Another visitor, a man, really managed to raise the bar in terms of what constitutes a hard-to-please customer. He wanted to find a simple instruction manual on flying. I mean, seriously, *are* there any?! You'd think – that flying probably requires a set of qualifications that can't really be covered in a single manual, but as this chap kept emphasising, he was looking for something that "wasn't too complicated"...

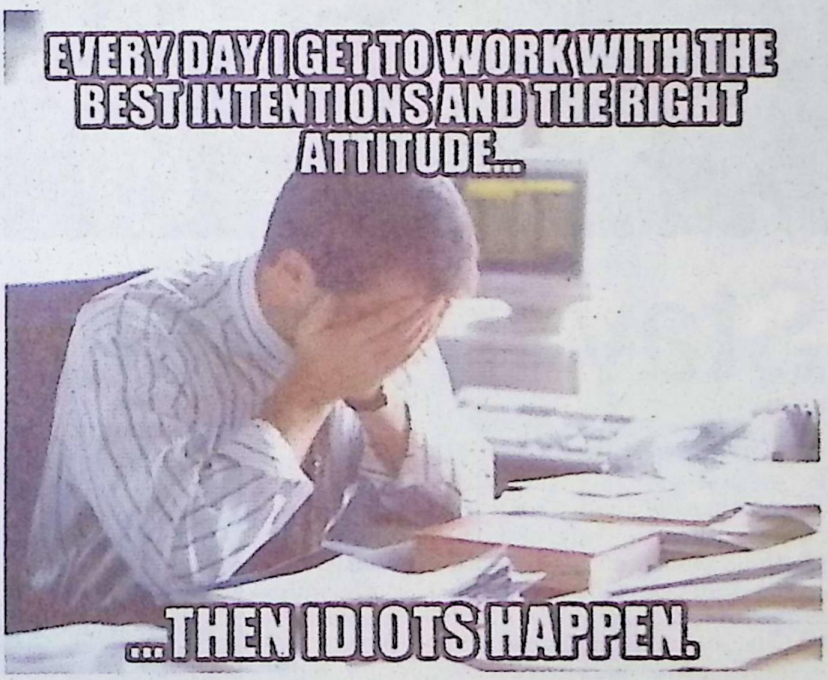
Another friend discovered that a summer job as a lifeguard at a swimming pool in Canada involved unexpected hazards. She had been prepared to rescue drowning children, but what came her way was in a different league. Trying to locate the source of an unpleasant smell - and let's face it, if you can actually smell something unpleasant over the amount of chlorine inhabiting the average Canadian swimming environment, it must be something *quite* unpleasant- she discovered a dead rat trapped in the water filter.

A colleague whom she asked for assistance was less than helpful. He suggested leaving it there until the cleaners were forced to come and deal with it. I will say in admiration that my friend did her duty. She removed the dead rat with a plastic bag, and then, heading for the nearest garbage bin, instead – hurled it over the nearest fence, unable to bear the smell. Thankfully, there was no one walking by just then, otherwise it could have got a lot more complicated - especially if she had been in the decidedly more litigation-prone United States!

For those working in less action-oriented fields, the challenges may be of a less (literally) hands-on variety. A colleague of mine, who is the manager of a large team, finds that she invariably ends up counselling some of her team members. I should add that this is a result of the fact that she is an unusually kind person surrounded by a set of unusually neurotic people. At one point, one of her male subordinates developed quite a serious case of hypochondria, and began stressing about all matters related to his health. Taking the time to do some research, she sat down with him and explained in some detail why he had nothing to worry about. He heard her out, and then perhaps from a sense of relief, relaxed and gave an enormous yawn. Unfortunately, ever since that incident, he begins to yawn whenever she speaks - which is singularly unhelpful when they are having a work-planning meeting! Despite threatening him with dire consequences, so far nothing has worked to put an end to this unfortunate tendency...

But one of the most bizarre work stories I have ever come across relates to someone I know who works in an advertising agency. Since any service industry is supposed to function on the basis that the customer is always right, making sure that clients are happy is part of Keya's mandate. Some time ago, she met with a prospective client, with whom she had managed to squeeze in an unscheduled meeting on a particularly busy day because he had told her it was very urgent.

Once the meeting began, the conversation went as follows – and it ends as you would expect, in a true facepalm moment!



Keya: Okay, can you tell me a little about your company - what your product is, and a little bit about it?

Prospective client: No, I can't disclose that. But the product is exclusive.

Keya: That's great, but I need to know what you want to sell and to whom.

Prospective client: I can't disclose that. Keya: So what would you like me to do for you, then?

Prospective client: I want you to give me an exclusive marketing plan for my product. Keya: You mean you want a marketing plan for the product that you won't tell me about?

Prospective client: That is correct.

Keya: *Speechless*