

## Londoner 41

### Chapter 41. Incentives

Cedoron shrugged his broad shoulders. "As a result, the only work I typically received was repairing broken tools. There wasn't a need for new tools being crafted here, so hiring a permanent apprentice never seemed necessary."

Kivamus offered a curt nod, a thoughtful expression settling on his face. "That clarifies a lot," he said. "Well, for the immediate future," he said, a hint of reassurance in his voice, "you don't have to worry about the cost of hiring new assistants. The current situation in the village is quite dire, and ensuring everyone survives the harsh winter will require a tremendous amount of work. So from tomorrow, I will be paying the wages to every villager who is willing to do manual work of any kind. That would include anyone you need to help you make those tools faster as well."

Cedoron shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "I did catch wind of these rumors earlier, my Lord," he admitted, "but I wasn't sure whether to believe them."

Kivamus offered a reassuring smile. "You heard correctly Cedoron, and those aren't just rumors. That means that you can hire as many workers as you need to supply me with all the tools on time, without worrying about paying them for now. Of course, they wouldn't be skilled in smithing itself, but even training them to do the easier tasks would help to improve your production speed."

Cedoron nodded. "It will certainly help a lot, my Lord. I can just give them the simpler tasks like fetching coal from the manor, fitting the handles in the axes and machetes, or even operating the bellows to keep the forge hot, which will free me to focus on the actual forging of those tools."

"That's true." Kivamus added, "From tomorrow, you'll just have to inform Duvas about how many people you will need for this. He'll be responsible for assigning the required number of workers to you, as well as keeping track of where the villagers are working to ensure fair compensation."

Cedoron nodded. "I'll do that, my Lord. And if I'm not paying for the assistants, the prices will be lower as well." He added after a moment, "So, assuming I have all the necessary materials readily available, and with a couple of apprentices by my side, I can realistically produce three, maybe even four axes per day. Now, this assumes you're not looking for top-notch quality with detailed engravings."

He puffed out his chest with a hint of pride. "Don't get me wrong, my Lord," he continued, "my father instilled in me the skills to craft such exquisite tools. But creating those elaborate designs would easily double or even triple the production time."

Kivamus chuckled, appreciating Cedoron's dedication to his craft. "No worries," he said, waving a dismissive hand. "I don't need any engravings or such things," he assured the blacksmith. "Just make sure they're sturdy and functional enough to handle the task they are meant for."

"Of course, my Lord," Cedoron nodded. "In that case, I can deliver all two dozen axes you ordered within a week. Now, machetes would be a bit trickier. They require a lot more shaping work, so I can only manage two or perhaps three per day. To give you a dozen machetes, that would take... another four or five days. But," he continued, his voice taking on an enterprising tone, "I can alternate production days between axes and machetes. That way, you'll start receiving both of them simultaneously. All in all, I can get you all the axes and machetes within two weeks, assuming there are no unforeseen delays."

Kivamus pursed his lips in contemplation. A two-week wait for the axes and machetes wasn't ideal, but it was still a better option than purchasing them from Cinran. Pydas would likely inflate the prices, and even then, buying the tools from him would take another week or maybe even two due to travel time. So getting the tools made locally, albeit slower, offered the advantage of a steady supply and potentially lower costs in the long run.

There was an additional motive behind his decision. Getting the blacksmith back into a routine of smithing new tools regularly, since he only repaired the broken tools till now, was a necessary step if he wanted to get completely new things made from him - things which Cedoron might never have seen in his life.

"Very well," Kivamus said. "Two weeks for the axes and machetes is manageable. Hammers, hinges, and the like, are only needed once Taniok begins constructing the longhouse frames, so you can work on those after the initial two weeks. He did say that he will only stock up planks until enough space is cleared for making the longhouses anyway."

"That will work, my Lord," Cedoron replied. "Now, the final item on your list was iron nails. That presents a bit of a challenge, my Lord. We're talking thousands of nails for a single longhouse, easily. And making them is very time-consuming, for something that is so small." He added, "While I consider myself a fast worker, I can only manage about a dozen nails per hour. Many blacksmiths would take twice as long."

