

## The Middle Manager

By Magmaman and Maverick

There's a reason no child ever lists "Middle Manager" on their list of professions they want to be when they grow up. My job as sales supervisor consists mostly of directing and scheduling our sales staff ("herding cats" as my mentor, Herbie Naylor, would say), and an assortment of menial tasks like ordering supplies. It's as unglamorous as you get, but the pay is good and I don't have the same pressure our sales staff has to close deals and meet quotas.

Like you, I used to be ambitious and upwardly mobile, but as I've entered my 40s I've gotten complacent. Or maybe I've gotten wiser? (Wisely complacent?) Several former protégés have passed me on the chain of command in recent years. Thirty-something me would have griped and grumbled, but I know how hard those misguided fools are working. My office virtually runs itself. My lunch hour has gradually crept to an hour and a half, and no one seems to care that my work attire has transitioned from business suit to khakis and a collared shirt.

Unfortunately, my biggest strength as a manager is the fly in my ointment of routine--I hire good people. My branch has become a pipeline to feed upper management and over the past few years most of my best people have been gobbled up. Having to hire new staff means having to do more training and having to explain the same ol' shit time and again and again (and again to millennials). As a result, I began to devalue long-term benefits for the company over short term benefits for me.

It started two years ago with Debbie, a fairly innocuous hire I made for branch secretary.



Debbie was a fresh-faced and enthusiastic blonde straight out of some state business college. I honestly can't remember where--I was too mesmerized by her pool blue eyes and warm smile. That alone wouldn't have been enough for me to hire her over more qualified applicants, but she had a couple of great points in our interview I just couldn't overlook!

I know what you're thinking, and you're right, but are you 100% certain you wouldn't do the same? It's not like she's incompetent. (I've come to find her ditziness endearing.) In truth, she's not even my type--at least she wasn't when I hired her--I like my girls with some junk in their trunk and some heft in their step. Debbie was slender...but there was something about her--roundness in her cheeks, softness in her upper arms, an hourglass figure that looked like it could accommodate more sand--that suggested she could "grow with the company" as much as she hoped to.

It didn't take long. Her sedentary desk job, a few large company sponsored "get to know you lunches," and my sudden habit of keeping a ready supply of donuts in the break room, quickly resulted in Debbie developing a case of "secretary spread," "office ass," or any number of colorful colloquialisms whispered by male staff and visiting regional supervisors alike. Apart from the small paunch my efforts collaterally added to my own midsection (and occasionally receiving incoming mail tinged with sticky donut glaze), I saw no harm. Debbie seemed to enjoy our playful banter, and although I occasionally ogled her assets I never harassed her in anyway.



Things got a bit more complex when I hired Veronica to replace an ace salesman assimilated by corporate. As assertive as her jet-black hair and ruby-red lipstick would suggest, she practically hired herself. She also did little to hide an overtly flirty nature that bordered on sexual assault. Five years ago, I never would have hired someone so sexy and headstrong (to protect myself as much as anything) but if she was going to get gobbled up by corporate anyway why not have a little fun?



Of course, her "never take no for an answer" mantra, coupled with a figure no one could ever say no to, quickly made her our branch's number one salesperson. By her second month, she was already breaking records (and more than a few hearts). Predictably, correspondence with corporate suggested that a call to the big leagues was imminent. That's when I did something I wasn't proud of--

I began sabotaging her leads.

Instead of pitching our products to horny middle-aged men like myself, Veronica found herself in the offices of companies headed by women, usually much older women, who weren't as impressed by dresses cut lower than the wholesale pricing she promised. Oh sure, it backfired a time or two (I should have known better than to send her to see that dykey buyer in New Haven), but for the most part it worked to perfection. Her numbers dropped and corporate stopped talking about her as the next big sales star. Veronica's numbers were still solid enough to warrant a corporate call-up had there not been something that concerned the powers that be more than her dipping figures:

Her own ballooning one.

