

Consider the following scenario:

After seven years of studying journalism, and seven more of low-paying freelance writing jobs, Eric finally lands a position as a staff writer at a major city newspaper. He's thrilled to be working at what he considers to be a "dream job", and is excited at the prospect of enjoying a steady income. Three years after taking the position, Eric is called into the office of Ed the editor. Ed asks Eric to close the office door, and invites him to sit down...

"Eric, you should know that I've been very pleased with your performance here. You're a solid reporter," Ed says.

"Thanks, chief. You know how much I enjoy the job."

"I know you do, and in a sense, that's why I invited you here. There's going to be a Senior Staff Writer position opening up next month, and I've been thinking that it would be nice to see you working up here with the big players. Do you know what would be involved in a position like that?"

Eric excitedly replies, "Are you kidding? The Senior Writers get the first shot at top story leads, they get huge offices, and they make about fifty percent more than I do now. Do you really think I might be in the running for the position?"

Ed gently places his fingertips together and arches his eyebrows. "Well, Eric, I imagine that would be entirely up to you."

"How do you mean, chief?"

"Well, I wouldn't want to give the position to just *anyone*. I need to know that I can rely on my senior staff, and that I can count on them to be team players."

"You can definitely count on me, chief!" Eric beams.

"So you say. As it happens, I've got a little opportunity for you to show me. Are you familiar with the proposed construction project on Fifth Street?"

"Yeah, I've heard a little about it. The project can't break ground until they get approval from at least half of the residents down there. Last I heard, they were close, but worried that they might not get enough signatures."

Smiling, Ed replies, "My goodness. It seems that you really *do* keep your ear to the ground. Good man. But there's an additional part of the story that you might not know. You see, the lead developer on that project is an old, old friend of mine. You might say that he and I are like family. Are you close with your family, Eric?"

"I am indeed."

"I thought so. Perhaps, then, you can appreciate my position. It troubles me to think that my old friend might lose the chance to see this project through—it would be quite lucrative for many people in our 'family.' I've been wondering if there's anything I could possibly do to give his chances a bit of a lift. And I think I've got it."

"I'm not sure I follow you, chief."

Ed reclines a bit, and explains, "As you've already stated, his project is essentially dead in the ground unless he can get the approval of fifty percent of local residents at their upcoming town hall meeting. My sources tell me that about 500 of these residents currently find themselves undecided on the matter. I think that my friend's project would be in excellent shape if he could get the approval of just 200 of them."

"So what's your idea? Is there something that you'd like me to do to help?"

"You're a sharp one, Eric. I'd like you to write an editorial for tomorrow's front page about the construction project. I'd like you to discuss how good you think the proposed shopping plaza will be for the local economy, and I'd like you to be *persuasive*."

I've read your columns in the past, and I know you have it in you. We sell a lot of papers in that part of town, and I think that a strong column endorsing the project could help my friend seal the deal."

Eric finds himself suddenly uncomfortable, and can't help himself from squirming a little in his chair. After a minute, he quietly says, "Uh, I don't know, chief."

"What is it exactly that you don't know? Is my request unclear? You write the column, my friend gets to build, and you get a promotion."

"No, I think I get it. It's just that I'm not sure that I *believe* that the shopping plaza would be all that great for the local economy. It's not that I think it would necessarily be a *bad* thing for that district—I'm just not sold on the idea that it will be particularly beneficial. If I wrote a strong endorsement of the project, I'd be lying."

Ed sits upright, and looks Eric directly in the eye. "I'm not asking you to *lie*—I understand that you're a journalist with principles, and I respect that, Eric. I'm asking you to just *exaggerate* a little. It's an *opinion* piece, after all, so it's not as though you'd be misstating any facts. Just imagine that you really believe in the construction project, and write the column from that perspective."

"Chief, maybe this assignment would be better for one of the other guys..."

"Perhaps. But remember, I'm offering it to *you* first. There are other guys around here who would be happy to exaggerate in the way I'm asking, and I have a suspicion that they'd be happy to take the Senior Writer position, too. It's a competitive field that we're in, Eric. Have you got what it takes to move up, or not?"

"What if I say no?"

"Think about it this way. You could certainly turn me down. I wouldn't fault a man for sticking to his guns like that. But I am going to need to let a few lower-level writers go at the end of the year, and I don't think that I can afford to keep employees around that I can't count on. Am I making myself clear?"

Eric feels himself becoming indignant, and raises his voice. "Well what if I decide to take my 'persuasive writing skills' to a competing paper?"

Ed chuckles. "Calm yourself, son. Don't forget for a *second* that I've got deep connections in this city. Do you like living here?"

"Of course. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

"And do you like writing for a newspaper?"

"You know I do."

"Well I'll make it simple, then. If you decide to leave this job, you're going to find yourself in a hell of a pickle, because you won't find another writing position in this city. You can count it. You can stay in the city and try your hand at some other profession, but I think you've invested too much time to want to do that. Or you could try writing in some other city, but I know you don't want to move. It's a tough scenario, kid, but I'll give it to you straight: You write this column for me, and your life gets a hell of a lot better. You don't, and it doesn't. So you mull it over during your lunch break, and come back to me in thirty minutes with an answer."

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