



## MY BEST LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION—EVER

A true story by speaker, writer, teacher Mary Sharon Moore

It's the mid 1990s, and my phone rings.

The personnel director for a very large organization wants me to lead a series of workshops for three waves of employees—about sixty per group—who are being let go due to cutbacks.

“The first workshop will be brief—half an hour. You'll get them right after they learn that they're on the cutback list.”

*Oh swell, I think.*

“Then we want some half-day sessions to help them rethink their household budgets, lifestyle changes, that sort of thing.”

*Got it.*

“The big piece will be a five-day workshop on all the nuts and bolts of reentry into the job market—emotional self-care, family relationships and anger management, resumés, workplace personality styles, work readiness, job interview coaching. You know, the whole package. We need to start in two weeks.”

On the morning of the first half-hour session, as sixty grumpy-looking employees file into the room, the personnel director draws me aside.

“A couple of big burly guys will be sitting in the back. They'll cross their arms, look defiant, and stare you down. They're probably packin' heat.”

*Hazard pay was not included in the contract, I am thinking.*

I come out alive following the first half-hour session. And I don't blame the group at all if they hate me. They know full well that my consulting fee adds insult to their injury. Most are civil, if sullen.

I walk Group 1 through the entire three sessions. The Big Burlies are pretty much there, and I give them credit for pretty much staying with the process.

Midway through Group 2's five-day workshop, before the morning break, I notice that Burly Bill is standing in the doorway of the hotel meeting room. His muscular presence fills the entire frame. Arms crossed, watching my every move.

*He just got turned down in a job interview, I am thinking. He's coming back to unpack his feelings.*

Now Burly Bill takes a slow, well considered step into the room, arms still crossed.

“Bill,” I say, maybe looking a little blanched, “do you have something to say?”

There is dead silence in the room. Everyone knows Bill, and everyone is probably thinking that this might not be a beautiful moment. Some turn toward the back of the room. Some keep their eyes fixed on me.

Burly Bill booms in his no-nonsense voice, “I want you all to pay very close attention to everything in this workshop.” ... *Pause* ... “This little lady really knows what she's talkin' about.”

Like I say, it's my best letter of recommendation. Ever.