

IN THE BACK/ON THE FLOOR
By Ken Green

CHARACTERS

CARLOS – Mexican, early 30s, member of the Stock Team. Laid back and sarcastic, a joker. Complains about his family but works hard trying to provide for them. Works several jobs in addition to the one at Home Base.

JOSE – Mexican, early 20s, member of the Stock Team. Young and hopeful, believes his hard work and focus will impress the higher ups. Has dreams of becoming management.

LARRY – African American, early 40s, freelance writer but working at the store to make a few extra bucks and have something to do. Doesn't really need to work there but does anyway.

MARIA – early 30s., Mexican. Stock team member. In addition to regular work, takes on tasks that she doesn't have to do: makes coffee or everyone in the morning, cleans up a little in the breakroom, etc. She is much appreciated by all the workers, but management doesn't see this as the "teamwork" they always talk about.

WALLY – White, 60s, member of the Stock Team. Retired accountant but had to take a new job when his wife became ill.

FOLEY – White, early 20s. Doesn't really need the job and not invested in it at all. Does just as much work as is necessary to keep it, maybe even slightly less when the bosses aren't watching. Yet, somehow, the managers think he's a hard worker

DONNA – White, assistant manager, early 30s. Directs the Stock Team. Feels a duty to the job yet wonders when it will pay off, if ever. Has been assistant manager for four years with no signs of moving up.

RAJ – Indian, Home Base manager, mid 30s. Rarely seen and rarely interacts with regular Stock Team, except on walk-throughs to check up on Donna. When he does, he acts as if he knows everyone intimately.

JULIE and PAUL

The Mexican and Indian (respectively) hosts of the Home Base training video. They are seen at various points of the play. They are extremely chipper, professional and plastic. (Note: They can either simply appear on stage or appear on video. Either way, they should be presented as if they are not part of the regular action on stage. This can be accomplished by either having them be the only illuminated characters on a darkened stage or in a pre-recorded video that is presented to the audience.)

OTHER CHARACTERS

ANGRY CUSTOMER – mid 40s, female

YOUNG CUSTOMER 1 – late teens, male

YOUNG CUSTOMER 2 – late teens, male

DUAL ROLES

Julie/Maria/Angry Customer

Foley/Young Customer 1

Raj/Paul/Young Customer 2

ACT I, SCENE IV

TIME: Same day as in Scene III, only a few hours later.

SCENE: In the employee breakroom. Workers are seated or standing. DONNA is standing at one end, waiting to get everyone's attention, like a teacher. She wears a stern expression)

DONNA

OK, I want everybody to listen up. First thing... We did NOT make our goal time today.

(A few team members moan)

JOSE

How many minutes off?

DONNA

We needed to be done by eight-thirty so we missed it by ten minutes. So, you don't get the point and you go back to zero.

(Moans)

CARLOS

Ten minutes? That's it? Aw, c'mon, you can give us the point.

DONNA

Nope, sorry. You don't get the point. You're back at zero.

(More moans)

Gotta make your goal time to get the point. You were at eighteen and you needed two more to make it to twenty. So now you're back down to zero.

(workers grumble and curse)

MARIA

It was probably Carlos' fault.

CARLOS

Hey, don't blame it on me, woman.

DONNA

Ok, I need three people to volunteer to stay after the store opens and work in the clothing department and ...

LARRY

(to CARLOS) Wait, so what's this point thing?

CARLOS

Aw, it's this thing. See, if we meet goal times...

DONNA

(interrupting) Is there a question?

LARRY

Yeah, I was wondering what the point was. The points, I mean.

DONNA

I forgot you haven't been here that long. It's the point system.

LARRY

Right. I got that. What's that all about?

JOSE

We get a point every time...

DONNA

Each time we make our goal time, I give you a point.

LARRY

You give us a point?

DONNA

Yes, a point.

LARRY

OK.

DONNA

The goal is to get to twenty points.

LARRY

Twenty points. If we finish by a certain time.

DONNA

Correct. Finish at or before the goal time and you get the point. (back to the business at hand)
OK, so who wants to stay and help out in clothing...

LARRY

(raises hand) Sorry, another question. When we get to twenty, what happens?

DONNA

Twenty points? Well, you get a prize.

LARRY

A prize.

DONNA

Yes. A little prize, a reward. Something to show our appreciation for your hard work.

LARRY

OK. So, if we finish by the designated time...

JOSE

The goal time.

LARRY

Goal time. Which is determined by...

DONNA

Based on the size of the shipment on the truck, the number of pieces of inventory. We calculate how long it should take you to finish unloading and stocking and that's the goal time.

LARRY

The goal time. Got it. And if we meet it, we get a point.

DONNA

Correct.

LARRY

We accumulate points, and if we get twenty points we get...

DONNA

You get a prize.

LARRY

Right, a prize.

DONNA

Correct. Meet the goal, get a prize.

