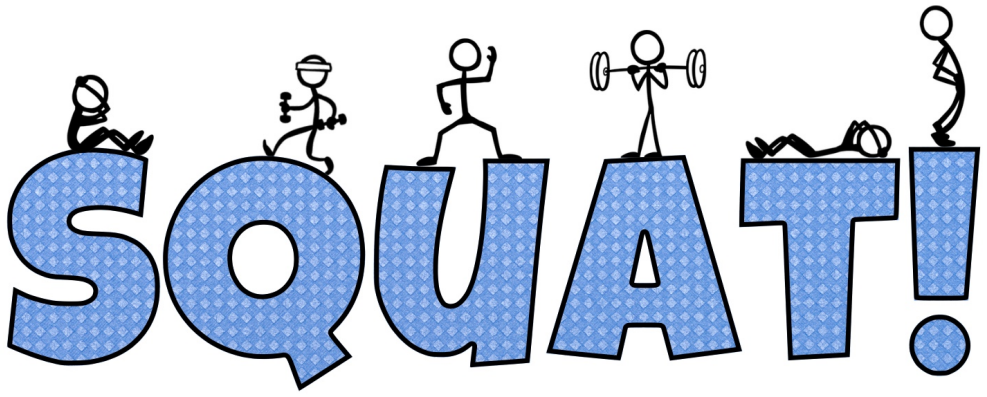

A Readable Sitcom

SEASON ONE

written and created by

Bo Bennett

with

Ryan Levesque

Squat!

A Readable Sitcom

by

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with

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Last Update: March 24, 2021

Published in eBook format by eBookIt.com
http://www.eBookIt.com

ISBN-13: 978-1-4566-3705-7

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Bo Bennett, PhD
Author of this book and many others

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FOREWORD

As a health and fitness buff, I served my time in gyms and fitness centers from my first home fitness setup at age ten through this day, almost forty years later, with my membership at a large fitness facility in a Boston suburb. I have been a member of public school gyms, university fitness centers, small mom-and-pop gyms, grungy (and dirty) city gyms, and large super-sized mega gyms. I realized long ago that they are breeding grounds for more than STDs; they are breeding grounds for comedy gold.

I wrote *Squat!* with the help of my good friend, Ryan, who shares the same twisted humor. It was written as a sitcom comprising ten half-hour episodes. As I write this, we are pitching *Squat!* to studios as a sitcom and entering it in industry contests. Being a realist, I understand that no matter how good a script is, for a myriad of reasons, even if a studio does buy the series, it may never see the light of day. As you will see, this material is too freakin' good to be sitting in some studio executive's desk drawer, so *Squat!* the book was born.

Squat! the book is nearly identical to the screenplays, with the exception of connecting narrative where we explain what the camera typically shows. The book is written in the present tense and, at times, reads a bit like a screenplay, so allow your mind to create the sitcom in your head.

Depending on how *Squat!* does with the industry bigwigs, we might produce *Squat!* ourselves as an

animated sitcom available on Amazon Prime and Apple TV, for starters. In fact, we had the pilot episode (chapter 1 in this book) already created (in storyboard format). You can watch this online for free at https://vimeo.com/490799361.

I will tell you that, unlike many first seasons, after the season finale, you will be satisfied, not left with annoying cliffhangers that will never be answered because the writers never continued the series. So, you're welcome. Enjoy season one!

Bo Bennett, PhD

1. THE NEW JOB

"God, I miss your Beamer," says Karen, a very attractive woman in her late twenties. Karen is behind the wheel of Scott's 1998 baby blue Prius that somehow smells like the 1980s. Scott, who is also in his late twenties, is well-groomed and wearing an expensive suit. He is sitting in the passenger seat, staring blankly ahead. Karen asks somewhat rhetorically, "Are you really this desperate?"

"You know I'm this desperate. You were the one who talked me out of putting one of my kidneys on eBay."

"I'm not looking forward to telling everyone that my fiancé has a promising career working at a..." Karen makes a face of disgust, almost unable to get the word out "...a gym."