"So, even if I dedicated an entire day to hammering out nails," he continued, "the most I could manage to produce would be around a hundred nails per day. And that's pushing it, using every available hour of daylight. However, I will try to train a couple of new workers I'll be hiring to make nails as well. It's not exactly intricate work, it is just incredibly time-consuming. Hopefully, within a week or two, assuming they pick it up quickly and can produce decent quality nails, the three of us combined could churn out around three hundred nails every day."

He spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "But even with that increase, producing enough nails for even a single longhouse before the snow falls will be impossible. Realistically, my Lord," he said, "I'd advise purchasing a decent stock of iron nails from Cinran. That way, you can get started on the construction, and by the time those supplies are running low, I'll have completed your other orders and can dedicate myself solely to making new iron nails."

"At a rate of three hundred iron nails a day, and even higher if I take on more workers to assist me," he continued, "we could keep you steadily supplied for those other projects you mentioned earlier, as well as any more longhouses which you might consider building in the future."

Kivamus steepled his fingers, his gaze fixed on a distant point as he weighed the options. "Alright, that will work." Pointing to the manor house, he said, "Now head over to the manor hall there and speak with Duvas, so he can note down the exact numbers for everything you'll be producing. He can finalize the compensation details with you as well." He added, "You should start work on these items from tomorrow morning itself."

"Of course, my Lord," Cedoron nodded. "And thank you for providing that much work for me. It will be a welcome change after the slow times I've been facing." With a quick bow of respect, he turned and strode purposefully towards the manor hall, eager to get the wheels of production in motion.

As the setting sun approached the horizon, painting the sky in hues of orange and red, Kivamus had decided to return inside the manor house again. A chill had settled in the air, a stark reminder of the approaching winter. He and the others were now gathered near the crackling fire in the manor hall.

Earlier, after a productive meeting with Taniok and Cedoron, Duvas had sent them back to the village after finalizing the details of their respective projects. He had also provided the final list of items to Pydas which he had to buy for them from Cinran, including grain, iron ingots, a decent quantity of salt on Nerida's request, as well as enough iron nails for them to finish constructing at least one longhouse. While he had to give a small amount of Reslinor gold crowns as an advance for the extra items, they had decided to settle the final amount after the merchant returned with all the required goods.

Hudan had reported selecting the final twelve recruits, who were now equipped with the bandits' armor and weapons. Half of them were already on duty as new guards for the manor, while the other half would go to the servant's hall to get their evening meal and have a good night's rest before they departed for Cinran tomorrow morning.

Nerida had just left the hall, informing them that the evening meal was nearly prepared. Soon, the distribution would begin outside the manor gates, catering to the growing crowd of elderly villagers and children who had already started to gather.

Helga, her eyes fixed on the now-closed windows, spoke up, her voice laced with concern. "My Lord," she began, "I saw the villagers gathering outside the gates of the manor, many of whom must be homeless right now. Can't we do anything to provide them with temporary shelter until the longhouses are built? These poor souls have little to no protection from the elements, and sickness can spread quickly in such conditions."

"That's a valid point," Kivamus acknowledged. "The evenings are certainly getting colder. But housing all of them within the manor doesn't seem feasible. Isn't that right Duvass?"

Duvass shook his head with a regretful sigh. "Indeed, my Lord," he replied. "Even if we wanted to house them in the barns for now, both of the coal barns are already full and the grain barn will be approaching its limit soon enough. And after allocating sleeping spaces for the dozen new guards we have hired, we don't even have enough space in the servants' hall now. We could probably take in a few children there, mostly on the upper floor with the maids, but that would be the limit of our available space within the outbuildings."

Kivamus furrowed his brow. "But what about the manor house itself?" he countered. "You mentioned earlier that there were a few vacant rooms here. Couldn't we use those?"

