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Reality Check

By Paperitalo Staff

I spent this past weekend at the TAPPI/PIMA Student Summit at the Holiday Inn South, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It is so much fun being around the students—they are without guile and cynicism. For them the future is bright, full of promise, devoid of the drudgery and foul experiences that for us older types sometimes overshadow the rare privilege being part of this industry is. These students, leaders all, are a blessed group, achieving early career advantages through hard work and the privileges of scholarships supplied by present and past generations. My little part in the program was to help them continue their competitive edge by discussing the preparation for and realities of the job interview. David Ashcraft of NC State followed up with a reality check on how to get one's career off to a good start after the job is landed.

As I left the hotel on Tuesday morning, I was in for some reality of my own that I had not expected. The woman who handled my checkout wore a pin stating that she has 26 years of service in that hotel. I asked her about it. She relayed how thankful she was for her job—how when she started 26 years ago, she made \$3.10/hour, ten cents more than minimum wage then. She told me she had raised six kids on that job, with the help of food stamps (for those of you not familiar with the United States, this is a form of welfare for the working poor in this country).

We bemoan the state of this industry. Let us not fool ourselves—this industry takes in huge quantities of money. Our poor mouthing and gnashing of teeth has nothing to do with the large cash flow this industry generates—it has solely to do with who gets what share of it. In the context of the checkout person at the hotel we are all fabulously rich. Abraham Lincoln, when talking about all the patronage seekers assaulting the White House after his first inauguration, in despair is quoted as saying, “There are too many pigs for the teats.” Not quite as famous as the Gettysburg Address, but nearly as pragmatic. In some respects, we have the same problem in the pulp and paper industry.

So emboldened by our idealistic students I have a proposal for all of you. I suggest you leave a generous tip, at least \$20.00, in your room each time you check out of a hotel. If the checkout

people are living on food stamps, one can only imagine how the rest of the staff is surviving. You can personally afford it if you work in this industry. It will go to a good cause. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the paper industry worldwide became quietly known as those people who leave big tips for hotel service people? It is simply the right way for us to share our abundance and would additionally be a great way to improve the image of our industry. And by the way, lest you think this is a half baked idea I just thought up—it is not—this is just an opportunity to expose my own practice. I have already been doing this for some time—I get my tip money from my personal funds by avoiding rich, fattening on-the-road meals that I don't need anyway. It is never part of my expense reports.

For safety this week, may I remind you to always check the fire escape plan when you stay in a hotel? It just may save your life. We will talk again next week. ##