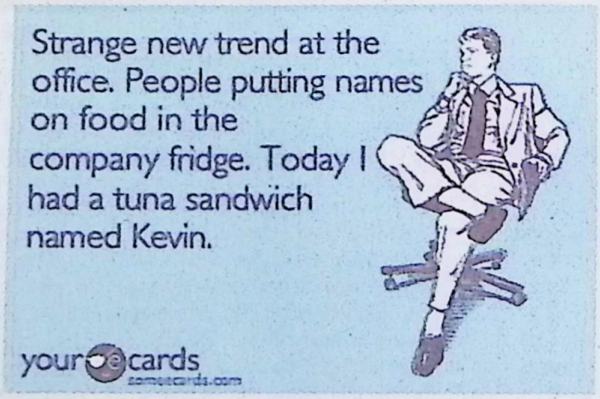


Do You Have Work "Experience"?

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All too often in life, what you have learned through work experience may not be quite what a potential employer has in mind when they ask you about it. I am grateful for having so far led a professional life rich with,ahem, 'interesting' experiences to write about. And I am continually amazed by the priceless material that lurks out there, yet to be mined. Some of it can be classified as mundane (lunchbox wars), some of it falls into the common sense category (don't go shopping with a bucket full of fish), and sometimes it is the result of a freak incident (or an incident with a freak).



Regardless, such experiences invariably have the power to horrify or amuse, depending on your perspective. For example, in this computer-dependent age, we all *know* the dangers of hitting the "reply all" button when answering an email - or of sending off the wrong attachment after too many hours spent slaving over a document that is resisting revision or completion. Yet how many of us can actually avoid recalling some awful memory as we consider this possibility, or can claim with any authority that we might not do the very same thing again tomorrow?

Sometimes the weirdest experiences at work come from unexpected sources, like the humble home-packed lunch. Some offices offer the option of storing your lunch in a fridge until it's time to eat. Of course, this assumes that the social contract which relies on one person not stealing the lunch of another will in fact be respected. That's not always the case. One friend in London mentioned how the Phantom Lunch Menace in his office invariably ate the contents of the most appetising-looking sandwich bag.

No amount of detective work had succeeded in identifying the culprit, so he and another colleague started keeping a close eye on the fridge, thereby cutting down the incidence of sandwich-nabbing. In addition, my friend adopted an ingenious strategy, occasionally "drawing" green mould onto his sandwich bag, and then placing the sandwich carefully in the bag so that it appeared that the bread was slightly mouldy. This, combined with his occasional comments about the frustrations of being a single man who could never get through a loaf of bread fast enough to avoid mould eventually resulted in his lunch remaining largely unmolested.

There are of course many more dramatic stories to be had, often regardless of what your job actually is. A friend of mine worked for two years at Barnes and Noble store in the US. You would think that working in a bookshop meant that she would meet any number of interesting and pleasant people, since at least folks who go to bookstores actually *read*. But as Leah found out, it isn't always that simple. For example, one woman actually brought a bucket of dead fish into the store while she was looking for cookbooks- presumably ones with fish recipes!