

THE COLUMN



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CHARACTERS

Legal Assistant
Associate
Partner
Supervisor
Human Resource Specialist

SETTING:

Law Office

LEGAL ASSISTANT

Type, rewrite
Prioritize
Every claim and decree
File, refile
Systematize
There goes another tree
Lawyers, staff
And secretaries
Find each and every way
To justify
To alibi
As long as clients pay
I reach out to
My fellow workers
Up front and direct
But working together
Emotions weather
There are egos to protect
If I could use my talents
To strike a balance
the future might look brighter
After too many years
Bored to tears
I long to be a writer

ASSOCIATE

Good morning and how are you? I'm fine, by the way. Do you remember the fax coversheet I asked you to print just as you were walking out the door last night? I would have thought you had the sense to include the SEC's fax number, which you did, along with the fax number of my client to assure they received a copy, that you didn't. Because you didn't, my client never received a final copy of my letter. I must admit that it was very late by the time I faxed the letter, so late I had to program the fax machine all by myself which is far more complicated than I imagined, and I was so tired because it was the middle of the night that I didn't catch your mistake. Now the client is mad at me for not faxing him what I faxed to the SEC even though it was exactly like the draft I emailed him I'm too busy to constantly confirm whether or not you are doing what needs to be done which is an incredible misuse of my time, especially if everyone is gone and I have to do everything myself. Speaking of which, I'm going to have to produce a letter to the client apologizing for your sloppiness and include additional information based on a call I got from the SEC this morning. I may decide to write this letter by hand even though I compose better on my computer or maybe I'll dictate my thoughts in voice with that software even though no one has ever told me how to use it because I'm too busy to go to those ridiculous trainings. Maybe I'd be better off turning the letter into an in-house memo in case that partner you also work for, excuse me, for whom you work, can write the letter. Then again, he may want to change whatever I write after he grills me about the phone call I got from some secretary at the SEC asking me to email the fax. However, after reading the in-house memo, that partner for whom you also work writes

a letter you may forget to cc me so I might never know what he said. Also, if he disagrees with me and decides to tell them something different, I will be disappointed in you for making this mess. This could make your job harder because you'd have to please him as well as me and do whatever we require you to do even if our ideas are in conflict. On the other hand, I could call the client instead and apologize for your incompetence except that means I would have no paperwork to cover my ass unless I followed up our convo with a letter. I know, you call the client and tell him I'll be cc'ing him with the email I'll send to the SEC. Forgive me if I can't keep on chatting with you like this, but I have a mountain of work to do, so excuse me if I seem preoccupied but as you can see I've got a lot on my mind. Do you think you have the time to do what I've asked in the next few hours? Good. Thank you.

LEGAL ASSISTANT

I've been asked to call
I hope you don't mind
We're very busy today
But I think that you'll find
You'll get the information
You so desperately seek
Either this afternoon
Or by the end of the week
You say you have a question
You want to ask
I not quite sure
I'm up to the task
She'll email a copy
Of the letter she faxed
She thinks she can do that
if she isn't too taxed
I'll email you a copy
I'll do better than try
A copy she will send
So sorry, good bye

ASSOCIATE

I've written my client a letter about the response we expect to get from the SEC regarding the letter I email today rather than fax yesterday because of that little mistake of yours for which you are forgiven because I try very hard to be supportive of my support staff. Take the text of the draft letter I've printed on the printer by your computer, which is only a few pages long, and retype it into a letter format on your computer for the partner's signature because I know he'll want it that way unless I just go ahead and sign it and send it off which now that I think about it will probably be more efficient but I'll have to think about it further and let you know. So what are you waiting for? You've got work to do and so do I. Good. Thank you.

PARTNER

I need you to make your magic. Make this community relations issue a priority over any other project you've got going. I've got six baseball tickets for Saturday's game, but I need ten. Guys from law firms we work with are flying in from all over the country for this game and I don't want to disappoint them. Help me, and if for some reason one of our guests doesn't show up, you can come with us. After all the time you've spent talking with these guys this last year, I'm sure they'll welcome your company.