"A) It's a full-service health and fitness center, and B) if I get this job, it's just temporary until I find something better." Scott has a moment of realization as he thinks back to three years ago when he and his friend were at a local bar.

"Dude, I can't believe you want to ask Karen out. I heard that she has a jar in her bedroom closet where she keeps her last boyfriend's testicles. Are you really this desperate?" asks Scott's inebriated friend.

Scott defensively responds, "A) She's hot, and B) if she says yes, it's just temporary until I find something better."

Back in reality, Scott hides a look of horror as he glances at Karen. Karen is too busy pitying herself for Scott's misfortune to notice.

"Call me when you're ready to be picked up," Karen says, not even able to make eye contact with Scott.

An ashamed Scott, partly of his situation and partly of his choice of fiancée, gets out of the car with his $400 Shinola leather portfolio, left over from better days. Karen peels out, leaving Scott coughing in a cloud of exhaust made by his own car. A seemingly perfect metaphor for his life. As the smoke clears, Scott looks upon a massive modern facility with a sign that reads, *Squat Spot Fitness* and *A Full-Service Health and Fitness Center* underneath in smaller letters. In one, long, exasperated breath, Scott manages to spend seven seconds saying the f-word.

~

Debbie, a thirty-something professionally-dressed woman, is sitting at the front desk in an impressive reception area spanning two stories. Behind the desk is a grand staircase that splits midway, leading to the left and right sides of the second floor, with an open crosswalk connecting the two sides. Scott enters the building through a revolving glass door and approaches Debbie.

"Welcome to Squat Spot Fitness!" Debbie says, with her voice resembling the woman who does the voicemails for virtually every large company and her presence resembling a Stepford wife.

"Scott Carter. I have an appointment for an interview."

"Welcome, Mr. Carter. Please help yourself to some all-natural asparagus-infused water," Debbie says as she gestures to a glass beverage dispenser filled with water and a ridiculous amount of asparagus. "I'll let the manager know that you are here." She picks up the phone and connects to the manager's office.

Bobby Brimble, the general manager, sits at his desk with his earphones in, reading a book titled, *How to Conduct a Kick-ass Interview by Remembering Just 3 Things*. Bobby is a somewhat awkward-looking fellow in his mid-thirties, wearing the standard Squat attire: a cornflower blue polo shirt bearing the Squat logo and khaki pants. Bobby's office is quite humble given the elegance of the fitness center but large enough to hold several bookshelves stocked with business and motivational books.

A deep voice plays through Bobby's earphones.

> *I am powerful. I have everything under control. I am in charge. People like me. People respect me.*

Bobby's desk phone makes a prolonged beep followed by Debbie saying, "Sir, your eight o'clock is here."

A startled Bobby removed his earphones. "Thanks, Debbie. Please bring him up in *exactly* five minutes." He closes his book, closes his eyes, and reviews the strategies he has been reading about while he counts on his fingers. "Be confident. Ask open-ended questions. Don't ask questions about race, religion, or disabilities." Filled with pregame anxiety, Bobby makes his way to the staff

restrooms, repeating out loud the three strategies over and over.

Back in the lobby, Scott waits patiently with a cup in his hand, having taken Debbie's offer to help himself to Squat's own asparagus-infused water. Looking forward, Scott raises the cup to his lips, only to have a stalk of soggy asparagus penetrate his left nostril. He removes it from the cup and looks at it inquisitively, questioning, just for a moment, the physics behind how the full-size stalk made the journey from the tank, through the faucet, into his cup. His attention is shifted, however, to several large promotional posters displayed in the waiting area. One reads, *Remove all the deadly toxins from your body with our delicious organic, GMO-free juices*. Another reads, *Align your chakras with Tanya - Tuesday @ 8 pm*. And another, *Lose up to 10 pounds per week with our visualization diet*. Realizing that he might have made a big mistake, Scott gets up and heads out the door.

"Mr. Carter?" Debbie attempts to get Scott's attention, but Scott pretends not to hear her and keeps walking. Debbie persists, "Mr. Carter?" Scott stops walking, closes his eyes for a moment, takes a deep breath, then turns around and acknowledges Debbie. "The manager will see you now."

