

# Working Life

by Haidee Allerton

## TATTOO.DOC

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department is using computers to track tattoos worn by urban gangs to identify gang members. The software, IBM's Query by Image Content, uses such data as color, texture, and shape to compare one image with another.

## TRUE TALES FROM THE WORKPLACE

Here is another cautionary tale from our friend Steve at Bellevue's Psychiatric Emergency Ward:

Seems that an employee brought in some used clothing to distribute to patients upon their release. Among the items was a T-shirt that read, "I've Got a Screw Loose."

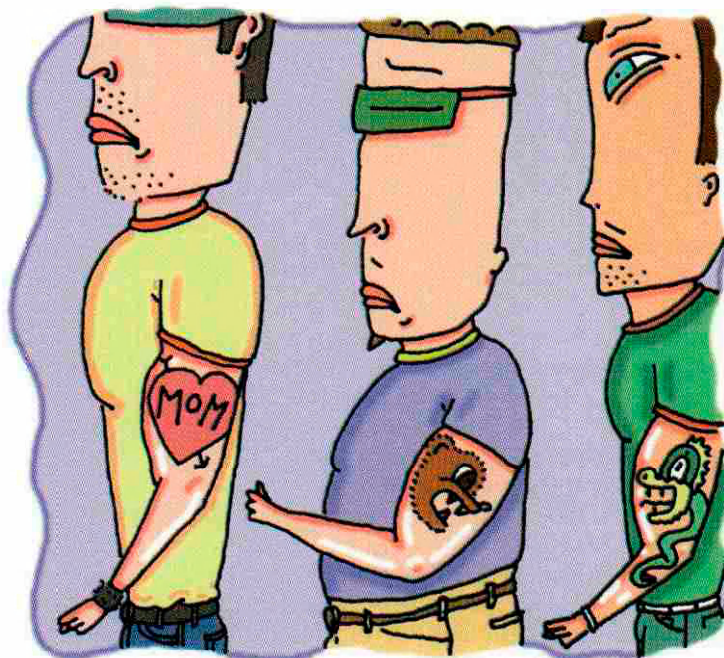
Some sensitivity training, perhaps?

## DISHONORABLE MENTION

Here's our report on the Top 10 Business Metamorons of 1996, bestowed annually by the Why Things Don't Work Institute in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The annual "Moron Awards" are given to organizations and individuals whose behavior best illustrates "the kind of counterproductive leadership that causes pain to investors and employees alike."

The awards got their name from a term coined in *Why Change Doesn't Work*, by Harvey Robbins and Michael Finley, co-directors of the institute. A *metamoron* is the opposite



of a *metaphile*, a person or company that seeks and welcomes opportunities for positive change.

So, without further ado:

**10. NIKE.** It wins for its Olympics ad that said, "You don't win silver, you lose gold." As if competition in the business world weren't already eroding morale, this philosophy is most dispiriting.

**9. Major league baseball and the players' association.** Noting that attendance and revenues have fallen 15 percent since the

1996 strike, the owners rejected a player contract that would assure that the game would be played in 1997. The result: disillusionment with a time-honored tradition.

**8. Archer Daniels-Midland.** Its father-son team fixed prices, misled investors, fooled employees, and lied to federal regulators—while the board of directors stood by and watched.

**7. Texaco.** A few racists plotted to

keep employees down and then tried to hide it.

**6. The AFL-CIO.** Big labor continues to push one-sided political objectives in a world that is trying to value diversity. Power versus trust.

**5. "Chainsaw" Al Dunlap.** Scott Paper's CEO fired thousands of people and took an inflated compensation package for himself.

**4. Federal Aviation Administration.** The regulatory agency was quicker to restrict ValuJet than it has been to curb larger, more established carriers with much worse records.

**3. Microsoft.** A year after promoting Windows 95

as practically the second coming, Microsoft let it be known that the real operating system will be Windows NT.

**2. Ross Perot.** Fathomless executive ego that undermined any chance of a credible third-party candidate in 1996.

**and number 1. The 1996 elections.** The test of a successful organization is whether it is meeting the needs of its customers. Both Republicans and Democrats ignored budget and deficit issues, deemed crucial to the American people.

