



L’ORÉAL MERCHANDISER AND MERCHANDISING

I arrived that evening, right on time, at the address given, and found about twenty people going through the same routine as me — there to learn, and to walk away, at the end, with a certificate of attendance that for many would mean titles and points.

The first day was a round of introductions — who we were, where we came from — and among the people there was someone from Standa, someone from Upim, someone from the state railway, a local TV station, an optician, a fruit vendor, a business consultant, a cheese sales agent, and me.

I wondered what I'd gotten myself into, but I'd already paid, and like an idiot I figured I'd scored an own goal — at least at first, before waiting to see how things developed.

There were three instructors, two women and a man, average age around thirty-five, with the kind of experience that reads well on a résumé but doesn't necessarily mean real skills.

They'd been recruited off Amazon and LinkedIn, and for them it was a great source of pride and standing to be part of a multinational company's environment and be able to say: we teach here.

On the second day they started projecting PowerPoint slides — it felt like being back at one of my Gillette meetings — but I stayed calm, decided to understand first and judge later.

On the third day a director of the school showed up, and thought it a good idea to single me out and question me in front of everyone, almost as if trying to put me on the spot — though I couldn't figure out why.

He'd been a manager at BIC FRANCE, and he despised Gillette and everyone connected to it, directly or otherwise.

On the fourth day he came back with a woman, the CEO of the multinational that ran the school and its courses. She came up to my desk, pulled up a stool, and sat down beside me. She said nothing, just watched the notes I was taking in my notebook — nothing but triangles, no actual notes.

There were still two days left to close out the course. Everyone was happy and motivated, and when the round-the-table discussion got to me, they asked what I thought.

Nothing, I answered, and the whole room fell silent.

On the last day we had to sign off to close things out and collect our attendance certificates — the actual diploma would arrive by mail — and after signing I said my goodbyes and left.

I stopped in front of a church and went in. It was full, a mass was underway, and the course had taught me something I hadn't known: the true masters of merchandising were priests. They sold without anyone ever noticing, and they were good at it precisely because they never even displayed the merchandise.

I'd spent good money, when all it would have taken was reading history, just as my father had suggested. What a mistake, not listening to him.

Ferdinando