

Working Life

ROCK BOTTOM

Well, they never promised us the workplace was a rose garden. This month, we're tilling for rocks and looking under a few rocks. Sometimes it isn't pretty, but we're all grown-ups.

How Low Can You Go?

United Airlines insists that one of its flight attendants lose 23 pounds or lose her job. The woman, who is a marathon runner, wears a size 8.

Other attendants must subject themselves to weigh-ins when reporting for work. An airline spokesperson told newspeople that "professional image" is the main issue behind the weight rules. Evidently, nine "extra" pounds can wreck one's professional image; that's the amount another attendant was told to shed, or else.

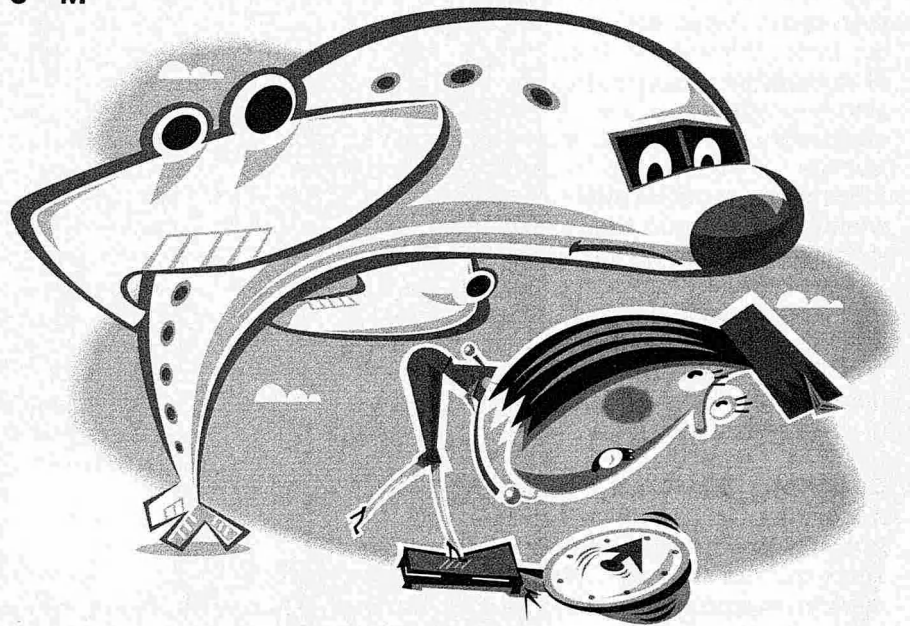
Though United also has weight rules for male flight attendants, some female attendants say that senior women employees are being targeted because of the company's desire to hire younger attendants at lower wages.

Other airlines have abandoned weight rules. Some still have them on the books but aren't currently enforcing them. Generally, the rules for female attendants over age 35 of average height and frame say they can weigh no more than 143 pounds. The guidelines are broader for male flight attendants.

New Meaning to Five-Alarm Chili

Cooks have higher on-the-job mortality rates than fire fighters. That's just one of many sometimes surprising statistics in *Fatal Tradeoffs: Public and Private Responsibilities for Risk*, by W. Kip Viscusi.

Getting the food is even more hazardous than cooking it. According to *Fortune*, the fatal accident rate for



crab fishers in Alaska is nearly 100 times the national average for all professions. Each year, about 660 fishers per 100,000 die on the job—usually by falling overboard into freezing waters or by injury from equipment. More than a few times, whole crews have been lost because their boats capsized in heavy seas.

New Meaning to Computer Users

Interactive video, a tool in training, has gone porno. A recent interactive-technology trade show featured several soft-porn interactive-video programs—including "Virtual Valerie," in which the animated title character, to her credit, shuts off the computer when she doesn't like the way a user is interacting with her. Or is it, "interacting"?

With "Penthouse Interactive," players can press on-screen buttons to indicate whether they want the models (real women) to lick their lips, remove certain items of clothing, and do various other things.

Ick, yuck, ee-yu.

Coffee, tea, or Slim-Fast?

Excess baggage is a weighty issue.

