



2013
THE BEST
TEN-MINUTE
PLAYS

edited by Lawrence Harbison

2013
THE BEST 10-MINUTE PLAYS

Edited and with a Foreword
by Lawrence Harbison



SMITH AND KRAUS PUBLISHERS

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FAIR SHAKE
by
Jeffrey Gold

Jeffrey Gold
Tel: (213) 787-6066
Email: jgold@jeffreygold.com

FAIR SHAKE

CHARACTERS

Phil Hennessey - your typical manager, mid 40s to late 50s, tired, and a bit behind the eight ball. Think J.T. Walsh.

Noel Ives - a sprightly young man, mid 20s to early 30s, and an overachiever whose life disappointments have not yet accumulated.

Buzzer - an omniscient buzzer that forces characters to correct lies, inaccuracies, outrageous comments, or anything else it deems worthy of intercession. Although a bit of a stretch, think of it as Adam Smith's invisible hand at work in the office.

SYNOPSIS

In this stylized comedy, Noel Ives has a job interview with Phil Hennessey. When Ives gets things wrong, a buzzer puts him back on track. Does Ives get the job, or does the buzzer get Hennessey too?

SET

The set is minimal and consists of a door (embedded in a wall, freestanding, or hanging), a desk and two chairs. All other choices pertaining to an office are at the discretion of the producer(s).

Fair Shake

HENNESSEY, middle 40s to late 50s, opens a door, revealing a younger man, Ives, mid 20s to early 30s.

HENNESSEY

You must be my three o'clock.

IVES

(looking at his watch)

Actually, it's more like three-o-five.

An omniscient buzzer sounds.

Ives shuts the door...

...and reopens it.

HENNESSEY

You must be my three o'clock.

IVES

(broad grin)

Yeah.

Buzzer.

Hennessey shuts the door...

...and reopens it.

HENNESSEY

You must be my three o'clock.

IVES

(pointing, gun-like fashion)

You got that right.

Buzzer.

Hennessey shuts the door...

...and reopens it.

HENNESSEY

You must be my three o'clock.

IVES

Three o'clock it is.

HENNESSEY

Phil Hennessey.

*Hennessey reaches out to shake
his hand.*

IVES

(shaking hands)

Noel Ives.

HENNESSEY

I'm executive vice-president of
regional sales.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

I'm a frustrated middle manager
with an unnaturally prolonged
marriage and a quarter century of
regrets.

(beat)

I wasn't sure you were my
appointment.

IVES

How so?

HENNESSEY

*(offering a seat with an
open hand)*

Have a seat.

*(returns to his desk;
waits for Ives)*

I've just never had anybody come to
an interview without a tie before.

Buzzer.

IVES

*(pulls out a clip-on tie
from his suit pocket.)*

I brought a tie.

*He holds up the tie like a kid
holding up a garter snake.*

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY

Usually interviewees are wearing
them.

IVES

You want me to put it on?

HENNESSEY

Never mind now.

Buzzer.

IVES

I'll put it on.

HENNESSEY

Do what you want.

While Ives is putting on his tie, Hennessey, slides on his birth control glasses, and leafs through some papers on his clipboard.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

Tell me a bit about yourself, Noel.

IVES

I'm just a guy with the wrong family name, living in a tumbledown house with a three-chair table on the wrong side of the tracks subject to the whims of jolly green giants.

Buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

I'm just a guy looking for something better.

HENNESSEY

So... where are you currently employed?

IVES

I'm not.

HENNESSEY

I beg your pardon.

IVES

I'm currently unemployed.

Buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

What I meant to say was: I'm currently freelancing.

Two insistent buzzes.

Both twist a bit with the buzzes: uncomfortable.

HENNESSEY

Not a good answer. We both know they're one and the same.

(beat)

Are you currently employed?

IVES

Yes.

(then much quieter)

Yes.

Hennessey looks up through his bifocals.

HENNESSEY

Tell me, Mr. Ives, why do you want this job?

IVES

I'm not sure I get you, Mr. Hennessey.

HENNESSEY

Why do you want...this...job?

IVES

I don't.

Buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

I don't really want a job. Do you?

Buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

No, really, I thought one had a better chance of getting a job if one doesn't want one.

HENNESSEY

...if one doesn't need one.

IVES

Oh, that's right.

Buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

They're making me get one.

HENNESSEY

Who's making you get one what?

IVES

A job.

HENNESSEY

Who is?

IVES

Society.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY

Mr. Ives, why do you want this job?

IVES

I'm currently a CPA with Morgan Stanley Dean Witter and I'm looking for more hours with less pay.

HENNESSEY

I don't believe you.

IVES

*(delayed, almost waiting
for the buzzer)*

What part?

HENNESSEY

All of it.

Buzzer.

IVES

That's ok.

HENNESSEY

Pardon?

IVES

I'm sorry, I was just testing...
(indicating the buzzer)
...you know.

HENNESSEY

(oblivious)

If you weren't doing this, what would you prefer to be doing?

IVES

That's pretty wide open.

HENNESSEY

Well, choose one.

IVES

I'd like to be a product tester in the pimping business.

Buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

I wouldn't mind sailing around the world.

HENNESSEY

Who wouldn't? Well, as you know, that isn't a possibility here.

IVES

Yes, sir.

HENNESSEY

(beat)

Mr. Ives. It tells me here you went to Stamford.

IVES

Yeah. I was gonna go to Yale, but when I heard a former president went there, I didn't care to go.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY

It tells me here you went to Stamford.

IVES

That's right.

HENNESSEY

Oh. I see now. Stamford. Not Stanford.

Buzzer.

IVES

Ask me that question again.

HENNESSEY

It tells me here you went to
Stamford.

IVES

No. That would be Stanford with an
"n".

HENNESSEY

(incredulous)

Stanford.

IVES

That's right. That's absolutely
right.

HENNESSEY

In Connecticut? I thought Stanford
was in California.

IVES

It was. I mean, it is. It's one of
the satellite campuses.

HENNESSEY

That's bullshit.

Buzzer.

IVES

That's right. Stamford,
Connecticut.

HENNESSEY

(not impressed)

I see.

IVES

And you? Oberlyn Community College?

Buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

I was going to apply to Stanford,
but couldn't scrape together the
application fee. I've been paying
the price for that ever since.

HENNESSEY

(interrupting)

So you ended up attending Stamford.
Is that right?

IVES

Affirmative.

A pregnant pause. Hennessey is waiting for the buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

I don't think you're supposed to use it that way.

HENNESSEY

(awkward, as if caught)

Moving on. What kind of salary are you expecting for this position?

IVES

Somewhere between the high end of reasonable and the low end of outrageous.

HENNESSEY

I don't follow. Could you be a bit more specific?

IVES

Well, let me ask you. How much do you make?

Buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

Let me rephrase that. How much are you offering?

HENNESSEY

Well, that's what I am asking you.

IVES

I just don't want a salary that's half of what some guy I'll be working with is getting who's doing the same job.

Hennessey waits for the buzzer.

IVES (CONT'D)

I don't think that's going to help you.

HENNESSEY

I'm sorry. What were we discussing?

IVES

My salary.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY

You don't have one. I haven't offered you the job yet.

IVES

What's it going to take for you to make the offer?

HENNESSEY

We've got to interview a whole pool of applicants, and then we'll make a choice based on the best fit.

IVES

How do I know you're not trying to fill the position with the owner's nephew?

HENNESSEY

Because I'm the owner's nephew.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

Because the owner's nephew is a moron.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

Because the owner's nephew is already employed here. He's a fine fellow.

IVES

Surely you've already gone through your stack of applicants and pared down your choices.

HENNESSEY

I have.

IVES

And were there any that stood out to you?

HENNESSEY

There were. A few.

IVES

And mine was in there.

HENNESSEY

Well, we're sitting here, aren't we?

IVES

Then what else do you need from me?
A DNA test?

HENNESSEY

For what?

IVES

(as if obvious)

To test for the slave gene?

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY

It's not that kind of place.

IVES

That's good to know.

HENNESSEY

I'd like to know a bit more about your work history. Your resume indicates a gap in employment. Can you explain that?

IVES

Sure can. I took time off to help my ailing father.

(beat)

What else would they like to know?

