

Working Life

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Work spelled backwards is “krow.” That means absolutely nothing. We just wanted to point out in our own inimitable way that a lot of off-beat stuff is going on in the workplace. You just have to take a different slant. That’s why we have “Working Life.”

Is It Goop Yet?

So, your company’s widgets have become obsolete. So, make something else.

That’s what Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico, did when the need for its once-thriving nuclear-weapons production fell off. Now, the company makes goop.

The labs’ scientists have invented a slimy substance designed to immobilize criminals. The goop is shot from a fat gun worn over the shoulder. (Just picture Bill Murray in *Ghostbusters*). The goop turns to a kind of brown taffy on contact. Once slimed, the perpetrator is purportedly unable to move.

Some police departments say they’re worried that the goop won’t act quickly enough. Sandia will test the goop gun on volunteers later this year. That is, if there are any.

From Business Week

No Novocain

Some dentists are using a form of virtual reality to distract particularly petrified patients from the rigors of root canals, reports *Fortune*.

The patients wear huge goggles that project a TV-screen image in front of their eyes. Wearers can choose regular television viewing or high-tech animation. Or, they can bring their own videotapes.

According to one California den-

tist, patients say that the two hours it takes to do a root canal seem to whiz-z-z-z by.

Foot Prints

Virtual reality has nothing on videotapes.

We know a guy—a friend of a friend—who makes six figures a year selling mail-order videos to people who...shall we say...really like feet. The (perfectly legal) videos are relatively tame. For the most part, the only nudity is naked feet.

One of the regular customers recently requested that our video producer make a “foot-intensive” video of women in various footwear pressing on the accelerator of a car. He is willing to pay \$1,000 for the customized film.

We didn’t make any of this up. Cross our toes and hope to drive...er, die.

Have Not, Want Knot

On a somewhat higher plane, bill collector and budding entrepreneur James McKnight offers a video on tie



Virtually speaking, just put one foot in front of the other and you're knot to be undone. Huh?

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tying. According to McKnight, there are 189 ways to configure a necktie. He refers to his market as the "knot-impaired."

The 13-minute tape, "How To Tie a Tie," features instructions on five different knots: the four-in-hand, half-Windsor, ascot, bow tie, and Shelby.

McKnight says that a tie is a "symbol of respect and responsibility."

The \$19.95 video is available through Janik Productions, Pleasant Plains, Illinois; 800/662-1976.

From the State Journal-Register

With Nuts and Without

The very successful, very rich Mars candy family doesn't believe in putting on airs.

In fact, family members at the company seem to avoid sweetening their own deals.

Family members punch a time clock and work at metal desks in an open area with other Mars employees, says *People*. And patriarch Forrest Mars, Sr., once lived in a modest apartment above the Las Vegas factory, unbeknownst to workers below. Daughter Jackie tells her personal shopper to shop at Sears. And all of the Mars clan give themselves yearly salaries of only \$1 million each—peanuts compared with CEOs' salaries at other large corporations.

Do we hear a few snickers?

A Call to Arms

The next time you want to sell a business, think about running a contest.

That's what a Maryland gun-store owner did when he wanted to sell his shop, reports the *Washington Post Magazine*. His ad asked interested parties to describe in 100 words or less, "Why I want to own a gun store." Plus, they had to send in a \$100 entry fee.

The essay winner will get the store—all the fixtures and inventory—and \$5,000, provided that the owner receives enough money in entry fees to constitute a reasonable "selling" price.

Most of the entries to date are from men age 35 to 55. And New Jersey is the state that boasts the most entrants so far.

So if you're looking to unload, a contest might be worth a shot.

Personnel Freedoms

A district court judge recently ruled that employees who habitually arrive late to work—the "temporarily impaired"—cannot be discriminated against, according to the *New York Times*.

The judge sided with a maintenance worker who had been fired from his job for being late most work days for nine years. The worker won monetary damages and was reinstated in his position. In effect, the judge said there was no legal precedent that required people to be punctual.

In fact, specialists have a bona fide term for tardiness—tardialamtrakia, a chronic inability to arrive anywhere on time.

In another case, a "digitally impaired" employee won a discrimination suit against her employer, who fired the woman because she kept spilling coffee on the control panel at the nuclear facility where she worked. (That's reassuring.) Actually, she wasn't fired until she dropped the contents of six soda cans, four orange-juice cartons, and six gallon bottles of Gatorade during a 12-week period.

The court decision in her favor was hailed by the editor of *American Maladroit*, a direct-mail magazine for people who are maladroit and American, we guess.

And in Portland, Oregon, an impending case will debate whether employees can be dismissed for repeatedly coming to work without having bathed.

By now, you probably think we're putting you on. But the stories are actual, according to Joe Queenan, author of *If You're Talking to Me, Your Career Must Be in Trouble* (Hyperion).

Honesty Is the Best Policy

Not only can't your boss fire you for bad personal habits, but he or she should help you find a better job if you wish.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, truly effective managers recognize that career mobility is inevitable for most people. With current

restrictions on raises and promotions, managers have to be realistic: People will seek greener pastures.

You should feel comfortable telling your boss that you are looking. But you should make it clear that you won't leave him or her in the lurch. In response, your boss should be reasonable and should even help you find new employment. By signaling your intention to leave, you give your manager time to find a replacement. Sometimes, the company even comes up with a counteroffer.

Still, experts advise keeping a job search secret if you think that your boss might react unfavorably to the news.

The Bike People

Want to earn as much as \$100 a day, work outdoors, get buns of steel, and disobey all traffic laws with impunity? Become a free-lance bike messenger.

It isn't just a job; it's a subculture. There is the look: dipped in lycra. There is the persona: outlaw on a mission. And there is the aura: They become one with the bike.

In Washington, D.C., bike messengers command their own quadrant in Dupont Circle—a popular park. The group emits a constant buzz of static and incomprehensible (except to bike messengers) instructions from the omnipresent walkie-talkies.

Every day, we city dwellers almost hit them, or they almost hit us. Businesses depend on them; the messengers are as free as birds. They look cool. And their method of transportation doesn't pollute.

Gotta love 'em.

Career Person of the Month

Natalie Rhys is a computer-systems analyst, trainer, board member of a Quaker retreat, and phone-sex-fantasy performer. About the latter, she has written a book, *Call Me Mistress*.

Next month, "Working Life" classics.

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