

The moment of truth . . .

You start your social enterprise with \$1,000 of your own money. You're 33, living in a garage with no bathroom and no heat, earning less than \$10,000 a year.

Eight years later you're a few minutes away from selling the company. The buyers are waiting in the next room, the documents have been vetted, your partner's ready to celebrate.

And why not? You and your partner will each receive \$60 million.

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You spend two years developing the pilot. CBS likes it and orders 13 episodes.

The network knows this will be a TV series like none before, but the new Vice President of Programming is trying to shake things up. You cast the show and tape the first episodes. The series will debut Tuesday night.

Monday morning the network's in-house censor asks you to cut one line from the pilot.

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The Tonight Show calls. *The Tonight Show!*

You've been dreaming about this for years! You've practiced for hours in front of the mirror after the show signed off each night, imagining how you'd handle yourself.

Now the moment is here.

. . . but one of the most popular singers in the country pulled you aside not long ago, started cursing *The Tonight Show* host, and told you why you should *never* go on his show.

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So what do you do?

Gary Erickson decided not to sell Clif Bar. Norman Lear refused to slice even a single line from the opening episode of All in the Family. Dick Gregory spurned The Tonight Show.

It happens to each of us. At some point in our personal or business lives -- often more than once -- we're faced with a moment of truth. Will we compromise? Or will we risk the consequences?

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Erickson's story begins in 1990 during a day-long, 175-mile bicycle ride with a friend. In his book *Raising the Bar: Integrity and Passion in Life and Business*, he recalls "gnawing on some 'other' energy bars all day. Suddenly, I couldn't take another bite, despite being famished and needing to eat to keep going. It came to me: 'I could make a better bar than this.'"

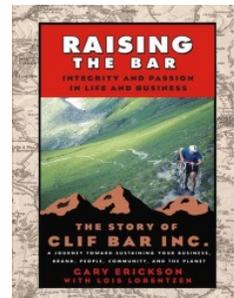
Two years later, after hours of experimenting in his mother's kitchen, he had a recipe he liked. By the time he almost sold the company in 2000, Clif Bar Inc. had \$40 million in annual sales. "I loved Clif Bar," he wrote, "the product, the people, the spirit of the company. I felt that there was more ahead for Clif Bar, yet . . . I nearly sold the company. Why?"

One of the main reasons is that selling seemed to be the logical exit strategy. "The story went -- and still goes -- like this. You're an entrepreneur. Your company grows and begins to feel too big for you. You're tired, stressed out, and working really hard. You become convinced that you can't compete against larger companies. You also become convinced that you can sell and maintain the company's -- and your own -- integrity. An offer comes along. The money is appealing. You sell the company."

Erickson had watched bigger corporations such as Nestle and Kraft gobble up two of his biggest competitors. "It seemed like selling was the *natural path*, the normal culmination to starting a small but successful company."

So the due diligence began and the process of selling the company gained momentum. Erickson and his partner promised employees their jobs were safe, that they would continue to manage the company after the sale, that doing so "was a non-negotiable criterion."

But shortly before the scheduled day of the sale, Erickson and his partner were told new management would take over within three or four months and company headquarters would move from California to the Midwest. All current employees would lose their jobs. "I now tell people who plan to sell their companies to *watch the process carefully*," he wrote four years later. "It often begins with a soft sell. At first you hear, 'We love you guys. We think you are the greatest company. You are fantastic. We want you to continue with the company.' The sales job is full on, and they say everything you want to hear. As time goes on you commit to the process itself and start to focus on the finish line and the money. Soon you've gone so far down the road that it seems irreversible, and you begin to give up on the promises you've made."



Erickson had seen it happen with some of his peers in the food industry, who later told him they felt manipulated and would do it differently if they had the chance. "You come to believe that in the end, when you see that fat check, the rest won't matter. Keeping the employees, maintaining the integrity of your products, running the company won't seem that important. The knowledge that a lot of money will be wired into your account looms larger and larger and you say, 'Well, I can live with that.' You detach. By the end of the process I was feeling 'Let's just get this done.'"

But, underneath it all, Erickson's gut was screaming at him. "I didn't listen. I detached from the process. I remember thinking, 'You feel sick to your stomach, and you are not sleeping because that is what anyone would be doing in this situation. You are selling the company you started, and you don't have a choice (or so I thought). Of course you feel bad. You wonder what will happen to the employees, to the products you have created, to the company.'"

His wife Kit and a few of his friends thought he was crazy to sell. He couldn't hear them -- but he felt nauseated constantly and hadn't slept well in weeks.