HENNESSEY

(almost defensive)

I'm just reading the questions they have prepared for me.

(beat, reading off the list)

How well do you work in groups?

IVES

Depends.

HENNESSEY

What do you mean?

IVES

It depends on the group.

HENNESSEY

Explain yourself.

IVES

You should know. Those AA meetings are pretty sedate.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY

I don't think it's very kind to bring up my drinking problem. The fact is, the alcohol has a somnambulant effect on my marriage.

IVES

Let me put it this way: I get along well in those groups where there isn't somebody jockeying to be in charge.

HENNESSEY

Oh, ok. That makes sense.

(reading off the list)

Name a situation in which you had a conflict with a manager. How did that get resolved?

IVES

One time I was sitting in a waiting room and some lackluster manager was mouthing off to me about being in charge. So I said to him, "You're not in charge." And he points to me like this, you know...with his finger twitching like an inchworm and he has that look of fear on his face...as if he just caught me screwing the secretary whose pants he hasn't gotten into...and he said "You come with me." So I get up and we go to the big boss' office, and he bursts out with, "Bob, he said I'm not in charge of the QA group." And the big boss looks at him and says, "Bill, you better relax.

(MORE)

IVES (CONT'D)

You look so stressed, you look like you're gonna have a heart attack." Then the big boss turns to me and asks, "Is Bill in charge of QA?" and I said, "Yeah, Bob, Bill is in charge of QA." And he said, "Then what's the fuckin' problem?" And I said, "I'm not in QA, Bob. I don't even work here."

HENNESSEY

(pregnant pause, then...)

Well, I'm satisfied with your answers and your C.V. is very impressive.

(beat)

Now, do you have any questions for me?

IVES

Sure. You've done a masterful job of circumventing the issue...

HENNESSEY

I tried.

IVES

... but I can see you're itching to offer me the job. You're not avoiding the point because you're personally embarrassed by the amount they're offering, are you?

HENNESSEY

Not at all.

IVES

So, for the sake of interest and to remove the suspense, how much are you offering that is competitive with the marketplace?

HENNESSEY

We're offering you \$45,000 a year.

IVES

(a mix between light incredulity and surprise)

You're serious.

HENNESSEY

(almost proud)

Yes. 45 thou.

IVES

And you're expecting me to give up
my dreams for that puny amount?

*Hennessey hesitates, expecting
to be saved by the buzzer.*

HENNESSEY

(emboldened and defensive)

We're expecting you to give up your
life.

Buzzer.

IVES

For this job?

HENNESSEY

For this company.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

I'm saying your life will be the
company.

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

(caught)

What am I saying? I mean, this is
your career. You're the one who
chose it, right?

IVES

*(waits for the buzzer: no
buzzer)*

Very clever.

HENNESSEY

(relieved)

Believe you me, this is why I'm the
manager.

IVES

So, this is the best you can do?
\$45,000?

HENNESSEY

What do you say I boost that to
\$55,000 after the first year?

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
How about \$55,000 starting?

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
65?

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
75?

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
\$85,000!

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
(outburst)
Jesus Christ!

Buzzer, Buzzer.

IVES
I think it needs to be a numerical
value.

HENNESSEY
95,000?

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
Too low?

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
Too high?

They both wait: no buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
*(insistent, sarcastically
shrill)*
Too high?

No buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)
How about \$90,000 dollars?

Hennessey waits: no buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

Ok, \$90,000 dollars it is. That sounds fair in this economy. You know, I'm going out on a limb on this for you. This is almost pre-recession. You get that, right?

IVES

Not only do I get it, Mr. Hennessey, I appreciate it.

Ives reaches across the table and shakes Hennessey's hand.

HENNESSEY

Whew. I'm glad we got that over with.

(beat)

Now, do you have any other questions for me?

IVES

Yeah. How much vacation time does this company offer?

HENNESSEY

(nervous laughter, as if he's never heard the word before)

Vacation time? What the hell is that?

Long buzzer.

Start fade to black.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

(insistent)

No, really, what is that?

Buzzer.

HENNESSEY (CONT'D)

(defeated)

I've heard somebody use that term before.

Long buzzer.

End of play.