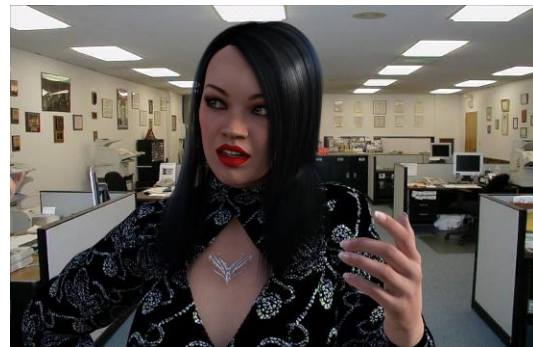
Frustrated and depressed by her sliding sales performance, Veronica had turned to food. She and Debbie became break room buddies, commiserating over coffee and an endless supply of pastries provided by yours truly. Of course, fewer appointments meant more

time to nosh. It became a vicious cycle. The more weight Veronica gained, the more I wanted to keep her around. And the more I sabotaged her efforts--professionally and physically--the more weight she gained.



Corporate, erroneously believing Veronica's fading sales numbers were solely a result of her fattening figure, issued memos to me "encouraging employees to use the company's fitness center." Those memos quickly found the trash.

Within a year, the sexy spitfire I hired was gone. Veronica gradually settled into the same satisfied complacency as I did. She put up good enough numbers to keep from being fired, but was happy to conduct business from her desk where she could dress down and have easy access to the break room and vending machines.



It was a great time for me. I was quick to supplement the growing gluttony of my girls with weekly catered staff meetings and lots of surprise pizza lunches. Of course, I had the best seat in the house to witness their excessive gormandizing, as well as their every new roll, bulge, and fold.

Had I kept my harem of heavy honies to two I probably wouldn't be in the predicament I'm in now. But I got greedy. Veronica's mediocre numbers eventually forced me to add another salesperson--and that's when Sarah joined the firm.



With long red hair and studious-looking spectacles that complemented her smart business attire, Sarah looked like a Playmate about to shoot a "naughty librarian" spread. Alabaster complexion. Pouty lips. Turquoise eyes. She was my perfect woman apart from one inescapable fact--she was skinny. Worse than skinny, she was athletic. Unlike Veronica and

Debbie, who both sported some softness on their slender pre-employment frames, Sarah was built like an Olympian.

*"Can all employees use the fitness center?" Sarah queried to me her first morning on the job. "It doesn't look like many people around here use it."*

Her question confirmed my assumption she was a workout warrior, while her follow-up statement confirmed my second suspicion--

Sarah was a bit of a bitch.



Later that week, I spied Debbie and Veronica gossiping over pastries in the break room on our closed circuit security system. Curious, I pressed the phone extension for the break room and immediately heard their muffled conversation.

*"Did you see Paul Thomas following her around like a puppy dog?" Debbie asked in her lazy Midwestern drawl.*

I found myself jotting "Paul Thomas" down on my desk calendar. He was a good looking junior staffer.

*"He used to follow me around the same way," Veronica added before taking a giant bite of her blueberry muffin. "I'm just pissed they're sending her to see Skip Stevens."*

Skip Stevens was our biggest buyer. Veronica had gotten him to place the largest order in our branch's history—before I pulled her from the account.

*"I tried to give her some tips for dealing with him, and you know what she told me?"*

I could see Debbie shake her head on my monitor.

*"If you know how to deal with him then why are they sending me?"*

Debbie's mouth went slack...then she filled the gap with a chunk of muffin.

*"I know, right?" Veronica followed Debbie's lead with a piece of her own. "Skinny bitch."*

At that moment, Sarah walked in. A palpable pall fell on the room as she walked to the fridge and took out a bottled water.

*"Would you like a muffin, Sarah?" Debbie asked, the malice in the room vanishing with her welcoming voice. "They are SO good."*



*“No, thanks.”* Sarah took a swig as she eyed the husky hotties disapprovingly. *“I’m not much on junk food.”*

*“Oh, C’mon,”* Veronica encouraged. *“Y’know, Paul Thomas likes his girls thick.”*

*“Really?”* Sarah’s voice was a mix of curiosity and surprise. Then her eyes narrowed and a hand went to her hip. *“You’d think if that were the case he’d be hanging around your desks.”*



With that, she arched her eyebrows, took another swig, and glided from the room, leaving Debbie and Veronica slack-jawed.

