

WORKING

Year 13

I hope you're not superstitious.

By Haidee E. Allerton

This year, 2004, marks the 60th anniversary of ASTD. It also begins the 13th year I have been writing *Working*, originally titled *Working Life*.

Let's see...get out my calculator (I'm a word not a numbers person)...that's 144 columns. It seems like a lot more when I think of it this way: Every month for 12 years, I've sat down in front of my computer to try to write a piece that will be amusing, entertaining, ironic, edgy—or have at least one of those qualities.

Right out of the box (some would say Pandora's), 1992, the column won

a prestigious Clarion for editorial excellence in the category “regular non-opinion” column. The “non-opinion” part still makes those who know me snicker.

Actually, *Working* has more of an attitude than an opinion. I'd describe that attitude as “looking at the world of work somewhat askew”—as in, slightly off center, awry. Occasionally, too askew for some readers.

Over 12 years, I've received a virtual hefty bag (more or less) of emails in response to different columns. A few messages have been irate. One or two of

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those epistles concerned an item about naked newscasters in Canada. A small deluge was about the column “Stop the Ma’amness” (February 2002), in which I explained (well, ranted) why I abhor being addressed as “ma’am” by waitpersons and the like. One camp thought I should “get over myself” and accept “aging” or realize that ma’am is just a polite, southern term for females of any age. The other camp applauded my stance, saying they didn’t like being called “ma’am” (or “sir”) for the same reasons.

I love getting feedback, adoring or admonishing.

A Working column can be a selection of items I’ve read and then mold like Silly Putty until the final shape strikes me as funny. I’d guess that’s what most humorists do—the Dave Barrys, the Abe Burrows, the Erma Bombecks, not that I place myself in that major league.

Other Working columns have been essays about something that happened to me or someone I know (that also has relevance to the workplace) or some topic that I must expound on or bust (such as the ma’amness issue), again with some relevance to the workplace.

Working has its fans, its detractors, its followers of both ilk. I wonder if they wonder about its creator. I used to be a devotee of Bob Greene’s column (now gone) American Beat, in *Esquire*. I used to imagine Greene sitting at his desk, wearing a rumpled oxford-cloth shirt, and marvel at how he came up with what I thought were brilliantly crafted columns—columns that always resonated like a bat hitting a hard ball in the sweet spot, even the time he wrote about his genuine Louisville Slugger and I never played Little League. I just know that when Greene knew he got it right, he’d tip back in his office chair, suffused with the feeling that the muse had indeed visited.

I’ve sat in four different employer-provided chairs over the years and now have my own, as you can see in the



picture. It’s cool, it’s an Aeron, it’s my office indulgence. It came like a car, “fully loaded,” and cost almost as much.

What’s that behind the chair, you ask? It’s a map of the world, depicted on a shower curtain. Yes, I have a shower curtain hanging on my office wall. Perhaps that offers some insight into the author of these off-the-wall (some would say) 144 columns.

I probably look least like a person who’d write a column in the satiric humor genre. In fact, a new person on staff here expressed shock when she learned I am the editor who pens Working. “Really?” she asked in disbelief. I take that to mean I appear humorless (and so is the column, some would say).

I know I won’t be writing Working for another 12 years; I don’t have another 12 years of funny in me, at least not for this column. I don’t know what I will write about for the February column when I sit in my cool chair and face my blank computer screen. I didn’t know until I began that a retrospective is what I’d write about for this, my 145th column.