



## MEET AND GREET

Okay, okay, so I shouldn't have opened my big mouth. We've all been there. Got put on the spot. Had to say something in a hurry. The guys, they're all looking at me like I was a plague of plagues or something. Give me a break.

Theme of the last Leadership Forum was *Stakeholder Engagement*. Course it was. What else would it be? The guys were jerking around a bit at the start, since it was only Poochie left in charge.

'You hold the stake,' says Set to Nut 'I'll hammer it in. Best way with these cheapskates who don't make their monthly sacrifices.'

Set and Nut do a pantomime of hammering a stake through some no-hoper from up-river. They give it some. Rest of us are rolling round, tears in our eyes. Sekhet joins in, makes victim noises. Bit like a pig squealing. 'Mercy, have mercy, wise gods!' he screams.

'Bit lower,' says Nut. What a guy!

Poochie, bless him, waits until we're all finished and dried our eyes.

'So,' says he, 'we've played hard. You know what? - now we get to work hard.' He points to his first hieroglyph. 'Stakeholder Engagement. What's that mean exactly?'

Sekhet squeals a bit more. The guys have another laugh, in memory. But you can tell they're thinking about the coffee-break already.

At last, Seshat pipes up. There's always one.

'Letting the Great People of Egypt worship us,' she offers. 'Chanting and wailing in the inner temples, all that good stuff?'

Poochie nods, and scribbles a couple of characters on his whiteboard. 'That's a place to start,' he says. 'What else?'

'Annual festivals?' says Thoth.

Poochie writes that one up.

'What about sacrifices?' asks Anubis. Nice one, o! God of the Dead.

Poochie scribbles that up as well, but we can see he's getting riled. 'Let's think a bit about the "engagement" side of things,' he says. 'Festivals are good. Real good stuff. But listen - how do we keep them interested going forward?'

'Sacrifices are interesting,' says Anubis, looking round for support. The guys are all nodding. Can't beat a good haul from the sacrifices. Especially if things have been going wrong. Sometime they do, you know what I mean? Can't help it.

'Plagues and retribution,' yawns Set. 'Death, injury and a whole loada frogs. Best way to keep the great unwashed paying attention. What d'ya say, guys? Thunder and lightning, sandstorms. But specially a loada frogs.' Set, he's your go-to man for Plagues and Retribution. Got a headful of ideas on that score.

Poochie sighs. 'You're not getting it, guys,' he says.

Thoth snorts, whispers loudly: 'Oh, I'm getting it, I tell you! Every Saturday night.' He winks at Khnum. Khnum sniggers. Ma'at pouts prettily. Poochie blushes. Can't help it.

'Engagement, engagement - that mean anything to you?'

The guys look at each other and shrug.

'Means that we, the Gods, we got to do stuff for them as well,' explains Poochie patiently. 'Let them know we care.'

Gengen-wer hoots. 'Why would we want to do that?' he says, looking dead puzzled.

'Policy says so,' says Poochie. 'It's exactly what we got to do. Agreed in the Service Plan.'

The guys sigh. Policy. Service Plans. All manner of shit creeps in that way. Wasn't like that a few centuries ago. We just got on with stuff. No Policy. Now we gotta worry what the People think. Like – duh?

Poochie's looking round the table.

Ma'at comes up with something. 'What about an annual lottery,' she says. 'With prizes. Big money. Or maybe a night spent with your favourite goddess.' Thoth's frowning at her, like she's gotta be kidding. Could have told him she's not. Thoth don't see it yet, but Ma'at likes to put herself about. She's a pushover for any mortal with a six-pack and pecs.

Poochie's writing up 'Lottery – big prizes. Nice one, Ma'at.'

There's a long silence. Guys thinking. Doesn't happen often. When it does, you can hear them.

Out of nowhere, I say it. 'Meet and greet.' Don't know where that came from, I swear. My mouth just dropped open, words fell out. Holy shit.

Poochie's pleased. 'Meet and greet. Good work, uh – Pepsi, right?'

Little rat don't even remember my name right. 'Khepri,' I tell him. 'The guys are killing themselves. Looks like I'm going to be called Pepsi for a millennium or two. Live with it, son.'

'Meet and greet' he writes up. 'Networking, glad-handing,' he says, nodding. 'Engage with the community. Brilliant! Reckon Osiris will buy into that one.'

Sure he did. Osiris swans in about an hour later, takes one look at Poochie's hieroglyphs, hits on *Meet & Greet* straight off.

'Who came up with that one?' he says, smiling like he just died and went to heaven. Poochie gives him the low-down. Osiris comes up behind my seat, puts his hands on my shoulders, and presents me as the Employee of the Month. Holy shit, I hate when he does that. My credibility's down the tubes for a few years now. Why did I ever say that?

So now we all got to go out once a month and do Meet & Greets.

Can't even tell you how bad it got. Show yourself as a god to the Egyptian people, you gonna get one of two reactions. Either they shield their eyes and throw themselves down, nose to the ground, shouting your praises. Can't get any sense out of them. Or they want to corner you and moan about all the things going wrong with their lives. Believe me, they gotta loada things wrong with their lives. And it's our fault? Course it is. We're the Gods after all.

I got mostly the second kind. Wall to wall whingers. Not many folks prostrated themselves. I'm that kinda god, I suppose. Dung-beetles – held in high respect. Not. The great god Pepsi – they mutter, looking scornfully at me. Pepsi? - word's got about, it seems.

Thoth, Set, some of the other guys, they got a lot of the first kind. Pretty goddam pleased with themselves.

But everyone got tired of it after a few sessions. Couple of months later, we're all back at the office for the quarterly performance meeting. Osiris is running late somewhere. The guys, they're all moaning.

'Just got back from one of those Engagement Sessions,' says Khnum, shaking his ram's head. 'Look at this, willya?' He shows his hands – all red and puffy. 'Can't take much more of this – it's doing me in. No idea how many hands I shook today.'

Nut feels much the same. 'It's like Hell out there,' he says, throwing himself on a couch. It's Isis' couch, forbidden territory, but she's out getting her hair done.

Horus takes the hump. He does that sometimes when he's feeling pissed. Real daddy's boy. 'And what's wrong with Hell?' he wants to know. 'It's my old man's place. You bad-mouthing it, or what?'

'Hell,' says Nut, 'but with people coming up to talk to you all the time.'

The guys all nodded.

Seshat's got a way with words: 'Hell,' she says, 'but with stakeholders.'

Holy shit – now that's some kind of Hell.