Here's how he describes the scene on the day of his decision:

Attorneys from Clif Bar and Company X had worked feverishly all weekend. Head honchos flew in from the Midwest to finalize the details. Finally it was late Monday morning, and I stood in the office waiting to go out and sign the contract. Out of nowhere I started to shake and couldn't breathe. I'd climbed big mountains, raced bicycles, played horn in jazz concerts: I handled pressure well, so this first-ever anxiety attack took me by surprise. I told my partner that I needed to walk around the block. Outside, as I started across the parking lot, I began to weep, overwhelmed. "How did I get here? Why am I doing this?" I kept walking. Halfway around the block I stopped dead in my tracks, hit by an epiphany. I felt in my gut, "I'm not done," and then "I don't have to do this." I began to laugh, feeling free, instantly. I turned around, went back to the office and told my partner, "Send them home. I can't sell the company."

Most people thought he was nuts. Investment bankers predicted Clif Bar would go under within six months. His partner demanded he buy her out.

But four years later he wrote "Business has a purpose beyond money. We look for meaning in our lives. Business has meaning too. Walking around the block forced me to ask again, 'What is Clif Bar's meaning?'"

The answer led him to re-define his own values as an entrepreneur and the concept of shareholder value. He rejected the idea that financial return on investment is the only true measure. Profit "is not the reason we exist. Profit enables Clif Bar to remain healthy and to do good over the long haul." He and his colleagues now insist upon including "product integrity, our people, the community, and the earth in the balance sheets" and in their definition of shareholder value.

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Even *This I Get to Experience*



Norman Lear

"So, you'd lose an entire series for one stupid line?"

That's CBS President Bob Wood speaking, as quoted in Norman Lear's 2014 autobiography *Even This I Get to Experience*.

The adventure began months earlier when Fred Silverman, the incoming Vice President of Programming, grew tired of the rural comedies that had driven CBS for years: *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Green Acres*, and *Petticoat Junction*. He wanted to change the network's brand.

Wood agreed and, according to Lear, thought his show "would do the trick, but he asked me to rewrite the pilot. I said I wouldn't do that." Nor would he agree to create a different first episode. "It

was deliberately based on the slightest of stories,” he wrote, “which gave me the opportunity to present 360 degrees of everyone, but especially Archie -- his attitudes on race, religion, politics, sex, and family, holding nothing back.”

Wood deliberated for a while before ordering 13 episodes, but the trouble started almost immediately. The CBS censor came to Lear with a long list of script changes the network wanted him to make. “There were pages of such requests,” Lear recalled, and they turned into “warnings and occasionally to threats.” He initially wrote lengthy letters of clarification and reasoning, “but rarely was I able to avoid the ultimate confrontation: ‘Remove that and I go, too.’”



CBS finally gave Lear a few days’ notice that *All in the Family* would debut Tuesday, January 12, 1971, at 9:30 p.m. (right after *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Green Acres* and *Hee-Haw*). Lear “alerted everyone in my world.” Then, the morning before the air date, the censor “paid me a visit and -- hold everything -- asked me to make one trim” in the first episode.

Lear refused and the censor replied: “Then *we’ll* cut it. Either way it won’t be in the broadcast.”

Silverman called later that day. “You’ve got a great show, Norm. What does one line matter?”

But Lear knew how much it *did* matter. “I told him the line had to stay in,” he wrote, “and he said I could talk myself blue in the face but ‘the boys upstairs’ had drawn a line. Somehow I knew that far more than differing opinions over one line was at stake here. As tiny as this issue was, much of the program content of the series depended on our relationship with (the censor), and that would be determined right here and now.”

At 5 p.m. Los Angeles time, an hour and a half before the show was scheduled to go on the air in New York, Bob Wood called. “He had a terrific compromise idea and felt sure I’d have no problem with it,” wrote Lear. “‘Listen, you’ll love it, we’re gonna run the second episode first,’ he said. ‘Then next week we’ll run the show intended for tonight. We won’t change a word and you’ve saved your precious line. Done?’

“‘No,’ I said. We weren’t done, and the rest of the conversation was like drowning in the dark, legs pumping to keep head above water, hands grasping for something, anything, to hold on to.

“‘The point is that we can’t keep giving in . . .’

“‘But we’re still talking *one line* . . .’

“‘Yes, but after that, trust me, I know where this is going.’

“‘So, you’d lose an entire series for one stupid line?’

“‘It isn’t the line, it’s the decision.’

“‘So you’d lose the series for one stupid decision? Is that what you’re telling me? We got twenty-five minutes to airtime, is that what you’re telling me?’

“I’m sorry, Bob. . . I want the pilot to air first and the line of dialogue to remain as taped.’

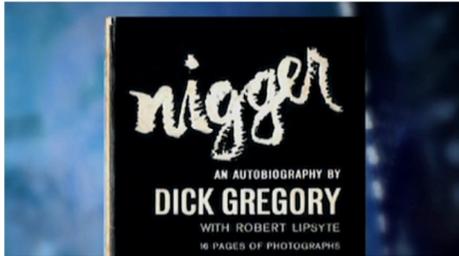
“And if not?’