CARLOS

I'll stay. Fuck, I can use the extra money... (to DONNA) Hey, I'll stay later...

DONNA

Thank you, Carlos. Anyone else?

LARRY

A prize. Not ... more money for doing a good job?

DONNA

Well, no, you don't get more money.

LARRY

But we get a prize.

DONNA

Yes, you get a prize. But not today because you didn't make goal time, so you didn't get the point.

LARRY

I understand that part and I'm a little upset about it, I guess. But if we had gotten this point and two more, we'd get... a prize.

DONNA

Yes, but you didn't make it, you missed it by ten minutes. (back to the work at hand) OK, who else would like to stay?

MARIA
I'll stay too, I guess. Even if it is with Carlos.

JOSE
I'll stay!

LARRY
(interrupts) What's the prize?

DONNA
What?

LARRY
What's the prize? What do we get for making goal time twenty times?

DONNA
We give you guys a little something to show our appreciation for the hard work.

LARRY
Like what?

DONNA
Well... (pause) we might throw you guys a taco party.

LARRY
(beat) A taco party.

DONNA
Yes, tacos. (pause) Or maybe we bring in chili.

LARRY
Chili.

DONNA
Right.

LARRY
Or tacos.

DONNA
Uh-huh. You know, a little something to say thanks. It might be chili or tacos. Or fresh baked cookies. Or cake.

WALLY
That's too much for early in the morning. My stomach couldn't take it

DONNA
Or maybe we set up a cereal bar. You know, a little something to show our appreciation.

LARRY
From where?

DONNA

What?

LARRY

From where? Where do you get the chili or tacos?

DONNA

Well, one of the Leaders on Duty might make it at home and bring it in.

LARRY

So, it's not special taco or chili you ordered from a restaurant. Just some taco or chili somebody made at home.

DONNA

Well, it's a reward for doing a good job. For making your goal times. A little incentive.

LARRY

(sort of to himself, but not really) Hmph... Pavlovian chili...

DONNA

What?

LARRY

Nothing. Is there a certain number of points we need to make more money?

DONNA

What? No.

LARRY

So even we do the work faster and more efficiently, for twenty days in a row, we only get tacos.

DONNA

Well... yeah. Look, you're making too much of this...

LARRY

Well, I just wanted to understand how this works. I mean, it's our job to meet goal times, right?

DONNA

Right. Meet the goal times, you make a point. Make twenty points, you get a prize. The prize might be tacos.

LARRY

But not money...a monetary bonus.

DONNA

(sigh) Right.

LARRY

What happens if we don't make the goal time and don't get the point?

DONNA

You go back down to zero and have to start over. It's really not that hard.

LARRY

So, there's no job penalty, just... come back and work harder. For, maybe, chili.

DONNA

(exasperated) Yes.

LARRY

So, this point system is mostly a metaphorical thing.

DONNA

A what?

LARRY

Metaphorical. It's not literally what it is but ...

DONNA

(getting frustrated) I know what metaphorical means.

LARRY

Sorry. So, the points really mean nothing. We get the points, but we really get nothing. It stands for something, but nothing really happens if we don't get the point so...

DONNA

No, if you get twenty points you get tacos or chili.

LARRY

Which we could conceivably get on our own.

DONNA

Yeah, but we're giving it to you. For getting the points.

LARRY

But just tacos and chili. Nothing significant.

DONNA

Well, it's significant if you like tacos and chili.

(muffled discussion from other Wave Team members)

LARRY

What if you don't like tacos and chili? What do you get then?

DONNA

Well, you...I don't know, you get...

WALLY

I don't like tacos.

DONNA

What?

WALLY

I said I don't really like tacos. (looks to CARLOS) No offense, Carlos.

CARLOS

Man, fuck you Wally.

WALLY

I mean, I'll eat 'em because, you know, they're free, but if you're asking me if we should have tacos, I really don't like 'em.

DONNA

Well, we can get something else. Like bagels and cream cheese...

CARLOS

I don't like bagels.

MARIA

I don't like cream cheese. Too... creamy.

DONNA

Look, we can get something else. But you can't get anything unless you get the point.

JOSE

What about protein shakes?

DONNA

Huh?

JOSE

Protein shakes. Why can't we have protein shakes? I try to work out and I don't want to eat tacos or bagels at six in the morning.

DONNA

Look, we're getting away from point. Which is the points. This is about making our goal times and getting the point.

LARRY

Which basically means nothing.

DONNA

(done with it all) Look, what it means is that if you don't make your goal times, we're going to have to start finding people who can do the job and MAKE the goal times. So, some of you could lose your job here, OK? Is that something?

LARRY

Ok, well, see, that's something significant. Make goal or lose your job. That's a little more motivation...

DONNA

We believe in giving incentives to succeed rather than punishments for failure.

LARRY

And a taco is an incentive? Rather than, say, more money?

