

Jobs

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**Midwest's Leading
Employment Marketplace**

A look at Leonardo puts things in perspective

With all the talk about a global work force, you might think everyone does business the same way, no matter where they live. A recent business trip to Italy gave me a chance to test the hypothesis.

A quick glance at a normal workday in Milan supports the theory that we all work in pretty much the same way. Workers commute, carry briefcases, drink coffee, sit in meetings, use computers and worry about profits. However, a closer look reveals the nuances that say Italy still has its own style.

The official office workday in Milan begins at 9 a.m., breaks for an hour lunch at 1:30 p.m., and ends at 7:30 p.m. Commuters ride subways, buses, and trolleys. Little cars with bad drivers (description provided by a Milanese business associate) compete for scarce parking spaces.

Parking is so difficult that workers will arrive hours early just to grab a parking spot on the sidewalk. It may be free but I would hate to be boxed in by a tree.

Workers smoke when and where they

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want. Few people seem to smoke while strolling since they can smoke sitting anywhere. The subway, however, is free of smokers.

Lunch time is similar—and not similar—to the U.S. For one thing, McDonald's restaurants exist and, I am told, are enjoyed by Italians. How anyone can resist a fresh rustica panini (vegetable sandwich with fresh mozzarella) at a local bar (not what you think) I don't know. I watched co-workers stand and relax over teeny cups of coffee for an hour. No paper or Styrofoam. So nice.

I believe a bigger trend than global-

ization for Milanese workers is mobilization. Everyone has a mobile phone and uses it everywhere, sometimes to distraction. Try to stay focused in a meeting where mobile phones randomly ring from every pocket, satchel and purse. Try not to feel odd when you're the only person in a car not talking on the phone.

Let's talk vacation. Dr. Alberto Cusi, a marketing professor and consultant, told me that the Italian government dictates 34 vacation days per year. It is not only the Italian worker's right but his duty to take vacation.

If a worker can't take off six weeks in a year — contrary to popular opinion not everyone in Europe goes on holiday for the month of August — vacation is carried over indefinitely. Now how can U.S. companies be part of a global economy when they operate under antiquated vacation policies?

The one sightseeing detour of my business trip led to Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper painting, which was undergoing restoration. I watched four women sitting on scaffolding in front of brightly illuminated sections of the

painting.

Each dabbed at her spot with a toothpick-size brush, occasionally sharing a word or laugh with another. At times, one would break focus to look over her shoulder at the tourists. I stared intently trying to determine if one artist was adding more blue or white to her spot.

As I examined the painting's perspective, my own job came into perspective. Think of the restoration artist's résumé: "Part of restoration team of da Vinci's Last Supper. Responsible for the blue vestment of second apostle to the left of Jesus." Sure beats my potato chip product launch.

The closest job in Chicago to match these artists' accomplishments would be working on a team to restore Michael Jordan's desire to play basketball. Globalization or not, genius restoration jobs come far and few between.

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The art of work leaves a lasting impression

Art often reflects the activity of the place in which it is located. So said Levi Smith, an adjunct lecturer in museum education at the Art Institute of Chicago and art history lecturer in its school. He was our group's guide for a tour of the Collection of Sara Lee Corp.

Smith proceeded to illustrate this theory with a painting by Georges Braque of a harbor in Antwerp. The painting adorns a hallway leading to an executive board room at Sara Lee. The harbor reflects the hallway. A little contrived, I thought, but interesting.

Another Braque, "Woman Painting," hangs inside the board room. Smith explained that the painting's study of an artist's studio reflected the work that happens in the board room. Ideas and plans are created. Great attention is paid to a work of art in a studio just as business is carefully developed in a board room.

Right outside the board room sat a bronze sculpture. "That's a fallen soldier," I whispered to a fellow tour attendee, "that's what happens to some-

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one when things don't go well in the board meeting."

"This sculpture is 'Falling Warrior' by Henry Moore," Smith said. "He could be a reminder of the business casualties that can happen outside the board room." I was in sync with Smith and hooked to the notion of connecting art and site.

On either side of the offices of the vice-president and the president, two Alberto Giacometti sculptures, one of a man, Diego, and the other a woman, Annette IV, stood on pedestals. The personalities captured in bronze reflected a very serious, no-nonsense

mood. I saw scowls on their faces. "Be alert," they could be saying, "you are getting close to the big guys, so be on your toes."

