top Chorus

Silos, silos work just fine – yeah they work just fine!
Teamwork, it's a waste of my time – TEAMWORK?!
The problem with this struggle
It's just not worth the trouble
Cause you got yours and I got mine.

(repeat - ad lib)

LAURIE

(incredulous)

I was told I'd be joining the Top *Team*.

TOP 4

A euphemism. Something for the stockholders. We tried teamwork. There were signs that it just wasn't working for us.

LAURIE

Signs?

TOP 4

Signs...such as...throwing things...calling one another vile names...threatening lawsuits...signs...like that.

LAURIE

I see.

(The following begins very calmly and business-like and gradually builds to fury.)

TOP 4

We each have our areas of responsibility. We take pride in these. We understand them. We know them better than anyone else could ever know them. *(heats up)* And we resent anyone else sticking their noses in our business...*(more heat)* telling *me* what's wrong with it...implying that I don't know what I'm doing...that I'm not doing enough...not trusting me...not respecting me...telling *me* what's best for the organization...*(furious)* Well I'll be damned if I'm going take any more of this...We'll see who really makes this place tick...

LAURIE

Uh huh. So you have some feelings about this.

TOP 4

(Distracted, having just overheard a stove-piped message from a counterpart.)

Excuse me. *(He shouts into his stovepipe.)* Please ignore the previous ill-thought-out message. No new priority of that order is to be implemented until it is passed through my department.

TOP 2

Ignore that order. Implement the previous order.

TOP 3

Ignore *that* order, do the order two steps back.

TOP 4

Ignore both of them. Proceed with the following order.

TOP 2

(confused)

Uh...Ignore that order...Uh...Proceed with the previously described order, three...or was it four...steps back.

(They are all shouting simultaneously into their stovepipes.)

LAURIE

This is not working.

TOP 3

(Whispering to LAURIE.)

You're absolutely right. You seem to have a good head on your shoulders. Between the two of us we can get these two fools out of here and start moving this company into the future.

TOP 4

(As LAURIE recoils from TOP 3, TOP 1 whispers to her.)

Stick with me, sweetheart; this is where the glory lies.

LAURIE

(Recoils.) Sweetheart! You've got to be kidding.

(As TOPS 3 and 4 busy themselves trying to enroll LAURIE, TOP 2 stealthily sabotages their desks -- stealing memos, hiding items in their drawers, blocking their stovepipes with whatever materials he can find.)

(The Tops move back to their locations, backs to one another, busying themselves in their work. TOPS 3 and 4 are having difficulty finding things.)

(LAURIE stands in the center of the room.)

LAURIE

We have got to talk. *(The Tops ignore her and continue with their work.)* We have got to talk. *(They shake their heads.)* This is important. *(No response. She pulls their chairs together. The Tops grudgingly move closer together.)*

LAURIE

You *do* understand what's happening, don't you?
(No response. Slowly)

You are driving this organization crazy. You're confusing everybody. *(Points to one.)* You send one message and *(points to another)* and you send something else. You're making it impossible for people to collaborate with one another. Nobody knows what this organization stands for. What they *do* know is that you Tops don't have your act together. You understand all this, don't you? *(They meekly nod their heads.)*

So now, I have a few questions. Have you *always* hated one another? *(They nod their heads.)* Always? Think about it. *(They're thinking.)* Get back to the beginning...when this team was first formed. *(They're thinking.)* Was it your idea to be part of a team whose members *hated* one another? Was *that* your big idea? Come on, think. Get back to the beginning.

(LAURIE sprinkles her Fairy Dust over their heads. As the following unfolds, the Tops rise from their chairs and gradually move closer to one another as they get into their memories of a better time.)

Top 4

Well actually no; it wasn't that way at all.

TOP 2

As I remember it we felt pretty good about one another.

TOP 4

Like we were going to make a great team.

TOP 3

(pointing to TOP 4)

He was our marketing genius. He was going to move us to the top.

TOP 2

(pointing to TOP 3)

And he was our entrepreneur, our wave of the future.

TOP 4

(pointing to TOP 2)

And you were our people person. You were going to create the ideal workplace. Make us into a real family.

LAURIE

Sounds pretty good.

(They are back in the past, feeling in the present what they had felt then. They are now together, sweet smiles on their faces, swaying together side to side.)

So what happened?