Bobby's sitting on the toilet uttering, "Be confident. Ask open-ended questions. Don't ask questions about race, religion, or disabilities." He flushes the toilet, washes his hands, and repeats the strategies one more time as he

looks at himself in the mirror. He gives himself a confident nod and exits the restroom, ready to conduct his "kick-ass" interview.

Lisa catches Bobby as he opens the restroom door. "Bobby. One of my best group exercise instructors quit last night because of the lack of members. The rest of my team has one foot out the door. I really hope this new guy works out."

"I've seen some of his photos on Facebook. I think he does work out."

Lisa is the fitness director for Squat and one of the few original employees of the gym. In her early thirties, she wears the standard Squat attire, but loose-fitting, and always has her hair up. Lisa often wears glasses even though she has perfect eyesight, which is kind of like wearing a diaper when using the toilet isn't a problem.

As Bobby reaches his office, he sees Scott approaching and quickly ducks into his office. Bobby leans against his bookshelf, picks out a random book, and makes it look as if he is busy reading. Not one who handles pressure well, he struggles to recall the three strategies. "Be confident. Umm... Dammit!"

Scott appears in the doorway and softly knocks on the open door. Bobby looks up and smiles. He attempts to return the book to the shelf, but it, along with several other books, falls on the floor. He pretends not to notice. Bobby walks over to Scott with his hand extended.
"Bobbybrimble," he mumbles.

"I'm sorry?"

"Bobby. Brimble. Please call me Bobby," Bobby confidently and cordially responds.

"Scott Carter. Pleasure to meet you."

"Please, have a seat." Bobby gestures to the chair in front of his desk. He attempts to be smooth but stumbles while sitting down, hitting his knee on the desk. He awkwardly leans back in his chair, legs crossed, with his hands clasped over his knee. He leans back a little too far and just catches himself from falling over. He looks at Scott and chuckles. "So, Scott, tell me a little about yourself."

Scott clears his throat. "I spent the last nine years working in marketing for The Tillman Agency, one of the largest marketing firms in the Boston Area. Two years ago, I was promoted to the director of marketing. Then... a few months ago, the company went under when the CEO was indicted for fraud, racketeering..."

Bobby, wide-eyed and with a forced smile, nods a little excessively in agreement as he struggles to pay attention. But Scott's voice is drowned out by Bobby's inner monologue... *Be confident. I got that. The second thing had something to do with working out on Facebook? No!* Bobby has a painful look on his face from thinking too hard. *Damn! The third thing... disabilities race, racism disability? Son of a...* Bobby panics. *Abort! Abort now!*

While Bobby is lost in his own thoughts, Scott concludes his brief self-introduction. "...corporate espionage, embezzlement, falsification of financial information, self-dealing by corporate insiders, fraud in connection with an otherwise legitimately operated mutual

hedge fund, market manipulation, money laundering, Ponzi schemes, human trafficking, and terrorism."

Bobby eagerly responds, "That all sounds great." He stands up and reaches across the desk, clasping Scott's hand in both of his, knocking over a cup full of pencils and pens in the process. "Congratulations, you'll make a fine addition to the team, Scott Carter! Let me show you around."

He leads a bemused Scott out of the office but stops at the door and looks at him inquisitively. "Carter. Is that a Jewish name?"

~

On the main gym floor, within the thousands of square feet of free weights, cardio machines, exercise mats, weight machines, and sweaty patrons, a heated argument is taking place between two trainers—Rog (pronounced "rogue") and Trina. Rog is a large ex-Marine with a "Semper Fidelis" tattoo on his forearm. Trina is a young woman, fresh out of college with pink and blue hair. They are both extremely opinionated with views on opposite sides of the political spectrum. Rog is the poster boy for conservative values, whereas Trina is all about liberalism and social justice. Trina is spotting her client, who is using the bench press. Rog approaches.

"Members are complaining about weights being left all over the gym floor. Trainers who don't put away the weights are disrespecting the weights, not to mention the gym employees who have given their careers to serving

the members, and the institution of health and fitness itself! It's a disgrace!" Rog says in a calm but firm tone.

