

Working Life

40

A H , S P R I N G !

Bright flowers, birds chirping, sunny skies, and warm breezes...nothing but happy news in the May edition of "Working Life." Hey, can't we be in a good mood for once?

Deposits? Try the Conga Line

Who is that guy in the can-can dress?

At Phelps County Bank in Rolla, Missouri, it might be one of the employees. Phelps CEO Emma Lou Brent says that the workers' high level of commitment at Phelps had caused stress. When employees of the bank stopped having fun, productivity declined.

One day, the loan-department staff decided to play charades to blow off a little steam. Now, the game is a weekly 30-minute event; the senior vice-president covers the phones.

Other departments have also been getting in on the fun. One day, the bank tellers bunny-hopped through the lobby. Another time, male employees danced the can-can, in appropriate costumes, at a staff meeting.

Brent credits the initiatives with helping the bank reduce overhead by 3 percent and increase net income by 32 percent. But she says that no one is pressured to take part in any activity.

From Business Ethics.

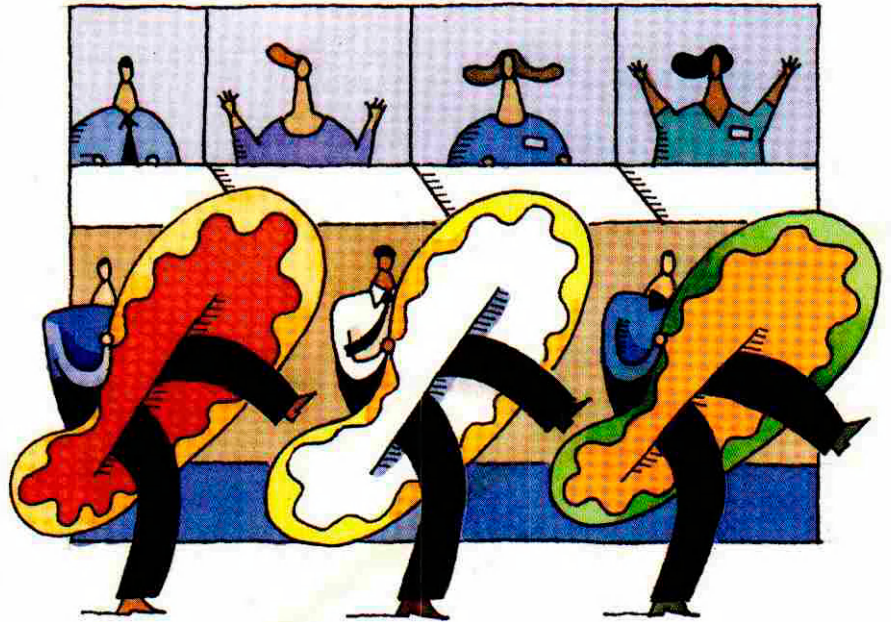
Quote of the Month

"An environment without any humor invents nothing." (T. George Harris)

From Speed Bumps.

Zen and the Art of Taxicab Maintenance

Ralph Napoleoni is proof that it's not so much what you do; it's how you do



Robin Jareaux

it. Enter Ralph's New York City cab....

"Is the temperature OK?"

"Music too loud?"

"Would you prefer Mozart? Led Zep? Or perhaps Ella Fitzgerald?"

"By the way, the cellular phone takes all credit cards."

No wonder Ralph is about to star in an HBO documentary, "Taxicab Confessions," about passengers sharing their innermost secrets with cab drivers. The producers asked Ralph to audition after they rode in his taxi one night.

Ralph, who is 29, has been driving a cab for 10 years. He is scornful of the fact that the certification exam is open book—or open map, actually. "A fifth-grader could pass that," snorts Ralph. Ralph says that some taxi drivers come up to him at the airport and ask how to get back to Manhattan. In Ralph's view, that's "sick."

Ralph's vision is to add a wet bar and a computer that can scan and fax to the back seat of his cab.

Ralph is no hack.

From New York.

Employees get canned—and like it! And more fun stuff.

True Tales From the Workplace

It's spring, and every scanner's fancy turns to love. At least, that's the way it appears.

One office's new scanning software has been inexplicably changing prosaic text to slightly purple prose. For example, it changed "decision making" to "decision mating" and "infinite games" to "infinite dames."