(They are puzzled. Much head shaking.)

TOP 3

I guess we were wrong.

(Anger returns.)

TOP 4

(to TOP 3)

I certainly was wrong about you. You almost drove us into bankruptcy with your idiotic schemes.

TOP 3

(to TOP 4)

And if you hadn't blocked me at every turn, we'd be number one today.

TOP 2

(to TOP 4)

Who'd have thought you'd become such an egotistical empire-builder? Your people strut around treating us as if *we're* the enemy.

TOP 3

(to TOP 2)

And who'd have thought you'd become such a slimy back-stabber?

TOP 2

(to TOP 3)

Someone had to slow you down.

TOP 3

(to TOP 2)

Ha! That's a good one. *You're* going to slow me down. (*With scorn.*) You born loser.

(They go at one another. All we hear are isolated words and phrases: Back-stabber. Sneaky. Selfish. Lying. Egotistical, I get no respect. I don't trust you, I never did. It escalates until TOP 2 grabs TOP 4 and begins to shake him violently while TOP 3 looks on gleefully.)

LAURIE

Hold it. (*A sprinkle of Fairy Dust. They freeze.*) So explain this to me. How did we get from "We're a great team" to this? What happened?

(The Tops are genuinely puzzled. What happened? They think for a few moments, muttering to themselves: "What happened?")

TOP 4

SUCCESS!

TOP 3

Success? You mean you know what did it?

TOP 4

Success. Success did it. Don't you see? We were doing O.K. until success hit us.

LAURIE

I think I can guess what happened next.

TOP 4

How can you know? You weren't even here.

LAURIE

I didn't have to be. What happened to you happens to Tops all over the world. Business partners. Married couples too. When life was simple, there was no problem. You were a team. You loved one another, and you worked everything out together. (*They nod.*) And then your world got complex.

TOP 4

Did it ever! Customers...competition...new technology...decisions

TOP 3

All of that and more.

LAURIE

So there came a time when you could no longer do everything together.

TOP 2

We tried, but it was too complex.

LAURIE

Of course, so you differentiated.

TOP 4

(*Not understanding.*)

Differentiated?

LAURIE

Differentiated. Specialized. Divided up responsibilities. You handle this, I'll handle that. You wash, I'll wipe.

TOP 2

So that was our mistake?

LAURIE

Not really. You *had* to differentiate. It was the only way you could handle all that complexity.

TOP 4

So what *did* go wrong?

LAURIE

You started to treat your territory like it was your exclusive property. You put up signs for one another. NO TRESPASSING! VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED. KEEP OUT OF MY TERRITORY. STOP

TOP 2

We went from this being *our* business to each of us have *my* business.

LAURIE

Exactly!

So now we get
defensive,
protective,
not getting the support we need,
not trusting one another,
not getting the respect we feel we deserve.

(The tops are nodding in agreement.)

It's painful, right?

(Nodding in agreement.)

Love turns to hate.

You see, what makes this hard is that you take all this *personally*. And it's not personal at all. You are terrific people. You can become a great team. Just the way you felt at the beginning.

TOP 3

How?

LAURIE

This is not about fixing one another, controlling one another, or breaking up the team. This is about how you master this complex top world without becoming territorial.

(pause)

TOP 2

Maybe the first step (*hesitates*) is take down the NO TRESPASSING signs.

(The others slowly nod agreement. TOP 1 enters and joins the other Tops.)

TOP 4

Maybe we could even start helping one another.

LAURIE

Now there's a *radical* thought.

TOP 2

Maybe we really can be a team.

(pause)

TOP 1

Has anyone noticed how quiet is?

(The others strain to listen.)

Listen carefully.

TOP 4

We're listening.

TOP 1

What do you hear?

(They struggle to hear something.)

TOP 4

Nothing.

TOP 3

I don't hear anything. Do you?

TOP 2

Uh uh. Nothing.

Top 1

Nothing. That's right. Now isn't *that* interesting?

TOP 4
(*panic*)
Nothing! Now I get it. We're hearing *nothing!*

TOP 3
Oh my God. Nothing!

TOP 2
No phones.

TOP 4
No fires.

TOP 2
What's going on down there?

TOP 3
Has everyone gone home?

TOP 4
Is it a holiday? What holiday?

TOP 2
A strike. It's a strike.