Trina turns and walks toward Rog, no longer behind her client who is in the middle of his reps. "Disrespecting the weights? Are you kidding me? Since when does cast iron and paint deserve our respect?" Trina's client is failing to push up the last rep. He is flailing madly with a dangerous amount of weight on his chest. Oblivious to this, Trina continues, "I am not going to put away the weights and show pride in an institution that oppresses people of girth. To me, this is bigger than personal training, and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. We need to be the voice for our members. We need to show compassion and care about our members."

Bobby and Scott enter the gym just as Trina finishes her rant. Neither Bobby nor Rog notice the struggling client. Scott notices but cannot seem to break away from the conversation to point it out.

"Rog, Trina, I'd like to introduce you to our newest team member: Scott Carter, our new membership and promotions manager!" Bobby says with enthusiasm.

"Nice to meet you," Trina says in a welcoming tone as she and Scott shake hands.

At this point, Scott can no longer ignore the client who appears to be losing the ability to breathe with a barbell across his chest. Scott extends his right hand toward the struggling client. "That guy can't—"

"Hey!?" Rog says to Scott authoritatively and inquisitively as he grabs Scott's hand in his and shakes it.

Scott's attention is immediately drawn to Rog, who cracks a smile. "Welcome to the family!"

Trina finally notices her struggling client and runs over to assist him. Lisa walks by.

"Lisa, this is Scott. Do you mind walking him to the staff meeting? I'll go grab his paperwork from... human resources," Bobby says with a smirk. Squat once did have such a department, but they are now down to a skeleton crew—a detail that Bobby is not ready to reveal to Scott.

"Yeah, no problem."

Scott introduces himself. "Scott Carter."

"Lisa McDougle, fitness director. We can really use the help around here." Lisa shakes Scott's extended hand a little too hard and for a little too long. Lisa and Scott start walking toward Squat's conference room. As soon as Bobby is out of sight, Lisa tenses. "How much do you know about Squat?"

"I don't know squat," Scott replies, followed by a chuckle.

Lisa stops by one of Squat's many water coolers, packed with asparagus. She pours a cup for Scott, and then they continue to the conference room.

"You're not the first person hired for this position. In fact..." Lisa tries her best to hide her embarrassment. "You're the seventh... in the last two weeks."

"Second?"

"Seventh! About a year ago, a former member named Jack Pemberton won 42 million dollars in the lottery, bought the gym, and officially took over last year."

Scott intently listens as he begins to sip his water, only to have a soggy stalk of asparagus penetrate his nostril again. This time, his right nostril.

Lisa continues. "He eventually fired all twelve employees on the business side and hired Bobby, his nephew. Bobby's a real sweet guy, tries hard, but doesn't know what the hell he's doing."

"Why would Pemberton fire everyone?" Scott asks as they arrive at the conference room. Lisa stops and gets closer to Scott, ready to share the company secret with him. Just then Rex, one of the trainers who is surprisingly "big boned" for a fitness trainer, approaches on his way to the conference room. Lisa and Scott simultaneously greet Rex with generic "How are ya?" and "How ya doin?." Rex looks at them suspiciously as he passes, nodding politely. Once Rex is in the conference room, Lisa continues, but more intensely.

"Like Bobby, he doesn't know what the hell he is doing. It must run in the family. And your predecessors were fired either because they implemented Jack's stupid ideas, which of course, failed, or because they refused to implement Jack's ethically questionable ideas."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I've seen your resumé and I think you can actually help us. If you can't, we're all screwed. Bobby let it slip that Pemberton is ready to close the gym and take the tax write-off if we keep losing members. Basically, Scott, we need you to save Squat." Lisa enters the conference room while Scott reflects on the gravity of what she just said, then he follows her in.

The Squat conference room comfortably seats a dozen people. It has a large flatscreen monitor mounted on the wall that displays the company logo. Tanya, Lidia, Rex, and JJ are seated at the table chatting with each other, but quiet down when Lisa and Scott come into the room.

