

WEEK ONE Monday, May 8

I see you. I see you walking by my office, trying to look like you have a reason to be there. But you don't. I see the guilty look on your face. You try not to make eye contact. You try to rush past me as if you're going to the bathroom. But the bathroom is at the other end of the hall. You think I'm naïve, but I know what you're doing. Everyone knows. But she's my secretary, not yours, and her candy belongs to me, not you. And if I have a say in whether or not you ever become a partner at this firm-and trust me, I do-I'm not going to forget this. My secretary. My candy. Go back to your office and finish reading the addendum to the lease agreement. I don't want to see you in the hall for at least another sixteen hours. AND STOP STEALING MY CANDY.

And stop stealing my stapler, too. I shouldn't have to go wandering the halls looking for a stapler. I'm a partner at a half-billion-dollar law firm. Staplers should be lining up at my desk, begging for me to use them. So should the young lawyers who think I know their names. The Short One, The Dumb One, The One With The Limp, The One Who's Never Getting Married, The One Who Missed Her Kid's Funeral-I don't know who these people really are. You in the blue shirt-no, the other blue shirt-I need you to count the number of commas in this three-foot-tall stack of paper. Pronto. The case is going to trial seven years from now, so I'll need this done by the time I leave the office today. Remember: I can make or break you. I hold your future in my hands. I decide whether you get a view of the ocean or a view of the dumpster. This isn't a game. Get back to work. My secretary. My stapler. MY CANDY.

#Posted by Anonymous at 1:14 pm

Tuesday, May 9

I can barely do anything this morning knowing there's a living creature in the office next to mine. Usually it's just the corporate securities partner, and he hasn't moved a muscle since the Carter administration. But today he brought his dog into the office. Ridiculous. As if there aren't enough animals here already. We had fish once. Piranhas. We overfed them. We threw The Fat Guy's lunch in the tank one day because he showed up to a meeting fifteen minutes late. The fish devoured it-turkey sandwich, brownie, forty-eight-ounce Coke-and then exploded. It made the point. No one shows up late to my meetings anymore.

But the dog arrived this morning and immediately everyone was in the hallway instead of where they belong, staring into their computer screens. Associates were getting up, out of their chairs, to go chase the dog, pet the dog, talk to the dog. Someone gave the dog a piece of his muffin from the attorney lounge. The muffins aren't for dogs. We don't even let the paralegals have the muffins. The muffins are for client-billing attorneys. They're purely sustenance to keep the lawyers from having to leave the office for breakfast. They're not for visitors. I made a note of the incident and I'll have a dollar-fifty taken off the guy's next paycheck.

The dog barked once. I told his owner to keep the dog quiet or I'd lock him in the document room with the junior associates who've been in there for six weeks, searching for a single e-mail in a room full of boxes. There's an eerie quiet that normally pervades the halls of the firm, punctuated only by the screams of those who've discovered they can use the letter opener to end the pain once and for all. I'd like to keep it that way. We don't need barking to drown out our inner turmoil. Noise is for the monthly happy hour and the annual picnic. Not the workspace. The workspace is sacred.

I overheard The One Who Doesn't Know How To Correctly Apply Her Makeup say the dog really brings some life into this place. "I don't feel so alone," she said. I gave her some more work to do. She's obviously not busy enough. She's supposed to feel alone. This isn't the kind of business where people can go into their co-workers' offices and fritter away the morning chatting about the weather or the stock market or their "relationship issues." Or playing with a damn dog.

We're a law firm. Time is billable. The client doesn't pay for small talk. Every minute you spend away from your desk is a minute the firm isn't making any money off your presence, even though you're still using the office supplies, eating the muffins, drinking the coffee, consuming the oxygen, and adding to the wear and tear on the carpets. You're overhead. And if you're not earning your keep, you shouldn't be here.