DONNA

(sternly) OK, forget about the tacos. Bottom line: we have to make goal. Period. Make the goal, get a point.

LARRY

A mythical point that actually represents nothing and serves only as an intangible place marker, signifying neither a significant penalty nor a significant reward. Well, other than tacos.

DONNA

(exasperated) Larry, can I talk to you alone for a minute?

LARRY

Do I get a point?

(DONNA and LARRY walk aside to speak alone)

DONNA

(controlled anger) Look, I know what you're doing.

LARRY

I'm not doing anything, I'm...

DONNA

Bullsh...(catches herself) Yes, you are. Look, I know you're a smart guy, college, office jobs, all that stuff. I read your resume. I know you don't need this job...

LARRY

I'm not...

DONNA

You're smart, but you're acting like above all this.

LARRY

No, I'm not...

DONNA

Yes, you are. I know this is just Home Base and it's just some store. We don't challenge anyone mentally, we just hire hands to put shit on shelves. So maybe this isn't the place for...

LARRY

I was just trying to figure out...

DONNA

You were trying to show how clever you are. You were being ... being a smartass.

LARRY

OK, can I... I just wanna be able to say what I need to say without...

DONNA

Say what you gotta say. We're just talking.

LARRY

(pause) OK, all that point stuff. I mean, c'mon, it's a little...

DONNA

A little what?

LARRY

It's a little... bullshit. You're treating grown-ass people like fucking little kids. I mean... (condescending tone) "Do your job well and you get a gold star and you get five gold stars and you get tacos!" These are grown-ass people, they aren't kids. Some of them HAVE kids. You see that, right?

DONNA

It's what we do to motivate people. It's the company's program and it's used nationwide...

LARRY

Money.

DONNA

What?

LARRY

Money. That's what motivates people. Getting paid fairly for doing hard work. All that other stuff, the points, the chili... I mean, look, I know you're not in charge of paychecks, but... I mean, you see that, right?

DONNA

(guard down) It's what we do, OK? It's how the company motivates employees. I know it's... (composes herself) If you have a problem with it, take it up with corporate, keep it to yourself or leave. But just don't undermine me in front of the team, OK? If I don't have their respect, then I've got nothing here.

LARRY

I wasn't trying to do that. (DONNA takes a skeptical look that is not missed by LARRY) OK, maybe I was acting a little bit...

DONNA

Like a dick? (catches herself) I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that, that was unacceptable...

LARRY

No, you're right. I was a dick. We're just talking. But, c'mon, this point system stuff... It's degrading... insulting. People get here at three a.m., busting ass lifting heavy-ass boxes of kitty litter and shit. You can't talk to them like they're little kids. Fucking Wally's over sixty. Got a wife in the hospital doing pretty bad from what I hear. You think he wants to be talked to like some

bad little kid? Carlos got three kids and who knows how many jobs. You think he wants fucking chili for working harder?

(They find common ground. For a few seconds)

DONNA

School, kids, rent, clothes, I know all that. But that's not my... My job is to get the work done fast and on time, ahead of time even. I don't have anything to do with bonuses or merit pay. We have the point system. It's either that or we start firing people outright. Corporate doesn't give a shit how it's done, they just want it done fast.

LARRY

(sarcastically) But we're a family! We're the Home Base family and we watch out for each other like family...

(both share a laugh at the obvious bullshit. LARRY gets apologetic)

Look, my BS meter sometimes runs on its own. I'll try to keep it in check.

DONNA

It would be better if you did. We're just trying to get everyone working together.

LARRY

Yeah, OK. (pause) Quick question – team leader. What's that all about?

DONNA

It's one of the first steps to becoming a Home Base manager. We pick someone who shows initiative, leadership skills. (pause) Why, are you interested in becoming a team lead?

LARRY

(quickly) Me? Hell... I mean, no, I'm not interested. But, I mean, I know other people who are.

DONNA

Well, if we see they have the qualities needed, we'll make note of it.

LARRY

Ok. But it's just that some people don't think the whole process is... fair.

DONNA

How so?

LARRY

(How do you tell someone they may be part of a racist system?) They think it's ... that you're gonna pick... that maybe that the decision is sort of already made.

DONNA

It's based on performance and nothing more. Why, what do people think?

LARRY

Nothing, I just... there are some people who want the job and don't feel they're getting a fair shot.

DONNA

Then they have to show us something. I haven't seen too many people step up.

LARRY

You haven't? (thoughtful pause) Huh...

DONNA

What?

LARRY

Nothing. Just... nothing. But, yeah, some people are really interested in being team leader. Just wanted to let you know in case, you know, you want to keep an eye on everybody on the Stock team.

DONNA

We always do. We make a point of noticing initiative. Everyone who's interested gets full consideration. (looks at watch). I have to go and check on the other teams. I'll talk to you tomorrow morning. We'll try to start fresh.

(They nod in a temporary truce.)

END SCENE