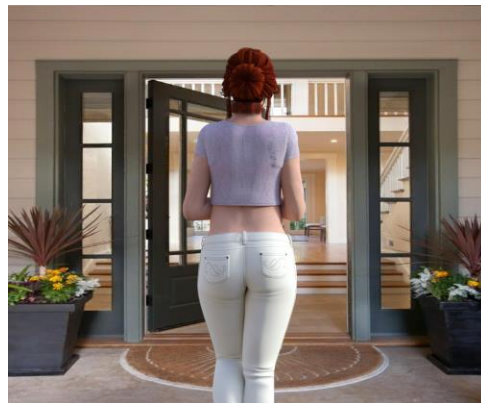
*“That Bit—”*

Before Veronica could fully articulate her thought, I lifted the receiver and dialed the phone number on a card I had pinned to my bulletin board.

*“Hi, Ginny, I’d like to order your deluxe box of chocolates. For delivery, yes. Hmm, how about ‘welcome to the team’? No, not from the company...”*

I tapped the eraser of my pencil against my upper lip.

*“Just initial them ‘P.T.’”*

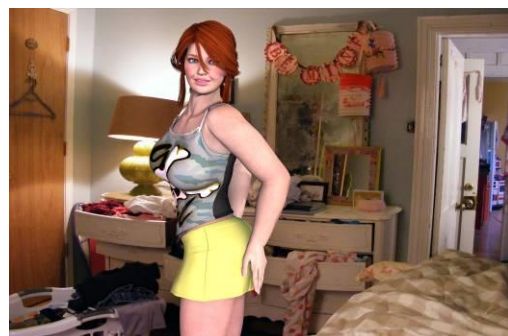


We have a zero tolerance policy on interoffice romance, but I was confident a by-the-book girl like Sarah would know better that to pursue anything...yet still be flattered enough not to question a welcome gift from the thick-loving hot guy. As luck would have it, Paul’s birthday fell two weeks later and Veronica and Debbie convinced Sarah to take not one, not two, but THREE cupcakes they brought to the office to celebrate. Their giddiness was palpable.



In response, I sent Sarah another box of chocolates with the inscription “*Noticed you have a bit of a sweet tooth. Hope this satisfies you! P.T.*”

Seeds of plumpness were definitely being planted, but we were short on one ingredient needed for Sarah to grow—time. It looked like a corporate call-up was inevitable. By Sarah’s second month, she had ascended near the top of our sales ranks, and by the third was threatening the sales records Veronica had hit the previous year. And despite our best efforts, the only thing fat about her was her profits. I could detect a little tightness in her top and some rounding of her rump, but, if anything, the fresh pounds lining her bottom were only adding to her bottom line.



I was prepared to accept defeat after sending a final box of chocolates congratulating her on her sales performance, but Debbie and Veronica were tireless. Every day one of them brought something—donuts, cookies, muffins, pastries, 1,000 calorie Mocha Frappuccinos, you name it—and slowly but surely Sarah succumbed to their temptations.

Just as I began to suspect that a meaningful gain was possible, however, Cliff Stein, a corporate weenie from our Tallahassee branch, called with the bad news: Sarah would be transferred sooner rather than later.



I wasn't going to give her up without a fight, however, especially as our efforts were just bearing fruit. (In retrospect, had I shown the same verve forwarding my career as I did sabotaging Sarah's, I would probably be company President right now.)

First of all, I closed the gym. Despite Sarah's sweet tooth for Paul and relaxing attitude for snacking, she still worked-out every morning at 8 AM. "Routine maintenance" and "don't know" were my pithy responses to her queries after she showed up at my door in her skimpy workout attire.