Lisa introduces Scott to the trainers. "Guys, I want to introduce you to Scott, our new membership guy. Scott, this is Tanya, our yoga instructor..."

Tanya is a grungy-looking woman in her late 30s, decked out in new age attire. She puts her hands together and slightly bows her head. "Namaste."

"I love yoga. Without a doubt, my all-time favorite Star Wars character." There's a slight pause in the conversation, and everyone looks at Scott inquisitively, missing his attempt at humor.

Lisa continues. "Lidia, our Zinga instructor..."

Lidia is an attractive woman in her mid-forties. "Welcome, Scott!" she says as she gives Scott a little wave.

"Thanks, Lidia! Y'know, I tried Zinga once..."

Everyone is expecting more to the story, but Scott is silent. After an uncomfortably long pause, Lisa continues, "Rex, our spin instructor..."

"Hey, buddy!" Rex says as he awkwardly stands and reaches across the table for a fist bump from Scott even though Scott is way out of the socially acceptable fist bump zone. Scott hesitantly walks closer and reaches back to complete the bump.

"And JJ, one of our personal trainers."

JJ, an effeminate man in his mid-twenties, enthusiastically gets up to greet Scott. “I’m a hugger, do you mind?”

“Not at all!” Scott replies in a welcoming tone.

JJ makes his way to Scott and wraps his arms firmly around him. Scott uncomfortably pats JJ on the back as the hug extends for longer than expected. Before JJ lets go, Bobby walks into the conference room and pulls Scott to the side in private. Bobby is holding a thick stack of documents and a pen, and he hands Scott most of the forms.

“Here are some standard employment forms that you can take with you and fill out at home tonight. The rest will be shipped to you.” Bobby puts one on the table in front of Scott. “I’ll need you to sign this one now. It’s a standard non-disclosure. Y’know, sayin’ that you’ll non... disclose... stuff.”

“Sure,” Scott agrees with slight trepidation.

“Sign here... here... here... initial here... here... here... and thumbprint here.” Bobby pulls an ink pad from his pocket, opens it, and puts it on the table for Scott. Scott hesitantly sticks his thumb in the ink and presses it on the document. Bobby then takes the paper.

"Thank you,” Bobby cheerfully says, like he’s working at a candy store and just sold a four-year-old girl a lollipop. As Scott looks around for something to wipe his thumb on, Rog and Trina enter the conference room, still arguing.

“You’re just not getting it,” Trina snaps.

"I get it. It's you who doesn't get it!" Rog responds, matching Trina's level of frustration. They take seats at the table.

Bobby, attempting to exercise his authority, interjects, "All right, all right... what's going on?"

"Rog here thinks that 'respecting the weights' is more important than the systemic discrimination happening not only here but at all fitness centers across the country."

"And Trina thinks that it's acceptable to treat the weights like used prophylactics by leaving them all over the gym floor in protest because of a handful of whiney members who can't handle a little tough love."

Bobby, confused as usual, asks, "Wait, who's leaving condoms on the floor?"

Tanya chimes in, "If they're the really small ones, then it's Rex." Rex scowls playfully.

"No... It's not a literal... I was..." Rog gives up.

"Trina, what kind of discrimination are you talking about?" Hesitantly asks Lisa, not wanting to dismiss her concerns but also not wanting to set her off on one of her rants. Expecting the latter, Rog facepalms.

"Well, discrimination against the motivationally challenged." While Tanya and JJ nod in approval, Lisa, Scott, Rex, and Lidia are confused.

Rex asks somewhat facetiously, "You mean... lazy people?" Rog looks at Rex and points in agreement.

"No, I mean the motivationally challenged. There are many people, due to genetics and environment, who simply don't have the motivation that others have. Yet many fitness trainers..." Trina pauses and glares at Rog.

"...continue to yell at them and push them just as aggressively as their motivationally privileged clients. Trainers across the country are refusing to put away the weights in protest."

"People come to the gym to get away from politics," Rex says with conviction.

Tanya replies with serene yoganess, "No, Rex. The gym and politics have always been intertwined."

