

Wowed into Awe

By Karel Murray, CSP

What lies behind an institution's front door? Have you ever walked down a bustling city street and stopped for a moment to peer through the glass at a corporate lobby? Often the interior of the building has sharp angles, a front desk with imposing guards manning the station and a horde of people moving with purpose across the highly shined tile floor. I try to guess what type of conversation individuals are having as they near the elevator. Are they talking about what the coming day will hold, problems from yesterday or only exchanging simple pleasantries?

I'm not a voyeur... I'm simply curious about how the world has changed since I was on the executive path years ago. Is the hierarchy in the corporate offices still the same, do turf wars continue to be fought and the administrative staff remain overworked? I left corporate America to start my own business in 1993 and never looked back. I periodically miss the day to day interaction of fellow employees and the imagined security of regular employment. But I don't miss the inner office politics. There is a certain pleasure in knowing if I have a problem with management, I can chastise myself.

After completing an interview with Susan Kubiesa of Zurich North America, I began to evaluate my past experiences in relationship to what the world is like today working in America. The most striking element is company culture and the significant amount of diversity and change we are seeing across industries. Searching websites on various companies, I still find it difficult to determine what it would be like to actually work at or with them. The typical marketing wordage on the home page and carefully written corporate annual minutes really don't tell a person how the company actually functions internally...behind the closed door.

Spying and stalking is probably against the law. That means better questions with a specific purpose need to be asked of the right people at the right time. Or, perhaps it is as simple as going and sitting in a lobby of a company and observe. I've done that a few times with some very interesting results. Does the reception person ignore me until I approach them? Do any passing employees acknowledge my presence as I sit cheerfully on the overstuffed couch? I observe how people relate to each other – is it a happy environment or highly introverted with each associate concentrating only on their tasks and not interacting with others.

Is anyone remotely curious about why I'm there? Once, I stepped into a business lobby and was struck by the completely accommodating nature of the receptionist. First, she introduced herself immediately and asked my name, which I provided. She welcomed

me to the company and said “Who may I ask are you here to see? I’d like to let them know you’ve arrived.”

Suddenly, a vision of corporate perfection strolled with purpose through the lobby – between me and the receptionist. The tall man, in an impeccable light weight navy wool suit and bright yellow tie, slid his right hand over his ear to smooth down an imagined flaw in his hairstyle as he reviewed the file he was holding. Never once did he acknowledge that he had severed our conversation nor did he indicate in any way I existed, no less than four feet from him.

As he strode out of view, I looked at the receptionist, raised an eyebrow and told her who I was there to see. With an apologetic look, she said “Ah...he just walked through here. Let me call him to let him know you are here.”

Not an auspicious start. When he came out to greet me, all smiles and cheerful demeanor, I already had a sense of the man before any words were spoken. My “gut” told me this company person and I weren’t a match.

I shortened the interview and sought out a competing firm. The person I was scheduled to meet was waiting for me in the lobby, casually chatting with the receptionist as I walked in. The executive smiled broadly and welcomed me by name as I stepped forward. She indicated that she loved my website and was very interested in hearing more about what I wanted to do on the project I came to discuss. After making sure I had a cup of coffee, we toured the office where I was introduced to key personnel who would be assisting on the project. Each one knew who I was and made every effort to make me feel at home.

One word. Wow.

I had been introduced to an environment that thrived on making things personal for maximum effect. In my mind, I had already hired them before I knew what they cost. I was home.

Before you make any determinations on who should get your business, or be your next employer, make an effort to learn something about the company and the people who work there. Remember, it is not just the name of the organization you are associating yourself with, but the identities and personalities of the employees who work there.

You have earned every right to be wowed into awe.

Karel Murray, author, humorist and business trainer speaks nationally and internationally. She is the author of “Straight Talk – Getting Off the Curb”, co-author of “Extreme Excellence” and publishes a monthly online newsletter, “Think Forward® which has thousands of subscribers, The Profitability Blueprint Series: Career Building Concepts for the Real Estate Licensee and

numerous articles in local, regional, and national publications. You can listen to exciting interviews at <http://www.JustForAMomentPodcast.com>. You can contact her at karel@karel.com or call 866-817-2986 or access her web site at <http://www.karel.com>