Secondly, I doubled-down on my use of Paul as patsy. I upped his chocolate deliveries to once a week and went from inferring that he liked chunky chicks to bursting him out of the closet like Harvey Fierstein. ("*Roses are red, Violets are blue, I love how these chocolates are looking on you!*") was one of my more clever candy accoutrements.) Of course, "Paul" was careful to remind Sarah with every note that their feelings remain unrequited for the time being. Instead, he provided a "personal" e-mail for correspondence without



fear of reprisal.

Finally, I called on another unwitting accomplice.

"*Just got word corporate is going to promote one of our salespeople before the end of the year.*" I leaned back in my chair and assessed Veronica from across my desk. She had to be fifty pounds heavier than when I hired her.

"*I see.*" Veronica leaned forward provocatively despite her matronly wardrobe.

"*I recommended you,*" I said.

"*Wow! Thank you so much!*" Veronica's dimples went so deep it looked like they were about to strike gold teeth.



*“Don’t thank me yet,” I said grimly. “Corporate wants to promote Sarah.”*

*“Naturally.” Veronica slumped in her seat. She looked utterly defeated—a far cry from the take-no-prisoners firebrand of last year.*

*“What the fuck, Veronica? I go to bat for you and you turn defeatist? You’ve gotten soft on me, Ronny.”*

Veronica looked like she’d been slapped. I had her attention though.

*“Maybe corporate was right. I told them you were the better salesperson, but they said the proof was in the pudding. Sarah’s been producing it, and you’ve been eating it.”*

Veronica transitioned from indignant to angry. Exactly what I was hoping for.

*“What do you expect? You haven’t given me a decent lead in months. All the good ones go to Miss Flavor of the Month.”*

*“Did you ever think I may have been testing you? Corporate may have been testing you? Anybody can sell from puff-ball leads.”*

*“I still do OK.”*

*“Yes, you do. And if you can sell OK to corporate you deserve the promotion.”*

Veronica nodded her head. She seemed to understand the situation. *“What can I do?”*

*“What can you do?”* I said matter of factly.

Veronica smirked. *“I can outsell Sarah in my sleep.”*

*“That’s the answer I was looking for.”* I took a manila folder from my desk and handed it to Veronica.

Her eyes brightened. *“Is this what I think it is?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“Looks I have some calls to make.”* Veronica stood up and headed towards the door.

*“By the way,”* I called after her. *“I’m not sure it’s enough that your numbers improve. Sarah’s will have to take a hit.”*





Veronica waived the folder. *“They will without these.”*

*“I don’t know. She’s in the zone. She could sell ice to an Eskimo right now.”*

*“What should I do, whack her?”* Veronica’s query was in jest, but there was a hint of hopefulness in her voice.

*“I don’t think you’ll need to do anything that drastic. Just throw her off her game a little.”*

I could see the wheels turning as Veronica nodded and closed the door.

Veronica ultimately untracked Sarah in a most unlikely way--she became her friend. The two started going to lunch together and, as the weeks went by, their lunch dates ran longer and longer and their returns got louder and louder. Two martini lunches used to be a staple of the sales trade and I suspected Veronica was bringing them back. Unfortunately for Sarah, Veronica was a hearty party girl who could hold her liquor. Sarah was not. One afternoon I spied Sarah asleep at her desk. I was about to say something when Veronica held her finger to her lips, stole a couple business cards from Sarah’s rolodex, and then headed off to give them a surprise sales call.

Between Veronica’s bad influence, Paul’s fattening gifts, Debbie’s homemade goodies, and the company’s perennially locked gym and stocked fridge, Sarah didn’t have a chance. She was getting hit from all sides.



And it quickly started to show on hers.

By her fourth month, the pleasing pounds that rounded Sarah’s bust and butt began shifting southward as if discovering the effects of gravity for the first time. She took on a slightly frumpy appearance that belied her age, an effect exacerbated by her ill-fitting attire. (I got the feeling she had splurged on a professional post-graduation wardrobe and was loath to abandon her investment.)



More importantly, her sales numbers cratered. What looked to corporate like the next surefire sales star suddenly looked like a flash-in-the-pan. They decided to take a “wait and see approach” on Sarah, and by her fifth month it was clear they didn’t like what they saw.