*Submitted by Amanda Stroud, Information Center assistant with the American Society for Training and Development.*

## A TIP FOR BUSINESS TRAVELERS

So, what luggage does Donald Cone, a baggage handler (actually, *ramp serviceman*) for United Airlines, own? A set of Samsonite Ultralite in black.

"When I'm working, I see the bags come off the plane. Rarely do I see this line of luggage busted up."

You heard it here.

**SALARY  
COMMENSURATE  
WITH EXPERIENCE,  
WE HOPE**

A recent employment ad in the *Washington Post* read, "The position requires a bachelor's degree in marketing or at least 305 years of relevant experience."

### CLOSE QUARTERS

A senior manager at Andersen Worldwide gave up his posh, private office with big mahogany door to sit next to his assistants at the same kind of low desk.

"I like the ability to see people," he says. "I don't know how they feel. I don't think there were volunteers standing by to sit by me, but I respect that and go out of my way to let them have their space."

In fact, Andersen's executives and managers receive seminars on how to give workers space and trust under the new arrangement. Workers get more flexibility but are also held more accountable. Andersen expects the move will save \$1 million yearly in real-estate

costs. Employees now occupy five floors, compared with 22 floors in their previous building.

So that people can "get away from it all," Andersen created shared areas—such as empty workstations, mini conference rooms, and private cubicles—where an employee can work on a computer and use a telephone in private, or groups can meet.

Steelcase is another company reconfiguring its offices so that even the chairperson gets the same type of permanent workstation that other employees have. But the leaders in this trend toward open spaces seem to be investment and high-tech firms.

American Civil Liberties Union says that about six percent of U.S. companies refused to hire smokers back in the 1980s when no-smoking policies first came onto the scene. One company, Ford Meter Box of Wabash, Indiana, forbid its employees to smoke, on or off the job.

Most companies have abandoned (or been forced to abandon) hiring practices that discriminate against smokers. But they do use other measures, such as forbidding smoking on company property and charging smokers more for health insurance. They're considered perfectly legal.

Still, some states have passed laws that protect the rights of smokers in the workplace, including New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, as well as the District of Columbia. In states where there are no such statutes, some companies still have policies against hiring smokers, such as Turner Broadcasting System, based in Georgia.

### SHOW ME THE MONEY

Recently, reportedly Mafia gunmen walked onto a trading floor at a major brokerage house on Wall Street, held a gun to the head of a trader as he was engaged in a deal on the phone, and demanded to know what securities he was trading in.

Or, one could just subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Sources include Parade, Business Week, the Washington Post Magazine, and the New York Times.

### DON'T TRY THIS IN YOUR NEXT JOB INTERVIEW

Here are some unusual, but actual, experiences people have had interviewing prospective employees. The true tales are from a survey conducted of 100 large corporations, reported in the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

- ▶ A candidate said that he never finished high school because he was kidnapped and kept in a closet in Mexico.
- ▶ A bald candidate excused himself during an interview and then returned wearing a hairpiece.
- ▶ A candidate wore headphones during an interview and when asked to remove them, explained that she could listen to the interviewer and music at the same time.
- ▶ A candidate said that she didn't have time for lunch and proceeded to eat a hamburger and fries.
- ▶ A candidate fell and broke his arm during an interview.
- ▶ An applicant interrupted the questioning to phone her therapist for advice.
- ▶ A candidate dozed off during an interview.

▶ A candidate refused to sit and insisted on being interviewed standing up.

▶ An applicant asked, "Would it be a problem if I'm angry most of the time?"

### GIVE US YOUR HUDDLED MASSES...

By now, most companies have no-smoking policies. That accounts for the covert groups of people seen lurking about the entrances of office buildings across the United States.

But at Kimball Physics in Wilton, New Hampshire, people can't even enter the building if they have smoked a cigarette within two hours. If any visitor smells of smoke, the receptionist tells him or her, politely but firmly, to come back later. Says the company's president, "Many of our workers are allergic to tobacco smoke, and even low levels cause a lot of people a lot of stress."

A few years ago, Kimball tried to hire only nonsmokers, a practice struck down as illegal by the New Hampshire legislature. In fact, the