JJ chimes in, "The last time we protested by removing the bolts from the exercise equipment, we were called 'psychopaths.' Now we peacefully protest, and it's still the wrong way? Is there any right way for a fitness trainer to protest?"

Rog, a bit more agitated, barks, "The management should be supporting me here. If they see a trainer protesting by disrespecting the weights, they should get that son of a bitch off the gym floor. Out! Fired!" The room breaks out in heated conversational chaos with all the trainers talking at once.

Bobby nervously looks at his watch, then says to Scott with a sense of urgency, "Let's go meet Mr. Pemberton. He's expecting your call."

~

The private elevator doors open. Scott's eyes widen as he looks at an executive office, one far larger and more luxurious than Bobby's.

"Why don't you have a seat at your new desk?" requests Bobby with a smile. Scott sits down, nodding his head in

approval while he looks around the desk and office. Bobby stands behind him. “See the video conference icon on the desktop? Click on that. Now select ‘Jack’ from the directory... Whoops! Not ‘Jackie.’ That call costs us $2.95 per minute. And click the green button when you’re ready to start the call.” Bobby heads for the elevator, then stops, turning back. “Oh, one more thing...” Bobby has a series of flashbacks:

Two weeks ago: A middle-aged man in a business suit sits in Scott’s place and looks up at Bobby eagerly. “Welcome aboard!” says Bobby.

Eleven days ago: A middle-aged woman sits in Scott’s place and looks at Bobby. “Good luck!” Bobby says with hope.

Ten days ago: A young, tattooed man with piercings and a mohawk, dressed in punk rock clothing, looks at Bobby. Bobby gives him the dual devil horns gesture.

One week ago: A morbidly obese woman in her mid-fifties, covered in makeup, looks at Bobby. Several cats are on her desk. “CAT-ch ya later!” Bobby says jovially.

Last Friday: A bored man in his mid-twenties wearing goth-style clothing and makeup looks at Bobby. “Wow” is all that Bobby is able to get out.

Three days ago: A ten-year-old girl in pigtails looks at Bobby. “You do a good job, princess!”

“Thanks, Uncle Bobby!”

Bobby returns to the present moment. He says to Scott, "It’s great to have you on the team,” while giving him the thumbs-up. Scott returns the gesture with his thumb still covered in ink, then looks for something to wipe the ink off

but doesn't find anything. He moves on and initiates the video conference call with Jack.

"Scottyboy!" Jack Pemberton shouts with exuberance while sitting in his luxury apartment in Boston. He is in his mid-fifties and dressed sharply. Jack is an exceptionally charming and good-looking guy.

"Nice to mee—"

"It is so great to meet you, pal." Jack cuts Scott off. "You're going be doing some amazing things with marketing and promotion for Squat Spot Fitness. Are you excited, or what?"

"I—"

"I knew you were! I can see it in your eyes! The same unadulterated passion I had when I got my first job." Jack's cell phone rings.

"Oh, this isn't—"

"Give me a moment. I need to take this." Jack picks up his cell phone and starts talking to the person on the other end. Scott sits uncomfortably while waiting for Jack's attention.

"This is Jack. Rin-Tim-Timmy!... So what'd she say?... You gotta be kidding me!... Really?... Really? She said that? Oh man! You are one lucky guy! Then what'd you say?... You didn't!?... You did?... Really?... Really?... You said that?"

Scott eyes the clock in his office. It reads 8:20... then 8:50... then 9:15... and Jack is still on the phone.

"It's been great catching up with you, man... You too." Jack pauses then laughs. "Bye bye." Jack's attention is once again on his call with Scott. "So anyway, I'd love to chat with you, buddy, but I'm <u>really</u> busy, and you got some work to

do. *Boston Magazine* is doing a feature on the area's top fitness centers. We're nailing it across the board except for one pesky category. 'Member satisfaction.'" Jack types something on his keyboard. "I just sent you the link to *Boston Magazine*'s online survey for our members. We need to get an average rating of at least 4 1/2 stars out of 5, AND according to their 'rules,' we need to make sure we send the survey link to ALL of our active members. Now, I'm not one to advocate breaking the rules, but I never met a rule that couldn't be bent. Y'know what I'm sayin', Scottyboy?"

