

Working Life

WORKING LIFE CLASSICS

Here's a tapestry of several "Working Life" categories, which have no unifying theme whatsoever. Readers are invited to construct a theme if they see a pattern.

Workaholistics

The colors in your work environment may affect your health and productivity, according to an article in *Via FedEx*.

Psychologists say colors can influence people's moods, but they don't know why or how. Different hues can also affect our perceptions of time, temperature, noise, and weight, according to studies.

Generally, cool tones—such as most greens and blues—are the most ergonomic for tasks that require high levels of concentration. Violet, bright red, dark brown, and yellow-green—the color of elementary school walls for many baby boomers, we bet—have negative effects.

Separately, yellow signifies communication and intelligence; green is reflective and restful. Red—particularly with lots of orange in it—is too stimulating for offices, except as an accent color. Blue is calming and relaxing, but a dark blue ceiling in a conference room tends to be oppressive. White or off-white is safe but boring.

And, as we all know, black makes you look thinner.

Work/Health Alert

Tuesday is the most productive day in the workplace. At least, that's what author Edith Weiner says in her book, *Office Biology*.

The book presents findings of several industrial psychologists and other experts on "relevant facts for survival in the workplace." For example, left-handed workers are



Philip Anderson

more likely to have work-related accidents than are right-handed workers. And more women than men hear the high-frequency tones emitted by video display terminals that may cause headaches and other maladies.

The 256-page hardbound book costs \$21.95. To order, call MasterMedia Limited at 717/348-2193.

Getting Global

Beware of Greeks bearing gifts, they say. We say, avoid giving flowers to a Greek. The recipient may think you're cheap and insulting.

That and other global etiquette tips are included in *European Customs and Manners*, a guide for doing business in Europe.

The book includes dos and don'ts on business travel in eastern Europe, which is fast becoming an entrepreneurial frontier. For example, bring electronic gifts (battery-powered) to business colleagues in eastern Europe. Also, you should expect your first meeting or the first hour of

If you're getting a lot done, it must be Tuesday. Or maybe it's just the yellow walls.

a business meeting in eastern Europe to be entirely social.

Also, don't put your hand in your lap while you're eating. We don't know why.

More on the global perspective.... Japanese workers who have spent years neglecting family for career—only to find that their grown children don't visit them—can get a second chance during retirement when they contact Japan Effectiveness Inc.

The firm offers lonely, elderly Japanese couples the opportunity to lease an ideal family—including a respectful son, a dutiful daughter-in-law, and an adoring grandchild—for three hours, at a cost of about \$1,200 (U.S. dollars).

Actors who portray family members say such things as, "Remember Grandpa?" as they cheerfully hand over a gurgling baby to be doted upon. The ersatz families dine together and go on outings to parks and other places that Japanese families typically gather.

We didn't make this up.

David Letterman, Eat Your Heart Out

Our version of "Late Night's" top 10 list is back. This time, we offer 10 ways to "cut off your nose to spite your face" at work—as suggested by *Your Own Worst Enemy*, from Amacom Books.

- ▶ 10. Always avoid office politics of any kind.
- ▶ 9. Openly criticize most new ventures contemplated by your company or department.
- ▶ 8. Freely pass along confidential information.
- ▶ 7. If you disagree with any of your company's practices, voice your opinion in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper.
- ▶ 6. Never attend company-sponsored social events.
- ▶ 5. Let higher-ups know when they have offended you.
- ▶ 4. Use competitors' products and services—and let superiors know about it.
- ▶ 3. Insult co-workers, if they have it coming.
- ▶ 2. Wear whatever clothes you're comfortable in.
- ▶ And number 1. Criticize top executives

in meetings, as long as the criticism is valid.

If that isn't enough rope to hang yourself, the book also describes 12 ways to sabotage your career. For more information on becoming your own worst enemy, call Amacom Books at 212/903-8087.

True Tales From the Workplace

Or maybe this is more a "Tips for Trips" item. Whatever. We know of a case in which an employee suggested a nice restaurant for her boss to visit while attending a conference in the employee's home town—a city known for its cuisine.

The boss headed for the bistro, with colleagues in tow, assuring everyone of the fine recommendation she'd gotten from one of her staff.

When they arrived at an establishment bearing the name given, they were somewhat perplexed by the shabby appearance, but were game to try it. Surely, the employee wouldn't steer them wrong. They peeked in the window to see if the place was crowded, and saw, not diners, but cheering patrons and an impressive line of male strippers.

Unbeknownst to the employee, a dive with the same name—and on the same street—as the lovely restaurant she had suggested had sprung up since she'd moved away.

Green Piece

That number 2 pencil you're chewing may be helping to deplete the rain forest. Some pencil makers in the United States have switched from expensive, California-grown cedar to less-costly jelutong, a wood that grows in the rain forests of Indonesia and Malaysia.

How many pencils does one of the largest U.S. manufacturers of pencils make each year? Nearly 800 million, of which 10 percent are made with jelutong. Another company plans to adorn its pencils with seals that read "Contains no rain forest wood."

The San Francisco-based Rain Forest Action Network provides information on companies that it has targeted as jelutong-users, should you want to boycott them, as the network urges.

In Closing

Toting office worries home with you not only takes the fun out of your leisure time, but it also may spoil your work performance. So says author Barbara Mackoff in her book, *The Art of Self-Renewal*.

Mackoff suggests the following techniques for leaving the office behind:

▶ Each day before leaving your workplace, engage in a "closing ceremony"—such as logging off your computer, chatting with a co-worker about evening plans, or summing up the day with your assistant.

▶ On the way home, try to infuse workplace problems with humor. For example, imagine that a frustrating situation at your workplace is like the "I Love Lucy" episode in which the candy conveyor belt goes out of control.

▶ Put things in perspective by turning your attention away from problems at work to personal or global concerns—what to do about those rain forest pencils, for example.

▶ Think about the people you care about. Imagine what their day was like. Look forward to seeing them.

▶ If you can't let go of something bothersome that happened at work, write a scathing memo (which you don't send) or have an imaginary conversation with the offender, in which you vent all your venom. (Nancy Reagan says that she regularly has such conversations while soaking in her bathtub.)

Next month is Halloween. Enough said.

"Working Life" is compiled and written by **Haidee Allerton**. Send items of interest to "Working Life," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.