I, however, was loving the view. Every day Sarah grew a little fatter and her clothes grew a little snugger. The highlight for me was a company beach party over the summer. A few months earlier, Sarah would have flouted her tight and toned body in some designer bikini. Instead she showed up in what looked to be a hastily purchased one-piece from Target. And while everybody else frolicked on the beach, she stayed in the shade munching junk food from the snack truck.



Sarah tried to fight it, but it was like a wildfire out of control. If she refused an exorbitant lunch with Veronica, Debbie was right there with a fattening afternoon treat, and if she squeezed in a workout after hours, a box of chocolates from Paul would be waiting for her at home.



Meanwhile, Veronica slowly worked her way back into shape. By the end of the summer, she surpassed Sarah in sales and had dipped beneath her in weight. Company scuttlebutt intimated that she and Sarah had

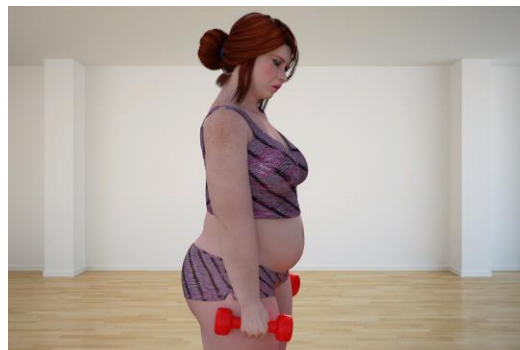
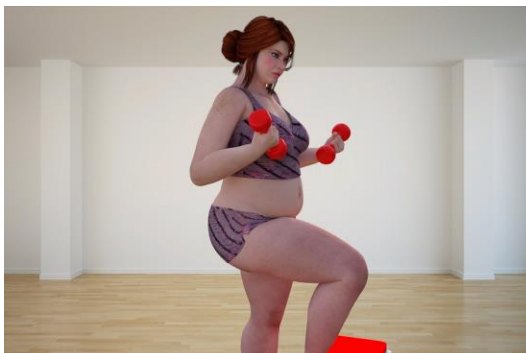
become more than friends—a clear violation of our company’s policies—but I turned the other cheek. To this day, I’m not sure if Veronica’s affection for Sarah was genuine or merely a manipulative ruse.



She’s quite a salesperson.



Corporate thought so too and promoted Veronica to National Sales Manager that fall. At the same time, Sarah’s numbers had dipped so low they began putting pressure on me to fire her. After buying her some time (I told them she was going through a bad breakup), I gave Sarah a pep-talk, some better leads, re-opened the gym and suspended all other nefarious activities.





But it was too little too late. Sarah tried a few times to get back in the morning workout routine, which afforded me some magnificent views, but it never stuck. And even with Veronica a thousand miles away now (or maybe because of it) her bad habits of lunchtime lushing and incessant snacking continued unabated. She was becoming a not-so-hot mess.



Things came to a head, literally, at the company Christmas party. A few weeks earlier, corporate had finally given me an ultimatum—fire Sarah by the end of the year. After giving her as much time as I could, I was prepared to do the deed. I wasn't planning to do it at the Christmas party—I'm not THAT cold—but Sarah's drunk and obnoxious behavior at the function forced my hand.

She stumbled around in a Santa's hat quaffing cookies by the handful and swigging from a bottle of champagne. Her face was flush and she was sweating profusely—effects of the alcohol and more exertion than she'd had in months.

*"I'm sorry, Sarah, this just isn't working out,"* I said after summoning her into my office.

*"You're firing me?"* All the holiday joy drained from Sarah's flushed face.

*"I'm afraid so. I gave you every opportunity to get your act together, but you just don't seem willing to accept my help."*

Sarah's eyes flashed a surprisingly lucid mix of anger and disbelief. *"You tried to help?"*

*"Of course."*

With that she moved close enough that her belly touched mine. Then she ran a finger up and down the length of my Christmas tie.