Behind the main reception area hangs the "Foliage-Oak Tree and Fruit Seller" by Edouard Vuillard. "It is a picture of a common place," Smith said. Lanes full of street vendors flow from a French garden. Children play. Women work the soil.

Sitting at the reception desk you look down the hallways of the floor. Smith's interpretation: the receptionist sits at the nexus of halls from which the company lives as the garden sits at the nexus of streets where the French live.

I told Smith that I found the metaphors fascinating and I could apply the work and art connection to my own office. "My sister made a quilt for me in a window design to represent the window view I lost in a recent office shuffle," I told him.

"Across from my computer is a Studs Terkel poster autographed with the message, 'Always the good fight,' " I continued. "And I'm a writer. Plus I have a Peruvian mask on my credenza.

What does that mean?"

Smith jumped in: "You have a maternalistic, nurturing influence from the quilt and a paternalistic, go-get-'em influence from Studs. And we all put masks on and off during the day."

Soon, 52 of Sara Lee's masterpieces will move to permanent homes in museums across the country. "What goes on the wall when the Dégas is gone?" I asked. How could anything replace a Pissarro, Matisse, Monet, Renoir?

How will employees feel when the day arrives that a lesser piece of art stands in the place of a masterpiece? Will the art and work symmetry ever be the same?

I suggest grieving employees call Smith for consolation and new artwork assimilation. Or maybe someone could sew them quilts to reflect what is missing. That made me and my office feel better.

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Julie Danis

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CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Furniture for the 'average' person comes up short

Here's a workplace riddle for you: My neck hurts, I can barely see over the table, and my feet don't touch the floor. What am I and where am I?

I'm not Alice and I'm not in Wonderland: I'm short and I'm sitting at my desk working on the computer for an extended period, conducting business around a conference table and, on a rare occasion, flying business class.

I am short and that's fine with me, except when I'm working. My monitor is too high. My chair, if adjusted up to meet my desk, leaves my feet dangling and prevents the chair's arms from fitting under the work surface. Short is fine except when paired with office furniture designed for the average worker.

Bettye Russell, customer design advocate for Herman Miller, the office furniture designer and manufacturer, understood my aches and complaints. Russell is an expert in developing ergonomic programs for workplaces.

Furniture manufacturers try to accommodate the majority of the population when designing furniture. They generally use sizing measurements

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from the military. However, military uniform measurements are not a good representation of sizes because the extremely tall and short get left out.

Average does not stay average over time. One size does not fit all. And as a Herman Miller brochure says, "People shouldn't be required to 'wear' chairs that are too big or too small."

I don't deny tall people have problems too, but Russell confirmed what I had discovered from interviews with short and tall: Petite people have it bad. "You get no back support," she said, "and have added tension at the back of the legs that can cut off circulation and

lead to future problems." My right leg is pins and needles. The future is here.

"What can I do?" I asked. Ergonomically fit my workspace was the answer. See, it doesn't really matter that I'm 5 feet 1 1/4 inches tall. A lot of people are. Really. What matters are the following anthropometric measurements: lower leg length, buttock to popliteal length (relates to seat depth), hip breadth, back height, elbow height, and lumbar height and depth.

With those numbers in hand and an idea of my normal range of activities Russell could advise me on the right chair to stabilize and accommodate me in my office routine. Conference rooms, she noted, would always be a problem since the furniture is made to accommodate the average-sized.

As for planes, she suggested guerrilla tactics: "Practice pillow management. Sit on one, put another at your lower back and a third where it feels most comfortable. The curvature of airplane seats is made for men. By sitting higher you can get the right curvature and your head won't poke forward as much." Unfortunately, none of this puts

my feet on the floor.

"Are companies adapting workspaces for their employees?" I asked.

"I would love to tell you that ergonomics is a trend," she replied, "but I don't see enough interest. It's a hidden trend. We become focused on the computer and lose sensitivity for our bodies. I see injuries waiting to happen due to poor posture."

I'm short and that's fine, but I'm not taking it anymore—ill-fitting furniture and stop-gap measures, that is. No more sitting on telephone books, pillows or my legs. Forget supporting my edge-of-the-chair position with a briefcase in my back. Down with never being able to reach the back of my desk without standing.