One analyst's opinion: "It must be the upgrade."

Serving Those Who Serve

Each month, Miami restaurant owner Allen Susser gives several staff members \$50 each to experience fine dining firsthand at establishments similar to their workplace, Chef Allen's. Susser requests that the staffers return with reports on the service they receive. And they're expected to learn from the mistakes they encounter.

Susser considers the "program"—which he calls Chow Now—to be good training in customer service. At Chef Allen's, the reviews are good, and employee turnover is low.

From Inc.

Let's Do Lunch, Lunch, Lunch

In Minnesota, the term "lunch break" takes on a whole new meaning. In Minnesota, lunch is eaten three times a day.

(We have that on good authority from the National Speakers Association, which will hold its annual convention in Minnesota this July.)

Actually, there is no lunch per se in Minnesota, just a lot of little lunches. Little lunch is eaten before, after, and between the three main meals of the day: breakfast, dinner, and supper. *Cornfused?* Us, too.

To clarify, the morning little lunch is at about 10 a.m. The midafternoon little lunch is at about 3 p.m. Then there is nighttime little lunch, which occurs during any activity that takes place after supper time.

So, suppose that you make a business trip to Minnesota and along about 10 a.m. someone asks if you'd like to have lunch. For heaven's sake, don't say, "What, are you crazy? I just finished breakfast, and you want to have lunch?" That

wouldn't be good business etiquette in Minnesota.

Little lunch consists of coffee, punch, meat sandwiches or snack buns, freshly baked cinnamon rolls, and bars. An example of bars is the product that results from mixing melted marshmallows with some kind of grease and Rice Krispies breakfast cereal. (Don't forget to bake and cut into bars.)

So, suppose that you're in Minnesota for a training stint and someone invites you to a nighttime little lunch and asks you to bring some food. For mercy's sake, don't be tempted to look in a Minnesota cookbook and make your own "hotdish," even if you can figure out what that is. Hotdish just isn't served at little lunch. That would be a big faux pas.

Enjoy your meal.

Training Heroes

John Cleese—"Monty Python" star turned training-video star—recently made a citizen's arrest outside of his home in London.

Late one night, Cleese heard a woman screaming. Cleese—wearing only a dressing gown and slippers—dashed out of his front door, took the mugger in hand, and marched him several blocks until he saw two bobbies on patrol. The British press hailed Cleese as a hero.

Cleese, by the way, is cofounder of Video Arts in Chicago, Illinois. He stars in a new training video, "More Bloody Meetings," the sequel to "Meetings Bloody Meetings."

Head Trips

No time in your busy work life for much-needed psychological therapy? Don't panic. Try therapy on wheels.

Psychologists Ursula Strauss and Shelley Lennox will chauffeur businesspeople to work (mostly to Manhattan) in a specially equipped van and provide a little counseling on the way. The van is outfitted with a burgundy couch, two bucket seats, a small coffee table, and a clock. The driver's compartment is sealed off so that whatever is said can't be overheard. Only one of the doctors at a time is in attendance.

Strauss and Lennox will also

schedule sessions during lunch hours and trips to the airport. Or they will just park the van outside of your office building for a quick "therapeutic conversation."

Strauss and Lennox say that the en-route service is ideal for routine psychotherapy and substance-abuse problems. For more serious emotional crises, they prefer to use their regular offices. Adds Strauss, "We haven't done people with claustrophobia. They wouldn't come to us in a van."

So far, the Bronx-based Mobile Psychological Services has 50 clients, six therapists, three drivers, and four vans. And the founders are thinking franchise and, possibly, group therapy in the vans. (For car-pool lanes?)

From the New York Times.

In the Van-Guard

OK, so you don't need therapy. But you do experience office-separation anxiety.

The Mobile Office Vehicle is the ultimate solution. The MO-V (the eponymous company is headquartered in Zeeland, Michigan) contains a desk, swivel chair, notebook computer, desk-jet portable printer, fax machine, hands-free cellular phone, and desk-type phone. The vans sell for about \$30,000.

So far, customers are mostly small companies. But MO-V is optimistic about future sales. By 1997, almost six million workers will be doing part or all of their jobs using mobile phones, faxes, and modems—according to the Yankee Group, a Boston consulting firm.

From Inc.

Next month, things beat up.

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