

## Manual Labour

**By Stuart White**  
**Printed in the Sunday Standard**  
**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> August 2010**

Remember the 2002 movie 'Catch Me If You Can'? It was about Frank Abagnale, a successful real-life conman who gifted millions of dollars before his nineteenth birthday, posing as a Pan Am pilot, a paediatrician and an attorney – though cheque forgery was his real forte. For many years he was pursued by FBI agent Carl Hanratty but he managed to elude his nemesis, sometimes by only a matter of minutes, till at last his luck ran out. Or how about the case of Thomas Salme, a Swedish national who flew for an Italian airline for 13 years on a fake commercial pilot's licence? Though he did have some basic flying training, he was working as an engineer for Scandinavian airline SAS when his friend allowed him to use the flight simulator after hours. Clocking up about 30 hours on the machine over a period of a year and a half he was able to pass a flying test with Air One and land himself a co-pilot's job, backed up by a fake license, simply designed on a PC. After that it was plane (sic) sailing for the next 13 years, during which he clocked up over 10,000 safe flying hours. Arrested this May just as he was about to fly a planeload of passengers from Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam to Ankara in Turkey after a tip-off to authorities, Salme confessed to being quite relieved that his deception had finally been uncovered. He explained that it was relatively easy to fake his qualifications and experience in the aviation industry where pilots can work all over the world on licenses that look completely different depending on where they are issued, hence they are rarely questioned.

We might be shocked at the idea of being flown by an unqualified airline pilot but the fact is that such deceptions are quite commonplace. People are faking it all over the world and in all sorts of different professions. There are thousands of fake doctors out there, along with fake lawyers, fake accountants, fake train drivers, fake chefs, fake teachers and even fake priests. And if they're handling your legal problems competently, filling out your tax returns correctly, counseling you spiritually and making you feel better, where's the harm? They may be self-taught but don't we all do that to one extent or another – Cordon Bleu cookery, playing the guitar, riding a motorbike, household DIY. We watch self-help DVDs, buy a book or just pick it up as we go along and with a little aptitude we can get quite good at whatever it is that we boned up on.

The problem only occurs when it doesn't go according to plan – when the bogus surgeon botches an operation or the wide-boy investment advisor loses all his clients' money – but any such high-profile errors that come to our attention are only the tip of the imposter iceberg. The majority of the rest just carry on carrying out their daily business, getting better and better at it with practice.

The reason I'm talking about this grey labour issue is a follow-on to my article last week entitled 'Pearly Gates' which debated the benefits of hiring a go-getting, unqualified hustler as opposed to a paper-smart college graduate with no practical experience or real-life aptitude. The piece struck a chord with quite a few of you, including regular reader, Kabo Mookodi. A former UB student, he sent me an e-mail in which he described how he took field and archiving jobs during his undergraduate time to make a buck or two and simultaneously found practical uses for his chosen subjects of archaeology and environmental sciences. In his final year, with no-one able to assist him with his thesis subject, he persuaded the university to buy a computer software package and over the next few months he taught himself how to use it, along the way learning computer languages and usage. And before you think that's easy – anyone can use a computer, this was back in the nineties when computers cost an arm and a leg, personal ownership was only for the very rich or very self-important, and UB itself had only 20 for the entire student body so preference was given to Computer Science students. This meant that the only time they were free was in the middle of the night and that's when Kabo did his work.

This diligence and determination paid off after graduation when he pulled a company in South Africa out of the phone book at random and rang to ask for a job. The company specialised in aeromagnetic geo-surveys and at his interview he was asked if he understood DOS. Thanks to his late night computer studies he was able to answer in the affirmative and was told great, you'll be airborne in 20 minutes! Sure enough, in less than half an hour he was in the air where his skills were put to the test in a practical, week-long interview, at the end of which he was hired, not on the basis of his paper qualifications but the useable skills he was able to demonstrate right there and then and which were just what the company required.

Sadly in our current climate here, this sort of story seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Even Kabo himself is disillusioned with what he finds, seeing today's undergraduates as spoiled, spoon-fed and work-shy, with that 'world owes me a living' attitude. A hardworking hustler himself, he's clearly frustrated by others who don't share his work ethic but nevertheless, there are so many lessons to be learned from his inspiring story.

First and foremost you can be a graduate and a committed hustler at the same time. The two are not complete contradictions if you have the right attitude. Second, as King Lear tells his youngest daughter, Cordelia, 'Nothing comes from nothing'. In other words, if you're not prepared to put anything in, don't expect to get anything out. And thirdly, if you can tick those first two boxes, you clearly have the competencies and self-belief to tilt at any windmill and succeed.

And I'd like to finish with a quote from Kabo that I think should be the ultimate hustler's mantra and a lesson to us all. "I have this belief", he writes, "that if something comes with a manual, anyone can learn to use it". And if you need any more proof, ask Thomas Salme.

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