TOP 4
We're out of business. I knew it would happen.

TOP 1
Wrong. Business is booming right along.

TOP 2
How can that be? Why aren't the phones ringing? Where are the knocks at the door?

TOP 3
The screaming? The complaints? The crises?

TOP 2
(*panic*)
The fires! Where are the fires we have to put out?

TOP 1
It's all being handled.

TOP 4

Being handled? What have I died and gone to heaven? Who's handling this?

TOP 1

(Makes a sweeping gesture encompassing the rest of the organization.)

They're handling it. All of them.

TOP 4

The workers? Those lazy, whining, complaining, blood-sucking bums!

TOP 1

Yuh, the bums. They're taking care of it. And the Middles, they're handling it.

TOP 3

The Middles? Those weak, confused, back-biting, incompetent fools!

TOP 1

Yuh, the fools. They're basically running the show...working together...

TOP 4

You got to be kidding.

TOP 1

Working together...coordinating things...making sure the workers have everything they need...basically doing everything *we* used to do, only doing it better.

TOP 4

Better than us? Impossible.

TOP 2

(calmly)

Tell me, Laurie. Is it really working?

LAURIE

It's really working.

TOP 2

How can we know?

LAURIE

They're working it out. You'll get all the information you need.
It really is working!

TOP 4

(gestures to other Tops to come close.)

Folks, we got ourselves a real problem. *(They come together.)*
This is serious. It's working. The bums aren't bums, and the
fools aren't fools. And together they're running the show.
Without us.

TOP 3

Don't worry, it'll never last.

TOP 4

Yuh, but what if it does.

TOP 2

You'll see, they'll need our leadership.

TOP 4

Yuh, but what if they won't.

TOP 2

(thinks)

We'll give it to them anyway?

LAURIE

(sarcasm)

That'll be nice. Nothing like a little leadership to get in the way
of progress.

TOP 4

So what *do* we do? If we're not being bothered by phone
calls...and knocks on the door...and fires to fight, *(plaintively)*
what's left for us?

*(They mill around, scratch their heads,
ponder the question: What's left for us?)*

TOP 1

(Points to the TOP BUSINESS charts.)

Think about all those things that are keeping us up at night.
All the things that aren't happening that *need* to happen.

(They think.)

TOP 4

Aha! Like thinking about the future.

(Enthusiasm builds.)

TOP 3

Like getting into new technology.

TOP 2

Like creating the workplace family we dreamed about.

TOP 4

Like getting smarter about the competition.

TOP 3

Spending more time listening...

TOP 2

To our workers...

TOP 3

To our customers.

TOP 1

Maybe even to one another. *(They nod.)*

LAURIE

All right! It seems like you have quite a bit of work to do.

TOP 1

(stunned)

You. What do you mean *you*? Aren't you one of us?

LAURIE

I need to move on.

TOP 2

You can't move on, Laurie. We need you. Everyone needs you.
The Workers. The Middles. Us. We all need you.

LAURIE

None of you need me. You all know exactly what this organization needs.
The workers need to produce *and* protect.
The Middles need to keep themselves from being torn up in the middle, *and* they need to keep connecting with one another.
And you, do you know what you need to do?

TOP 2

It sounds like one thing we need to do is get out of their way.

TOP 1

Or at least make it easy for them to do what they need to do.

TOP 3

And *we* need to do Top business. Whatever we can do to see that this organization has a future.

(They nod.)

LAURIE

So there you have it.

(She looks out over the audience searching for a new opportunity, some place else that needs her. She sees what she's been looking for. Smiles. Rubbing her hands together, relishing her new challenge, she slowly removes her Top costume revealing herself to the Tops as an angel.)

(The Tops are stunned. What's with the wings?)

(She sprinkles fairy dust on herself, trying to make herself disappear. It doesn't work. She shrugs, and walks off.)

TOP 1

(still stunned)

Well, Partners, what do you say? Are we ready for a new beginning?

OTHERS

As ready as we'll ever be.

(Just as they are ready to leave, a Middle rushes on excitedly.)

MIDDLE

They've solved the exercise bike problem!

ALL TOPS

(Cheers, high fives, victory dancing)

YEAHH!!

(beat)

MIDDLE

Now they want treadmills.

*(The Tops freeze, there is a loud BANG!
The lights go out.)*

Curtain