I'm calling the furniture tailor to take measurements and make permanent alterations. Then I'll be short and really fine all the time.

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CHICAGO TRIBUNE

At review time, teamwork can catch you off guard

It was marked "personal and confidential." It requested my self-review—ASAP—four months ago. The memo asking for my personal performance evaluation offered a sweet carrot at the end of a prickly stick. "By completing the form," the note said, "you will be in a position to control your progress and development."

I questioned that. How much control can I have in a 360-degree evaluation, where superiors, peers and subordinates will rate my performance?

Performance reviews are necessary and confusing personal documents. The definition of superior may vary by company, within departments in a company and by managers across a department. It's not uncommon to discover that job performance doesn't count as much towards a superior rating as playing well with others, or acting just like the other kids in the sandbox.

Research technical assistant Carolyn Nuhn said, "I was told that my objectives were too high and that if I tried too hard or had too much initiative

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that was bad because the organization liked people to move slowly."

Some workplaces have unwritten evaluation guidelines. A lobbyist's enthusiasm was dampened when her manager told her she couldn't achieve the highest rating because no one performs at that level.

Nuhn says she can relate. "I was told that I was the best person doing the job but I couldn't receive the best rating because that would mean I was spending too much of my life at work, and therefore something was wrong."

The emphasis on teamwork has made the 360-degree review popular—with

employers at least. This format can prove difficult for employees. If you have a choice, who do you choose to evaluate you? Do you stuff the ballot box with sure-fire admirers or is this too obvious? And if you don't have a choice, what can you do but wonder and worry about who will say what and how much it will count?

Evaluations often have as much to do with the evaluator as with worker performance. Some managers know how to deliver praise or constructive criticism better than others do. My first manager stressed that evaluations should not hold surprises. It wasn't easy receiving monthly reminders of how I could improve but it made the yearly, written-in-stone evaluation easy to swallow. My second manager in the same company believed in providing feedback only once a year. He gave me a negative rating on communications skills because I sometimes held my hand in front of my mouth while speaking. While his observation was true, I always wondered why he didn't tell me sooner. How many meetings had passed with my hand in the way of progress?

Same workplace, boss No. 3. I received an excellent review. Okay, it was only "superior," but no one ever received an excellent. My fourth manager gave surprise reviews. Surprise, he told me one day, I wasn't considered XYZ Company material. I didn't fit with the other kids in his sandbox.

I'm taking control and warding off surprises. I'm completing my self-evaluation. I've rated myself in various skill sets and am left with identifying strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. Tricky stuff.

"You have to find areas to improve that are important from management's perspective," Nuhn told me. She wanted to increase her goals to reflect her project load. Management agreed she should focus on output and wrote in her review that she should not try to do too much, even though she gets most of it done. The message—do less, not more. That's a nice surprise review.

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CHICAGO TRIBUNE

For many, public speaking is a date with fear

You choose: walk the plank or speak in public. A 1993 poll by Bruskin-Goldring Research found 45 percent of Americans feared public speaking. Thirty percent feared death. In the 1995 Book of Lists speaking in public was the top fear of 41 percent surveyed.

Even people like myself who fearlessly seek public speaking opportunities can be fearful once they're found. My fears were in the "Fear Inventory" found in Lilyan Wilder's book, "Seven Steps to Fearless Speaking."

Yes, I've thought, "They'll know more about this than I do. I'll be boring. They'll ask questions I can't answer. I'll make a fool of myself."

So, I wondered if Wilder's steps could help me. "The seven-step program teaches you to replace fear with a deeper, more meaningful involvement in your message . . . it is rooted in human values and not performance mechanics," writes Wilder.

I liked the philosophy. There was little chance Wilder would suggest using nausea-producing gimmicks such as pretending my audience was naked.

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Wilder said she wants to do away with the idea that "you can stand behind a lectern and talk, talk, talk and call that a speech. You have to connect and have a sense of self before you have a speech." That is fearless speaking.

So, I laid out my case. First, I talk too fast, pop my P's and sometimes speak in a business-boring monotone.

"You must develop your own sound," Wilder said, "This is empowering and confidence-building." She evaluated: "Your voice is developed but not as full and rich as it could be. Do the vocal exercises in the book."