Violence in the Workplace

Recently, the United States has suffered a spate of two particular kinds of violence in the workplace—postal workers going on shooting rampages and estranged spouses shooting themselves or their mates at work.

When interviewed about the post-office incidents, several U.S. postal employees said they're under tremendous stress due to understaffing and the increasing volume of mail. They also complained that they're too closely scrutinized at work for minor errors. One man said he was reprimanded for whistling on the job. And a few postal workers admitted they weren't that upset to hear about the shooting of a particular supervisor.

As for domestic violence spilling over into the workplace, in one case a woman's ex-husband came to her office and then shot himself as she ran out. He was carrying a bouquet of roses at the time.

Good News/Bad News

According to *American Demographics*, America's largest suburban areas will have enough jobs for all resident workers...in 35 years.

True Tales From the Workplace

Cold calling.... Recently, a beleaguered man told a young broker over the phone that he wanted his name removed from the brokerage's telephone list of sales prospects.

"There are only two ways you can get off my list," the ambitious Gordon-Gekko-in-training replied. "You can buy something, or you can die."

The Grass Is Always Greener. Or Is It?

Feeling overworked and unable to balance work and family successfully? You're not alone. In a recent survey by *Training & Development*, 46 percent of the respondents said they feel overworked most of the time. More than half work 10 hours a day, on holidays, and on vacations.

In addition, only about a third of office workers say that their employers are sensitive to family needs and demands, according to a survey of 6,000 employees by the Steelcase Worldwide Office Environment Index.

Well, you could move to France.

In France, public day care can

cost as little as \$2 a day, reports *Newsweek*. Workers get a minimum of five weeks of vacation a year; many get six or seven weeks.

Many employees in France get a 13th month of pay for Christmas and a 14th month of pay for summer vacation. Laid-off workers receive 60 percent of their pay for up to five years.

But all is not pate and baguettes. Bosses started noticing that the French workforce wasn't competitively lean and mean, so they took measures to compensate. For example, employees must contribute 6 percent of their salaries toward health care. Also, jobs have been moving to other countries where labor is cheaper.

Well, what about moving to Japan, you ask. In Japan, parental leave and corporate-sponsored day care are practically nonexistent, according to *Fortune*. As for sexual harassment—known as *seku-hara*—few Japanese companies have formal systems for dealing with the problem.

Inside Job

Employee theft costs businesses in the United States \$40 billion annually, according to *Personnel Journal*.

Also due to internal theft, retail items cost 15 to 30 percent more than necessary. It seems that paying customers make up for the losses.

Some of the more creative ways employees steal from employers include hiding stolen merchandise in vacuum-cleaner bags and then taking the bags out to empty, as shown on the television show, "20/20."

Another popular scam is "sweet-hearting," which entails having an accomplice (a nonemployee) "purchase" goods, except that no money changes hands. The goods leave the store for free.

And we all pay.

Ouch! Ouch!

In 1990, more than 180,000 American workers suffered from injuries to the muscles and tendons in their hands, wrists, and forearms due to repetitive-motion tasks. So says the United States Department of Labor.

Repetitive-motion injuries have been common among assembly-line workers for years, but now the ailments also afflict white-collar

workers using such devices as computer keyboards and court-stenography machines.

Nearly 25 percent of people whose jobs require the use of video-display terminals suffer from repetitive-stress syndrome, according to the National Institute for Occupational Therapy.

Working the Streets

Some of the homeless people asking for money in Washington, D.C., take in up to \$150 a day, reports the *Washington Post*. Also, some of them share apartments, even though they carry signs that read, "Homeless."

But most of the panhandlers do not have permanent homes. Some, but not all, spend the spare change they get on drugs. Some stop asking for money when they reach an amount sufficient to buy a meal, a pack of cigarettes, and a movie ticket.

Watchword

According to the NBC television show "First Person," hosted by Maria Shriver, bosses are invading the privacy of employees in the following ways:

- ▶ eavesdropping on supposedly confidential interoffice electronic correspondence
 - ▶ prying into supposedly confidential medical records and psychological reports
 - ▶ videotaping employee locker rooms, lounges, and even restrooms.
- Smile!

Next month, we look on the bright side with a medley of "Working Life" favorites.

"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.