"Well, actually I—"

"Of course you do." Jack quiets down a little, talking out of the side of his mouth. He leans forward, close to his camera, his face filling Scott's screen. "Now, when we did a pre-survey a few weeks ago, we only got an average of three stars, thanks to several dozen whiners. So all you need to do is temporarily suspend those members—making them inactive—then send the survey to all the active members. A few minutes later, reinstate the suspended members. Problem solved." Jack's energy level returns. "You see, Scottyboy, every problem has a solution. You just need to use the ol' noggin! I have faith in you, Scottyboy. I really mean that. Oh, by the way, the deadline's tomorrow. Take care, pal!"

Jack disconnects. Scott stares at the screen blankly.

~

Back on the main gym floor, Lisa, hoping to resolve Trina and Rog's dispute, pulls them both aside and makes a proposal. "What about a compromise? Trina, can you lean the weights against the weight racks rather than just leave them in the middle of the floor?"

"What does that accomplish?" Rog asks skeptically.

"Well, it's a way for Trina and other trainers to show solidarity and still give a respectful nod to the health and fitness institution and the weights."

Trina pauses for a moment to consider the compromise. "If it works for Rog, I can live with it."

Trina and Lisa look at Rog. Rog engages in a moment of deep reflection before he speaks. Directly behind Rog is one of the many televisions in the gym. This one is playing a commercial for the Marines comprised of patriotic music and a montage of patriotic scenes.

"My daddy once told me that America is about respect, honor, and freedom. But he also told me that this means respecting and honoring the freedom of those who we disagree with. For the sake of the weights, the other employees, and the very institution we serve... yeah. I can live with that."

Trina and Rog give each other a respectful nod. The Marines commercial ends with the voice-over saying, "The Marines. We Don't Compromise."

Scott approaches Lisa. "Hey, Lisa. Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Sure, what's up?"

Scott is momentarily distracted by a middle-aged male member wearing 1980s-style short shorts. The member is

sitting on the floor with his legs spread, stretching, with his junk is visible for the world to see. Scott makes a disgusted face, then regains focus. "I had a quick meeting with Jack, who already gave me one of those ethically questionable tasks you mentioned. I really appreciate you being so upfront with me, so I wanted to tell you this myself: I don't think I can take this job."

Lisa, not seeming too surprised, responds, "Come with me. There's someone you need to meet."

Lisa and Scott make their way to the basement, where they stand in front of a door with a sign that reads *Custodial Engineering.* Lisa knocks on the door, then gives Scott a *trust me* look. The janitor opens the door. He is a very distinguished man in his late fifties with a powerful presence. He has a name patch that reads:

JAN ITOR

The janitor greets Scott with a warm and welcoming smile. "You must be Scott. Please, won't you come in?"

Lisa gives a nod to both Scott and the janitor. She leaves.

The inside of the janitor's office is meticulous and has a large bookshelf full of books on philosophy, literature, history, religion, and science. Scott sits down on a couch that looks like it belongs in a psychiatrist's office while the janitor pours a large cup of water for him. The janitor then sits down in his executive chair. He leans over to his phone and presses a button. "Debbie, please hold my calls." He turns to Scott. "What's on your mind, son?"

"Big picture? I have the feeling that I just jumped aboard a sinking ship."

The janitor gets up and walks over to his window with his hands clasped behind his back. He stares out the window. "June 17th, 2017. The US Navy Destroyer Fitzgerald was in danger of sinking after a catastrophic collision off the coast of Japan." The janitor turns and faces Scott. "But the ship didn't sink. The admiral credited the 'heroic efforts' of the crew in saving the ship. Not all sinking ships are destined to sink, Scott. Especially those with the right crew."

Scott is somewhat mesmerized by the janitor. Not only does the janitor have the eloquence of Morgan Freeman, but he looks a lot like him as well. "All right. Let's assume that I take this job... which I think I might have already done." Scott looks at his ink-covered thumb. "Jack Pemberton basically asked me to fake member satisfaction survey results. This just seems very wrong."