As for the boring tone, just say no, Wilder advised. If the language or subject matter makes me begin to drone, then find a creative way to bring my natural exuberance into the delivery.

Second, my beginnings and endings sometimes lack punch. "Opening with a joke can be tricky. So think about using a good story or quote that is relevant to your topic," she said.

Applause is a good way to start a speech, too and it's simple. Ask for a raise of hands on a question and then ask the audience to applaud those hand raisers.

Third, I can't speak without holding a full script. Wilder, a fan of outlines, warned, "Completely writing out the speech is a security blanket but not a healthy one. You're too busy going from word to word and not letting yourself flow."

Fourth, if I'm not really interested in the subject matter I find it difficult to muster energy and spirit. Years ago I made a presentation on the future of pork rind sales. I didn't really care about the topic. The audience could tell.

Wilder counsels in her book, "Even if

the work you do isn't your dream come true you must have a heart connection to it. It is what you do. You must take pride in it. . . . It feels good to be a professional. If nothing else, your personal objective can be to express that professionalism."

"What if someone doesn't feel like a professional or can't find anything to value about his work?" I asked.

"Then quit and do something that leads to another level of understanding," Wilder responded, then quickly admitted that wasn't an option for most people.

But if you chose that option, I suggest you read Wilder's advice on developing mini-speeches for all occasions and looking at job interviews as an opportunity for persuasive public speaking.

She has good insight that could increase your chances of fearlessly finding that heart connection. At least you won't feel foolish while trying.

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AUGUST 20, 1999

Does it take walking on fire to liberate a pack rat?

Every horizontal surface in my house held either a pile or a file. In fact, some held piles of files. I struggled for eight months to bring my new home office out of chaos before realizing I needed professional help to organize my physical space (and by extension, I hoped, my mental space).

I had read Jeff Mayer's book, "Success is a Journey: 7 Steps to Achieving Success In the Business of Life," focusing on the sections about dreams, results without clutter and value of time. So ago I asked Mayer to help with my journey.

"I work with people who want to find their passions," said Mayer, president of Chicago-based SucceedingInBusiness.com. My passion os obviously not discarding things. When Mayer promised he could help me take control of my life if I bought the garbage bags, I made an appointment.

Mayer's theory on the mess in my house suggested other, larger messes in my life. I was mis-using time, not setting priorities and not moving ahead on key agendas. True. True. True.

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"People who get things done go places," Mayer said, "People leave things on a desktop as a reminder of things to do. If you need to keep it, file it. If you don't need it, throw it away. If you have work to do, note it on your master list."

I made a mental note to start a master list. Not good enough: He made me actually start one.

The master list holds everything you need to do. Each day you choose the things you need to do to get ahead. But you must do the most important things, not the most urgent things. I wondered, is that possible?

Mayer surveyed my storage space and said: "The goal isn't to fill all of it. The goal is to ask what can you put in there that will help you and make you feel good."

Turning to a dusty banker's storage box he asked, "Do you need check stubs from 1991?" I didn't know, but I did know what I wanted to do with the almost two year's worth of newspapers sitting in the corner. Cut out all my columns and put them in an album.

"You don't have time for that," he said. "Plus, what will that do for you?" Make me feel good, I thought.

"Deal with *information*," Mayer urged. "People who deal with paper can't get ahead." He recommended saving the columns on the computer and putting them on a Web site, too.

I attacked a stack of files. At first I put aside for refiling special papers I just couldn't throw away for sentimental reasons. But after finding in three different files three different copies of a 1984 newspaper article that mentioned my name, I began to pitch with enthusiasm.

Holding a full garbage bag, Mayer

cautioned: "No cleaner's remorse. Don't go through the bags when I leave." Was he reading my mind? To demonstrate my resolve I let him carry out the trash.

"Obviously, I have a problem with finding time for this," I said, reminding him of the eight-month prelude to this day.

"Eliminate interruptions and make appointments with yourself," Mayer said, "That's the key to managing time."

Mayer has called several times since our meeting. I have not returned his calls. I appreciate the kick-start to finding my passion under the paper. But it's just as he described.