“Don’t expect me back.’

The show ran without the cut. “Thirty minutes later America had been introduced to the subversive mind of Norman Lear, and not a single state seceded from the Union.” The series lasted for nine years.

Lear was unaware how much his life would change -- “and how much the establishment would come to believe that TV and the American culture had been ‘radicalized’ overnight.” Within five years, he had seven series on the air (including *Maude*, *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons*) that were viewed by more than 120 million people each week.

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Long before Dave Chapelle, Chris Rock, Eddie Murphy, Richard Pryor and other in-your-face black comedians, there was Richard Claxton “Dick” Gregory.

In their 2013 book about Pryor, authors David and Joe Henry write that Gregory belonged to a new generation of black comedians who rejected “the deferential buffoonery of vaudeville or minstrelsy. Gregory . . . did not flinch from skewering white audiences on issues of race . . . Perched on a stool in a three-button Brooks Brothers suit, (Gregory) possessed an unflappable cool, taking long, contemplative drags on his cigarette and exhaling well-timed streams of smoke into the spotlight before delivering his punch lines. Not even the inevitable catcalls of ‘nigger’ could rock his composure. ‘According to my contract,’ he replied to one such heckler, ‘the management pays me fifty dollars every time someone calls me that. So will you all do me a favor? Everybody in the room please stand up and yell ‘nigger.’”

But breaking into the national comedy scene (read: white) had been all but impossible for blacks. Gregory usually performed at small clubs for mostly black audiences, earning an average of five dollars a night, and worked as a postal employee during the day.

Then, in January 1961, everything changed. The Playboy Club called him at the last minute to replace a comedian who’d canceled his performance. Gregory missed his bus, sprinted 20 blocks -- and discovered there’d been a mistake . . . the nightclub was filled with a convention of white executives from the South. The room manager offered Gregory \$50, told him to go home and said they’d try to book him again sometime soon. “But I was cold and mad,” he told the Henry brothers, “and I had run twenty blocks. I didn’t care if (they) had a lynch mob in there, I was going on.”

The Henry brothers take up the story from there:

At the end of the show, the frozen-food execs gave him a standing ovation. They handed him money as he left the stage . . . Hugh Hefner came down for the second show . . . and

immediately signed Gregory to a three-year contract, beginning with a three-week run (at the Club) . . .

“And just like that,” Phillip Lutz would write in the *New York Times*, “with little fanfare or protest, nightclub comedy was integrated.”

Time magazine of Friday, February 17, featured a prominent article on Gregory, and the following Monday morning a call came from someone on Jack Paar’s staff inviting him to appear on *The Tonight Show*.

“My wife took the call and she’s so happy,” Gregory said. “I got on the phone and said, ‘No, I don’t want to do this,’ and I hung up and started cryin’

(He’d gone) out drinking one night (not long before) with singer Billy Eckstine, who began “cussin’ Paar out to me. [He] told me, ‘Hey, man, that motherfuckin’ Jack Paar, he ain’t *never* let a nigger sit on the couch (after performing).’

“I was so embarrassed, so humiliated, I never told my wife that I could not do the Paar show. It was just a personal thing.”

Fortunately, Gregory’s phone rang again

“This is Mr. Paar. How come you don’t want to work my show?”

“I just don’t want to work it.”

“Why?”

“Because the negroes never sit on the couch.”

There was a long pause and he said, “Well come on in, you can sit on the couch.”

While Paar and Gregory exchanged a few canned jokes . . . so many phone calls came in to the NBC switchboard in New York the circuits blew out. The calls, Gregory says, were coming from “white folks who were seeing a black person for the first time in a *human* conversation.”

Gregory had been earning \$250 a week at the Playboy Club. After sitting on Jack Paar’s couch, he said, his salary jumped to \$5,000. “What a country!” he would say. “Where else could I have to ride in the back of the bus, live in the worst neighborhoods, go to the worst schools, eat in the worst restaurants -- and average \$5,000 a week just talking about it?”

But the money was only window-dressing. Gregory has spent the rest of his life fighting for social justice -- and he might not have had the necessary clout if he’d said yes to Jack Paar’s staffer.

After his appearance on *The Tonight Show*, he became a nationally known headliner, selling out nightclubs, making numerous national television appearances, and recording popular comedy albums. He used his celebrity status to draw attention to such issues as segregation and disfranchisement, joined voter registration drives and sit-ins, participated in marches and parades to support a range of causes,



including opposition to the Vietnam War, world hunger, and drug abuse. He also fasted more than 60 times to protest injustice; at one point, he weighed just 97 pounds.

Gregory published his autobiography, *Nigger*, in 1963 and it became the best-selling book in the country. At last count it had sold more than seven million copies.

SOURCES

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