*"Can I convince you to help me one more time?"*

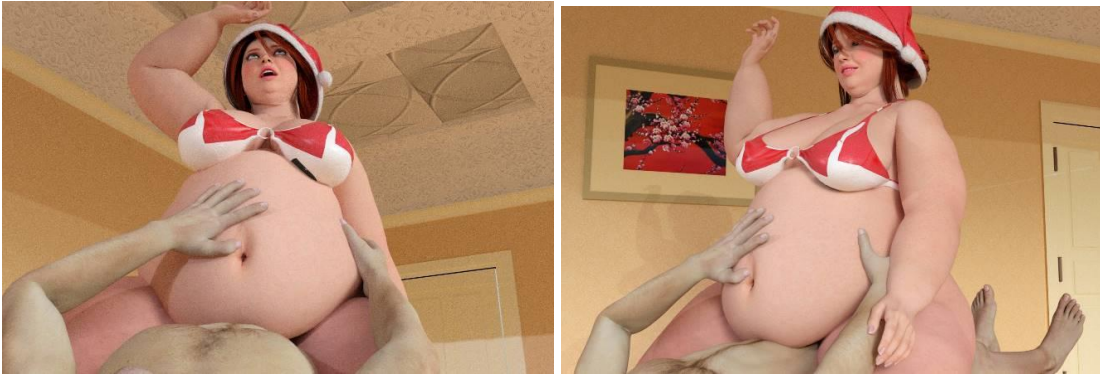
I cleared my throat. *"I'm not sure what more I can do."*

Sarah leaned forward and whispered in my ear. *"Is there anything I can do to keep this job?"* Her hot breath tickled my neck.



*“Hmmm...Maybe I could think of something.”* With that, I cupped her saggy and heavy breasts.

What followed was a flurry of flying clothes and kissing. Before I knew it, my desktop contents were on the floor and I was flat on my back atop it with Sarah straddling me, still in her Santa’s cap. As she gyrated, her belly shook like a bowlful of jelly. So did the desk, which sagged and shimmied under our combined weight. The fact that it didn’t collapse was a real Christmas miracle.



After the deed was done, we hurriedly got dressed. Unsurprisingly, I moved faster than Sarah which afforded me the chance to admire my handiwork. As the obese lush plodded around my office looking for her panties, I marveled at just how flabby and out-of-shape she had gotten over the past year. Tree-trunk thighs. Cellulite riddled ass. Upper arms like freckle-covered hams. I like my girls plump, but Sarah was crossing the line into grotesque.

Still, a promise was a promise.

*“I think you can keep your job,”* I said as I straightened my tie. *“Assuming we can make that a regular occurrence.”*

Sarah pulled her stretch pants up and over her titanic tush...then removed an I-Phone from her pocket. She held it up to show me the screen. It had been recording the last fifteen minutes.

*“Thanks...boss.”*

Before I could process what was happening, Sarah raced from the room—with no hint of the stumbling gait she had lumbered in with. Numb, I retrieved my desktop items from the floor and put them in their proper place. On its side, partially spilled on the floor, was Sarah’s champagne bottle. I spun it around to read the label—

Martinelli’s Gold Medal Sparkling Cider.

Between the recording, the testimony of her co-workers (especially Paul Thomas), and my own poorly covered paper trail (charging the chocolates to the corporate account was particularly boneheaded), the evidence against me was damning. My attorney tried to argue that Sarah was equally duplicitous in her gathering of said evidence, but the arbiter assigned to the case jokingly referred to it as “the pot calling the kettle black defense.” Sarah was awarded a large out-of-court settlement by the company and I was unceremoniously fired.

I’m currently serving a short prison sentence following a subsequent criminal trial. (I’d like to think the brevity of my sentence was a result of my own consummate salesmanship to the jury.) With apologies to supporters of prisoner rehabilitation, I don’t have many regrets (unless covering my tracks better counts). I know I was in the wrong, however, and certainly don’t hold any animosity towards Sarah. Wherever she is, I hope she’s fat and happy.

At least, that’s how she is in my mind as I lay alone in my cell.



**THE END**