He said: "It's like a fire-walk experience. After you walk over the coals it is energizing. It's freeing." Well, I'm still walking—slowly—and it's burning. I'll call when I really feel free, or in eight months, whichever is earlier.

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JULY 8, 1998

How to wake up a business audience: Go no-tech

Steve Morgan, a lawyer from Dallas, e-mailed: "My firm is putting on a seminar in San Antonio next month and I'm in charge. I want the speakers to prepare presentations that won't put the audience to sleep. This can be a real problem with attorneys. I'll wear a costume if I have to, but my co-speakers will never go for the idea. What do you suggest?"

I responded, "If you want to make the presentation different, go low-tech. No overheads, slides or LCD projector . . . What kind of costume?"

Steve replied immediately: "Really? No high-tech stuff? We're bombarded by the high-tech stuff at so many seminars that I assumed that's what audiences expect. Different hats."

Steve, that's why the unexpected is so refreshing. I can't take credit for this low-brow solution to seminar and presentation format. The credit goes to Gordon MacKenzie. His recent no-tech presentation on creativity within bureaucracies so overwhelmed me that I can't stop preaching a back-to-basics approach to public speaking.

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MacKenzie, author of "Orbiting the Giant Hairball," is a former Hallmark Cards executive whose last working title was director of creative paradox. He taught—no, *showed*—me the fine art of communicating simple yet compelling thoughts and principles in a simple and compelling manner.

With 18 oversized index cards, each sporting a line drawing, hung by a clothespin on a line strung between two flip charts, MacKenzie captivated an audience of 50 for more than three hours. He showed no slides or fancy graphics.

No extra electricity was involved at

all. The whole presentation was in black-and-white, including his own self, which is very much part of his presentation.

The audience had every right to fall asleep. Most of them suffered from jet lag. All of them had been listening to presentations for eight hours straight. Who wanted to sit through another presentation, especially one on creativity?

Nobody wants to try to be creative on cue and in public. I worry about drawing stick people or playing decision-tree games. I dread choosing the wrong items to take on a raft with a bunch of strangers after our ship sinks. And brain teasers make me feel stupid, not creative.

None of my worries materialized with MacKenzie. He didn't tease our brains, he massaged them. He drew while we enjoyed.

To my amazement he never mentioned survival skill games or forced any creative group interaction. Yet I heard ideas and learned useful tools for living creatively.

How? First, MacKenzie put the audi-

ence in charge of the presentation's flow. Anyone could request a card number including the last one, No. 19, which said "ENOUGH" in big block letters. Enough meant enough and the presentation would stop.

After each number was called MacKenzie told and demonstrated the story behind the drawing, which led to a principle related to maintaining creativity in a bureaucracy. He never lost his flow, even though he didn't control it. His audience never let their attention stray because they controlled the flow. Nothing was force-fed and everything sank in. When No. 19 was the only card left I wanted to yell: "20!"

I won't completely balk the next time someone tells me to add eye candy (graphics, video and special effects) to my presentation. But since seeing MacKenzie I know the candy doesn't have to be truffles. A simple licorice stick might do just fine.

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Do things like this happen to good girls?

The first time "it" happened I received odd, special attention whenever I worked late. Another time "it" came as a form of peer pressure to participate in a sexual guess-who's-telling-the-truth game at an off-site meeting. Once "it" began when someone pressed himself against me as I looked out the conference room window at something he had pointed out.

Each time "it" subtly or blatantly happened I was surprised. I wasn't even sure what "it" was. Voices in my head said: "Things like this don't happen to good girls. Surely his interest in me is professional, not personal. Don't say anything or you'll be out."

Nothing from my 1960s and 1970s upbringing or education prepared me for "it." No one spoke of "it." Not even when I went to business school in the early '80s. "It" didn't have a name until Anita Hill: Harassment.

My mother couldn't even bring herself to tell me about the birds and the bees, so how could she have broached

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this subject? My father protected me from blatant harassment by not allowing me to work as a laborer for the family construction company. He encouraged me to learn the business, become an engineer and take his place someday. The office was okay for his daughter. He didn't see any sexual shenanigans in his company.

My generation left college in the '70s ready to have it all. Ready to break new ground. We were not ready for the realities of the old-boy network that supported sexual discrimination and

harassment.

