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Working for Idiots

By Paperitalo Staff

This column was not precipitated by any encounter I have had with anyone in the pulp and paper industry in at least the last five years. So, if you think I am talking about you, I am not. It was precipitated by a series of events, but they have nothing to do with our industry.

Let's face it, the world is full of, for a lack of a better term, idiots. They may be your boss. They may be your boss's boss. They may have risen to their position because their parents could send them to some prestigious school. The most severe cases like that involve daddy or mommy giving their alma mater enough money to build a satellite campus in order to get junior, whose SAT score is something south of 500 processed through the system.

Think I am joking? Long ago, I worked for such an idiot (several layers above me) that I was convinced couldn't add $2 + 2$ on a solar calculator in the Sahara Desert. To my amazement, this person continued to land fantastic jobs. This was done by employers kicking them out and helping them buff up their résumé in order to get rid of them. Eventually, this person had a résumé that looked like, if only you asked them, they could single-handedly navigate a nuclear submarine beneath the Arctic Ocean. Once, this person even convinced a company to move their headquarters half way across the country. The company's board (they must have all been geniuses, too) wanted this person as CEO so bad they moved the headquarters so the new CEO's spouse would not have to give up her bridge club.

I digress. Sooner or later, we all work for idiots. It is unavoidable, they are ubiquitous. What we can do, is do something about them.

Ask for a transfer. Call them out. It is your mission in life as a fiduciarily responsible employee to make sure these people rise no higher in the organization. They can kill your career, your company and our industry. It has been done many times in the past.

These people get to the top because everyone acts passively towards them. It is far less trouble to let them be than to confront them.

Stated another way, demand high standards, demand that accolades be earned, not bestowed. You do have a problem if junior works for mommy and mommy owns the company. In that case, all you can do is leave. It may be painful, it may be personally disruptive to you and your family,

but you might as well cut free early and build your career in a professional, high standards organization.

It all boils down to excellence. If people around you are not truly committed to excellence and you cannot find a way to impact that, you are wasting your time and they are ruining the company. Fix it if you can, get out if you can't.

And of course, idiots and safety are two words that do not go together. Make sure your safety committee is staffed with the competent.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##