

## You Know, This Could Catch On

Written by Alex Baer

Sunday, 15 July 2012 23:25 - Last Updated Sunday, 15 July 2012 23:31

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Some businesses have figured out a way to make a go of it, even in tight times: Just do business like the Pentagon and its contractors.

Say you're out in the country, seeing the sights, when you spot a nondescript place with a giant, neon sign that screams, "EAT!" in three colors. You pull in, go inside, order a 'burger, fries, and a pop -- the penultimate American meal.

"Sure thing," says the guy at the counter, all smiles, and says, "that'll be 14 million dollars, on the nose -- if you buy it now, and can take delivery in 60 days."

The guy continues, his eyes briefly watching you chewing your bottom lip. "Of course, by then, it'll be closer to 40 million, what with cost overruns, for those three meals that you wanted. Of course, there's no guarantee what'll be in 'em, at that low a price," the counterman concludes.

Something fizzles and pops in your head. You narrow your eyes, not aiming to be played today, right now, and say clearly, "That was only the one meal I wanted," you assert, hands propped on the countertop.

"Oh, right, right," says counter guy, checking a note pad close to your hand, his finger tracing the surface of a completely blank page. "That's actually closer to 12-point-9 billion, for those 723 meals you ordered.

The counter guy looks left, then right, quickly, then leans in, speaking quietly, saying, "We can go 10 billion even, cash, but there's no telling what'll be in those 300 meals you wanted."

At this point, two men casually stroll out from behind an office door, to the far right of the counter. The shorter guy, you notice, looks like a turtle. The other one has the kind of swagger that only a lifetime of money, special privilege, and routine penalty escape can bring. They're both in suits, although Turtle's is far less expensive. Both are wearing fright wigs in ultra-bright red, white, and blue.

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Turtle comes up and pokes you in the stomach repeatedly, frowning, looking you up and down. "You look familiar, but I don't know if The Orangeman approves of your kind." He cranes his neck up to look you in the eye. "All I can tell you is that this is a very fine and fair offer, as all our constituents back home would agree."

Adjusting his fright wig meticulously, Turtle states, "I think you should accept the offer, especially as I hope to work in this fine enterprise someday."

Swagger glides up alongside you, trying to bump you, as intimidation, but is light as a feather, and stumbles backward. "Everything fine here? Need anything?" he anxiously asks counter guy.

Counter guy leans back, slowly stroking his chin. "Not sure yet, Willard," counter guy says, leveling his gaze at you.

By now, you're fed up with these idiotic games, telling yourself, "Surely there's more places than *this* to get food!" You head for the door, calling over your shoulder, "I'll pass," and firmly stride out to the car.

You fire up the car, then look up from the key, finding all three men arrayed around your hood, writing down your license plate, in between stoops and squinting.

Counter guy laughs, saying, "Come back real soon to pick up your order!"

Turtle adds, "But, even if you don't..."

Swagger finishes, "...we know where you live - we'll mail it to you!"

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You burn rubber out of the lot, hoping to scatter them with any loose gravel, and drive for an hour, clearing your head. Still hungry, and now low on gas, too, you pull into a one-pump spot with a country-store facade.

"Fill 'er up for me, wouldya?" you ask the pump guy, wiping down the pump with a dirty rag. You head into the store, grab a pre-made sandwich, a bag of chips, a can of iced tea, and head for the counter.

Register man fancies himself a yachtsman, wearing a two-dollar commodore's cap you might find as a prize at a ring toss carny game. Checking your items, he states, "That comes to 49 billion dollars -- unless you put everything back, in which case it's only 13 billion, for wasting my time."

Just then, pump guy ambles in. "All tanked up," he announces. "Came to 11 gallons, so that's uh... uh... uh... uh... uh... 500 billion, right, Daddy?"

Register man gives a short, nervous laugh, then says, "Why not call it one trillion even -- gas has probably gone up two or three times while we've been standing here."

Pump guy cuts in helpfully here, interjecting, "Unless you got a lot more land someplace like Eye-Rack, sittin' on top of some more oil or gas or jewels we can use, maybe, or stuff like 'at."

A moment of awkward silence ensues, before tossing off an exasperated sigh. "All right, one trillion even." You take out your tattered, bet-up, red, white, and blue checkbook, and start making out payment, telling register man, "I'll need an itemized receipt for my expense report to the home office."

"Uh-huh," register man says. "Make it out to H.W. & Son."

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Pump guy chuckles and says, "Nice top hat, but that dang flag suit is somethin' else."

You nod and ignore them as best as you can, and simply sign the check "U. Sam" this time, and hope not to get the same old crappy joke people always give when taking the check, thinking they're the first to ever make it: *Hey, don't feel too bad about bein' made to feel like a monkey's uncle, Uncle!*

This type always snatches the check away fast and disappears instantly, seeming to vanish back into the woodwork.

"Just business," they're always quick to add, laughing their way to the bank -- joining the raucous, out-of-control party already in full swing there.

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<http://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2012/07/13/auditors-say-billions-likely-wasted-in-iraq-work>