It was a different world. Margaret Desjardins, 42, said, "Once my boss told me to attend a meeting because the client was a sucker for good-looking girls." A female sales representative had a customer tell her that he never dealt with women except for sex. I lost a job because I "didn't fit the culture," that is, I didn't play the boys' game.

I envy the 20-something generation. The media, parents, high schools and colleges prepared them. They entered the workplace aware and armed with strategies.

Katy Kinsella, 27, said: "As an age group we have been aware of rape, date rape and other sexual crimes since high school, maybe earlier. We were raised knowing men might take advantage of women but we were also empowered to fight back. Our generation of women was taught to be strong, independent and tough."

There's a downside to the attention paid to stopping sexual harassment. The nature of workplace friendships

and social interaction has changed. Male supervisors don't ask female subordinates to lunch. Caveats such as, "Don't sue me if I say this but . . ." enter many conversations.

Desjardins said: "I'm a 'touchy' person. I grab a forearm to make a point. Most people don't feel that's harassment or inappropriate behavior from me. But men have stopped doing things that might be done out of enthusiasm or friendliness.

"Focusing on the issue has wiped out the sense of humor and stifled creativity in some offices. We just need a workplace where people deal with each other as human beings."

Until that happens I'll learn from the 20-somethings. I'll set boundaries for appropriate behavior, speak up when I feel uncomfortable and try to maintain perspective on the subject.

I don't plan on having another surprise or unanswered "it" in my career.

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Julie Danis

SEPT. 20, 1998

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Finding the perfect job: Welcome to Fantasyland

The newspaper advertisement reprint framed above my computer asks, "How did you end up where you are?" Good question.

How did you choose the company where you work? Was it a conscious choice or totally unplanned? Did luck, fate, or genetics play a role? Where would you work now if you could choose?

Answer: Everyone wants to work for the Walt Disney Company. Everyone I talked to, at least. Everyone but me. I would tire of hearing "It's a Small World After All" pretty fast. I barely made it through the ride without screaming.

Go ahead. Ask your co-worker, next door neighbor or a stranger on the bus where they would work if they had a choice. If my informal survey of dream companies has any validity I bet one out of two respondents will reply Disney. Why? Disney, much like Disneyland and Disneyworld, pulls people into a fantasy life of childhood memories. It holds out hope for an adventurous adulthood we used to dream of. It

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sounds like vacation, not work. And, if the company is like its theme parks, it's a perfectly clean and orderly environment that doesn't exist in reality.

A recently retired salesperson wanted to be a Disney character, preferably one with a papier-mâché head so no one would know who she was. She would be able to hug cute children (and adults if she's brave) and not worry about inciting lawsuits.

If Disney wasn't hiring she would settle for working the sales floor at Tiffany's during the holiday season. She would play with all the jewelry and wait on people with no apparent bud-

get. Sounds Disneyesque to me.

Dream companies offered an escape from the real world of sales, medicine, high tech, law, finance and manufacturing. Working for Abercrombie & Kent one could lead travel expeditions or just plan them if travel itself proved to be a bother.

Stacking books at Borders appealed to the reading-starved. Test-driving motorcycles for Harley-Davidson was the choice of a computer salesperson. He longed to shed his business suit for leathers.

Any movie studio looked enticing to many respondents. They would meet actors, discuss films, eat popcorn and attend previews for a living. A cable television executive specifically mentioned Dreamworks. She wanted to learn from Spielberg.

Some people, on the other hand, think working for a not-for-profit would make them feel as if they had contributed to something worthwhile at the end of the day.

While some workers couldn't name a specific company, they could easily identify qualities and characteristics of

an ideal employer. Freedom and flexibility topped the list.

And an employer who gave positive feedback would be appreciated. Specifically, straightforward positive feedback such as "You did a good job" versus "You somehow pulled that one off" or "You're not bad." Disney might fill the bill. How many people can bring themselves to say nasty things to Mickey Mouse?

Sandra Clingan, a fast-food industry executive, said, "Working in one of the vineyards in the Sonoma Valley wine country would be ideal. A good product to market, theoretically interesting people to work with, a nice place to live, great climate and great benefits. I'm tired of tasting fried food at food shows."

What's my dream company? I can't name a name but it's where I would be living my dream which, unlike the world, isn't small after all.

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