Feroy, who was the only one who had been taking swigs from a tankard of ale, reacted swiftly to Kivamus's suggestion. "Absolutely not, my Lord!" he exclaimed, slamming his tankard on the table and spilling some ale in the process. "Housing a large number of unknown people within the manor walls would be risky enough on its own. But lodging them within the manor house itself? Especially after that recent scare with your life? It'd be madness! Best find another place to house them."

Hudan echoed Feroy's sentiment with a firm nod. "Indeed, my Lord," he declared. "It would be impossible to know where their loyalty lies, and the security risk in that is simply unacceptable. I cannot allow it."

Kivamus sighed, acknowledging the validity of their concerns with a nod. "Very well," he conceded, "housing them within the manor is off the table for now." He looked at the faces of everyone gathered around him for a moment. "Is there any other solution we haven't considered?"

A thoughtful silence descended upon the group, broken only by the crackling of the fire, as they considered it.

After a moment, Gorsazo offered a suggestion. "My Lord," he began, "could we reach out to the villagers who still have houses in decent condition? Perhaps they could be persuaded to take in the homeless folks for the time being."

Duvas added with a skeptical frown. "We can certainly ask them," he conceded, "but very few of them will want to open their doors for strangers, unless Lord Kivamus makes it mandatory." He added, "The idea of housing unknown people and possibly putting their own families' well-being at risk is not acceptable to most people, or they would have already done it. They have nothing to gain from doing that."

Kivamus tapped his fingers thoughtfully against the armrest of his chair. Forcing villagers to take in others wouldn't be a sustainable solution anyway. There had to be a way to encourage them, to incentivize their compassion.

A smile played on his lips as a plan began to form. "Incentives, Duvas," he declared, his gaze sweeping across the faces gathered near the fireplace. "That's exactly what we need."

"Here's an idea," he announced, leaning forward in his chair. "Let's offer the villagers a choice. They'll be under no obligation to take anyone in, but for those families who do choose to open their homes to the homeless until the longhouses are built, we will provide a fixed amount of grains every week, for every new person that a family takes in."

He paused for a moment, letting the idea sink in. "Let's say a family agrees to take in two homeless people. So we'll provide them with enough grain every week to feed two people. But that family doesn't

have to actually feed the people they take in - they only need to give them shelter, so they can keep the provided grain for themselves."

Kivamus leaned back in his chair, as he explained. "Remember, manual labor is the only way to earn grain right now in Tiranat. But not everyone is capable of such work. There might be someone who recently suffered an injury, or perhaps a woman who's simply too weak for heavy labor. Those people might have no means of obtaining grain on their own, and wouldn't qualify for the free food program reserved for the elderly and children."

"But with this plan," he added, "we create a fallback option for them. People with spare space in their homes, and especially those who can't do manual labor, can still contribute to the village and earn a living. In essence, they become temporary innkeepers, offering shelter in exchange for a small, but guaranteed income in the form of grain rations."

Gorsazo stroked his chin thoughtfully. "An interesting plan, my Lord," he mused. "The prospect of additional grain, especially with winter approaching, might be enough to sway a lot of villagers." He added, "Since we are already providing meals for the elderly as well as the children, and those who are capable of working will also get grain rations from tomorrow, so the burden of feeding the homeless wouldn't fall on the villagers who are housing them. It's an incentive that benefits both parties - the homeless receive much-needed shelter until the longhouses are built, and the participating families have their own food stores bolstered."

"Exactly." Kivamus nodded with satisfaction. "And to further sweeten the deal, we'll throw in a small amount of coal as well, for cooking and heating. Those extra rations of grain and coal will serve as a valuable backup for them in the winter."

"Of course," he added, "this is only a temporary solution, but there would still be a few people who'd like to continue this arrangement even after the longhouses are built, since many homeless families might still prefer to live with another family until they get their home rebuilt, instead of inside the crowded longhouses. That means many of the villagers, particularly those who are not capable of manual work, can continue to get a fixed amount of grain in the near future by providing housing to those who still want it."

He turned towards Duvas. "That reminds me, do we have an actual inn here? We could offer the same deal to the innkeeper as well."