"Scott, there's an approach in normative ethics known as Utilitarianism."

Scott intently listens as he lifts the cup of water up to his mouth. This time, each of his nostrils is penetrated by two stalks of asparagus.

The janitor continues. "Although the Classical Utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and even Epicurus, conflated hedonism with good, the value in the approach is its focus on maximizing the overall good. In other words, Scott, from the Utilitarian perspective, the consequences of our actions are of greater moral value than the actions themselves."

"So I should fake the results?"

"Well, not without considering virtue ethics. Plato emphasized four virtues in particular, which were later called cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Virtue ethics stresses the importance of developing good habits of character." The janitor allows Scott to reflect for a moment. "Consider, Scott, that you might be asking the wrong question. Rather than ask *Should I do this unethical thing?* perhaps you should ask *How can I do this thing ethically?*"

As Scott contemplates what he just said, the janitor stands up. "Well, if you will excuse me, son, I have to mop up a regurgitated wheatgrass, kale, and banana peel smoothie by the leg press."

Scott gets up and extends his hand to the janitor. The janitor notices the ink on Scott's thumb. He grabs a paper towel and puts some rubbing alcohol on it and cleans the ink from Scott's thumb with ease, then gives Scott a friendly nod and a warm smile. He wheels his mop bucket out the door while Scott, in utter confusion, watches him go. Scott's phone vibrates, notifying him of a voicemail. He plays it. The voice on the message is deep and obfuscated.

> *Scott Carter. This is Windstream Electric. We've disconnected your electricity. If you ever want to see your power again, bring a cashier's check to...*

The person leaving the message coughs and clears his throat. Now the voice is friendly.

...sorry about that! Please bring a cashier's check for $382.44 to any of our offices. Thank you, and have a great day!

~

Later that day, Scott is back in his office, sitting at his desk in front of his computer—just staring.

A little later: Scott is organizing his drawers.

A little later: Scott spins a ruler on a pencil.

A little later: Scott stares at his screen again... about to type.

A little later: Scott holds a pencil between his upper lip and nose.

A little later: Scott creates an elaborate structure with all the items on his desk and in his drawers.

A little later: Scott picks up the phone and starts dialing. "Hello, Susan? This is Scott Carter, the new membership director at Squat Spot Fitness. I'm following up on your complaint about one of the members. What can I do to help?" Scott listens to Susan's complaint. "I am aware of the member, and I agree that his shorts are far too revealing."

~

It's past closing time, and Scott is leaving for the day and passing by the front desk with his jacket over his shoulder and a large stack of file folders under his arm. The janitor is mopping the floor by the entrance. Debbie is still there, not doing anything.

The janitor stops mopping the floor. “Will we see you tomorrow, Scott?”

“I think so,” answers Scott as he stops walking and looks at the janitor.

“How do you feel?”

“Fine.”

“I mean, how do you feel about yourself?”

Scott takes a moment before he responds. “Good. Really good.”

“Mind the signs, son. Mind the signs.”

“Right. Signs are everywhere. We just need to look for them.” Scott starts walking out the door. He slips and falls on the wet floor. His folders and the papers scatter in the air.

“The signs, Scott.” The janitor gestures to the two “wet floor” signs.

~

The main gym floor is vacant, except for the freeweights section where there is a woman vacuuming, and Rog and Trina are finishing up for the night by putting away the weights. The television plays the national anthem. Rog takes weights that members left on barbells and puts them back on the weight racks. Trina does the same, but she leans the weights against the weight racks rather than putting them on it.

As the anthem comes to a close, Rog stands tall, looking off into the distance scratching his left breast with this right hand. Trina, down on one knee, ties her sneaker. Trina

stands up the moment the anthem ends. Rog stops scratching his breast. Trina puts her hand on Rog's shoulder. Rog gives Trina a side-hug. They both smile and walk out together.

End of the free sample

You have just read the foreword and the whole of Chapter 1 of *SQUAT!* by Bo Bennett, PhD.

The complete ebook (EPUB and PDF) is available direct from the author at

bobennett.com/bookstore