



onlyPulpandPaperJobs.com

Soft stuff: feelings

By Paperitalo Staff

For you grizzled types who see the world as black and white, you may want to skip this week's column. The following is an abstract idea that I hope I can get across, and more importantly, make a point with it. When one starts their career, they are a bit of an open book. They may have had some work experiences, maybe even some military experience, but, in general their expectations about the work environment are recognized, even by them, as just that: expectations that may or may not become reality. It amuses me, for instance, to hear some of the ideas soon to be college graduates have about work. One told me last year something to the effect that once she started to work, she saw excitement in life as being over-you go to work each day, do the same things each day and forty years later you retire. Sadly, I think I have actually met people who have done exactly this.

What I am getting at here, though, is something more subtle. It seems to me, now in my fifties, that earlier in my career, I expected attitudes to not change for myself as I got older. This happened because as one enters a career, he or she was thrown into the work environment with people of at least two generations. One may start to work as a twenty something alongside forty somethings, fifty somethings, sixty somethings, and perhaps even some in their seventies. One starts to share experiences with these people and unconsciously makes assumptions that, because of many shared experiences on a daily basis, our co-workers of different ages have similar attitudes about life, work, and so forth.

Stating the obvious, that is wrong, for co-workers of different ages have different views based on the phase of life they are in outside of the work environment. Simply, young people are focused on establishing their own independent lifestyle, middle aged are focused on perhaps children and aging parents, and older workers are focused on their own health issues and pending retirement.

All of this seems obvious in the abstract; it is in the application to our own individual lives and personal attitudes that it falls apart. And it manifests itself in the following way: when we reach, say, the mid-fifties, we think our industry, our world, indeed everything we touch, has deteriorated greatly from our experiences earlier in our career (the company we work for is falling apart, our industry is falling apart, and so forth). I don't think this is necessarily true, rather,

it is our attitudes and perceptions at this age of life that have changed. For instance, today we think the industry is falling apart, especially here in North America, and to a certain extent we can cite statistics, locked gates, and bulldozed plants that bear witness to this idea. However, this destruction of the obsolete has been going on as long as there has been an industrial revolution.

Ask the old timers in Mechanicville, New York what happened to the pulp and paper industry and they will tell you it died with the departure of the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company in the 1960s. Ask the people of Portsmouth, Ohio about the steel industry and they will tell you it died in the 1950s. These things have been going on from before our times and will be going on long after we are gone. They events of today are dramatic and life changing to us simply because they are happening to us and destroying the memories of earlier in our career. In a big picture context, they are nothing new and the sooner we realize that, the sooner we can quit dwelling on them and deal with the realities of today. Simply put, we do not live in special or extraordinary times, we just happen to live in our times.

You might be a slovenly bureaucrat if you think the industry and your career are nothing but downhill from here. For safety this week, does your facility have defibrillators placed strategically throughout? Have you considered purchasing one of these to keep at home? They are life saving devices. Be safe and we will talk next week. ##