The dog shouldn't be here, except he's probably more easily trained than some of my associates. If I get him to eat some incriminating evidence we need to destroy, I can bill the client a couple hundred dollars an hour for it. If I can get him to bark at some opposing counsel and scare them into accepting our settlement offer, that's probably billable. If I can get him to pee on a secretary, it won't be billable, but it's entertaining nonetheless. Hardly matters. Having a dog in the office is almost as ridiculous as holding the elevator for a paralegal. Inappropriate, undesirable, and it WILL NOT HAPPEN when I become chairman of this place, I guarantee you that.

#Posted by Anonymous at 9:25 AM

To: Anonymous Niece
From: Anonymous Lawyer
Date: Tuesday, May 9, 1:40 PM

Great seeing you over the weekend. I'm glad you came down. I was just talking about you at lunch-another partner said his son is starting at Stanford in the fall, and I told him I have a niece who's graduating next month. I said I'd see if you'd let me pass along your e-mail address in case his son has any questions. His father is a tax lawyer, so the son's probably a nut, but at least I can get some points for being helpful to my colleagues. He'll owe me one the next time I need a swing vote at the partner meeting.

I took a quick look at some of those law student weblogs you told me about. They gave me some names to add to the list of kids I'm never going to hire. They also motivated me to start this new e-mail account. Maybe I'll write a weblog of my own. I'll be Anonymous Lawyer. You can be Anonymous Niece. How does that sound?

To: Anonymous Lawyer
From: Anonymous Niece
Date: Tuesday, May 9, 2:23 PM

Sounds strange, but you're the boss. Anonymous Niece is fine. Feel free to give the tax partner my e-mail address. I can tell his son which professors to avoid, where to get the best pizza, it's no problem. Besides, if I'm nice to his son, his dad will help me with my Tax assignments once I'm in law school, right?

To: Anonymous Niece
From: Anonymous Lawyer
Date: Tuesday, May 9, 2:37 PM

You won't need his help. I'm sure you'll do quite fine on your own. Not everyone can get into Yale Law School. I'm proud of you, you know. It doesn't look like either of my kids is turning out to be a genius, so you might be my only hope.

Don't forget to call your grandma and wish her a happy birthday. We talked about you this morning. She's happy you're following in my footsteps. At least someone in this family is.

Wednesday, May 10

The Guy With The Giant Mole quit today. Associates usually quit in January, right after the annual bonus checks, but this guy had been trying to go on vacation for three and a half years and never got the chance. Apparently he woke up one day last week and decided to become a high school teacher. That's what happens when you can't cut it. The best part of my job is getting to watch people like him go from happy, energetic, eager-to-please young law school graduates to slightly older, frustrated, burned-out midlevel associates who can't stand to be here.

And then it falls to me to replace them. That's the power of being the hiring partner at one of the most prestigious law firms on the planet. Law students love us. We have to beat them away with sticks. Well, not anymore, at least not literally. In the old days, the story is they would get some sticks with the firm's logo screen-printed on the side and really have some fun with the recruiting process, but I think there's an American Bar Association rule against that now, and so we have to use the standard rejection letter. I bet it was a lot more fun with the sticks.

We have students lining up to hand us their résumés, yet we've got a 30 percent annual turnover rate. And it's not just us. It's everywhere, all our peers, the whole industry. That makes my job a bit of a challenge. How to stay positive about selling students on the excellence of this place when we have to make sure the boxes of copier paper aren't tied up with rope-because that rope is just too tempting. One hanging every so often is to be expected, but when there's another one every time we get new office supplies it starts to get a little difficult to work.

At least the ones who kill themselves are admitting the truth. Once you realize you can't hack it at a place like this-that you're not as smart as you thought you were, or don't have the discipline to make the sacrifices it takes to succeed-then obviously it's not really worth continuing the charade. But some don't get the hint. They stay until we push them out-with a polite suggestion that they might find more appropriate work at Denny's.

I've been informed we have a former associate driving a bus. Until someone said that, I didn't realize we still had buses in this country. I fired the person who told me. Lawyers at this firm shouldn't be riding the bus. They shouldn't be using any kind of transportation at all, actually. They should be here. Billing clients.

#Posted by Anonymous at 10:51 AM