

VOICES IN THE HEAD

'I HAD NEVER THOUGHT OF KEVIN COSTNER AS BEING AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES, BUT I HAD SEEN HIM AS SIMPLY A IOWA FARMER, WHO HAD STRUGGLED TO MAKE MONEY FROM GROWING CORN, AND WHO HAD DIVERSIFIED INTO RUNNING A BASEBALL FIELD'

There is an iconic film from the late 1980s called *Field of Dreams* that has stuck in my memory. It dates back to the time when Kevin Costner was a huge Hollywood star. In the film, Costner plays an Iowa corn farmer who starts hearing 'voices', which he believes are telling him to convert one of his fields into a baseball diamond. Costner follows the wishes of the voices and slowly out of the corn stalks surrounding the diamond appear the figures of baseball stars from the past. I forget how the film ended. But I can remember leaving my first viewing with a smile on my face.

Being hazy about the details, I decided to consult www.imdb.com, a database which carries every fact imaginable about films and film stars. For once, the site let me down. In one synopsis, the ghostly figures emerging from the corn stalks were the disgraced members of the Chicago White Sox¹ team, who had accepted bribes to lose the World Series in 1919. In another, they were members of the Chicago Black Sox, who – ditto. Anyway, White Sox, Black Sox, or Grey Sox, [imdb](http://imdb.com) confirmed that they were led out of the corn stalks by Shoeless Joe Jackson, and, though I am no expert, I am pretty sure that Shoeless Joe played for the White Sox.

In one synopsis, [imdb](http://imdb.com) has quoted the voices as saying to Costner: "If you build it, he will come." Now, I was pretty certain that the correct quotation should be: "If you build it, they will come". Why am I fussing about whether the correct word is 'he' or 'they'? Well, because, the meaning of the phrase changes radically when 'he' is substituted for 'they'.

Who can Costner be referring to if he uses the word 'he'? Shoeless Joe? The Spirit of Baseball? I had never thought of Costner as being away with the fairies, but I had seen him as simply a Iowa farmer, who had struggled to make money from growing corn, and who had diversified into running a baseball field.

He is a powerful metaphor for those entrepreneurs who build a product and hope that public demand will follow. 'They' refers to the fans, who would crowd the bleachers at the baseball field that Costner builds. The distinction between 'he' and 'they' is therefore very important. My son, the film buff, agreed with me, by the way, that the word must be 'they'.

Of all my employers, Widgets seems the most likely to have followed the example of Costner's character in the film. Let me think. There was a new version of the standard Widget with a few thou' shaved off the rotating flange. That was a brave step.

Then there was the aluminium smelter built in the open country, which was forced to close when local farmers kept dumping dead lambs in Reception, claiming that they had been killed by the fumes from the chimney.

No, come to think of it, that was a mistake, rather than an innovative step. Then there was that dodgy import-export agency in Montreux, which I always suspected was a front for MI6, where they bought and paid for a yacht for a Saudi prince, only to discover that he had changed his mind and wanted a Learjet instead.

And then there were the zillions spent on developing a welding robot. The finest welding engineers in the country were recruited, but after three and a half years the robot could not even make itself a cup of tea, whereas in Japan and Germany there were already thousands of them which could sense how many lumps of sugar needed to be added. An honourable failure, but not very Kevin Costner-ish in *Field of Dreams*.

Why am I wasting time reading you pages from Widgets's history, which are daft, rather than visionary? Ah yes, now I remember. Years ago, when 'diversification' was king, Widgets diversified into a series of crazy things. There was a chimney-sweeping subsidiary and Widgets ran franchises for shoe-polishing and for sweeping dandruff from suit collars.

One of the more sensible diversification was the move into vending machine re-stocking. The directors of the subsidiary that re-stocked vending machines heard 'voices' in their heads that told them to build the ultimate vending machine. The voices assured them that, "If you build it, they will buy". So, they leased a development laboratory and hired vending machine engineers, and food technologists, and set to work to build a vending machine that could dispense fried potato chips!

I stress that this was nothing so simple as a microwave capable of heating a portion of oven-ready chips but a chip fryer bubbling away when the punter inserted a coin. No, in case you ask, the chips did not slither down individually through a pipe. After the fat had been drained from them, they were to be delivered on a paper plate onto the dispenser in the front.

Did it work? Well, it might have done if head office had not put a stop to it on the grounds that the 'voices' had not submitted the correct capital investment approval form.

By the way, www.google.com has proved to me conclusively that the 'voices' used the word 'he' and were referring to Shoeless Joe Jackson. **JF**

¹ The eight White Sox players accused of throwing the 1919 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds were labelled the Black Sox. Although they avoided criminal charges they were banned from the game for life.