LEGAL ASSISTANT

Since we're the teams' lawyers
I don't think they'll mind
A few extra tickets
For services in kind
One call will do it
They're unlikely to refuse
But doesn't he know
Our team's bound to lose?
His gesture of sharing
Was very nice
There won't be an extra
A bonus would suffice
I'm glad I have meaning
Outside the firm
I'll live as a writer
When my luck it does turn

SUPERVISOR

Let me preface your review by saying we're so proud to have you on our staff. I know other people are sometimes alarmed by those outrageous shoes you wear, but I tell them you've got to be you. Now review. First off, the partner who you work for has nothing but glowing things to say about you and when he's happy, we're all happy because he's a rainmaker. The associate reports that she isn't bothered by your choice of footwear and she really and truly applauds your aspirations to become a writer. But she is concerned. She says you have a tendency to get a little too chatty. She finds herself having to explain everything she's doing just a little too much. She wanted me to tell you because she didn't want to get into argument with you. I recommend you refrain from talking with her as much as possible. I understand a lot more about your frustrations than you know. The woman never stops talking. That said, my husband wants to be a writer and he'll go on for hours about what he plans to write. I only say that to let you know, I know all about you aspiring writers. Which brings me to the best part of your review. My superiors have advised me that I should make better use of the firm's newsletter as a means of communication, especially for staff. What would you say if I told you I wanted you to create the Staff's Corner as a column for the firm's newsletter? It's quite an honor, you know. I wouldn't ask just anybody.

LEGAL ASSISTANT

A chance to write
During the working day
A wonderful opportunity
I've got plenty to say
I hear the frustrations
Of my office mates
They need a voice
To facilitate complaints

HUMAN RESOURCE SPECIALIST

You're the one she asked to write for the newsletter? Good choice. I wish you the luck you will need to please her. I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but if you avoid meaningful content you'll be fine. Better yet, keep your trouble-making subtle enough and human resources will go ahead and print it. We desperately need content. The firm will hold the rights to whatever you write but don't be surprised if your column falls into the hands of clients who want to use it for their own purposes. Despite what we tell them, partners have no compunctions about co-opting whatever they like – anything to impress their clients. Good luck.

LEGAL ASSISTANT

The Staff's Corner. I look over at the desk of the assistant who sits next to me. It's spotless. Everything has a place. My desk, on the other hand, looks like a tornado hit it, even though I know where everything is. How important is this? Our desks may look different, but we utilize the same service departments within the firm to move things off our desks to wherever they go next. If attorneys complain, we modify accordingly. Our differing styles reflect our diversity. Once in a while, these variations cause problems for those who sit at our desks when we are absent. Then again, we each write up a map of sorts to assist. Some say that the service departments are challenged into developing systems that include all of our differing styles. But we're not machines – we're human beings who are capable of many forms of communication, capable of lining up the kind of support we need to get things done. I will be writing about not only what we do, but how we do it. You are invited to participate in a dialogue of thoughts, opinions and perceptions.

ASSOCIATE

You wrote that? Really? I'm surprised, not that I didn't think you could really write, but it's almost interesting and if it gets printed it'll reflect on me as well and to tell you the truth, I'm glad because it means you're special and if you're special so am I and that can only work to my advantage. Only the staff can afford the time to actually read *The Newsletter* because we lawyers are too busy to take the time and read it except late at night when we're too tired or drunk to care. Congratulations. You're a writer.

PARTNER

First of all, thanks again for getting those baseball tickets. I'm sorry there weren't any extra, but I also know that baseball isn't your thing. Now about this column you've written. I don't see a problem with it but then I don't see a purpose for it either. Let management do their job. No reason for you to do it for them.

SUPERVISOR

I want you to know up front that I really appreciate your dedication to the firm. However, your column brings up some difficult issues. (A) It has your name on it. I know you writers are very particular about getting credit for what you write. However, if we let you write a column with your name on it, every staff member in the firm will want a column of their own. It wouldn't be fair. (B) In your first paragraph you mention messy desks. The firm wants to promote tidiness, cleanliness and order. Messiness is counterproductive. (C) If *The Newsletter* included a column based on opinion and attitude -- especially with your name on it -- it could promote ill feelings. We don't want unnecessary conflict, do we? With the exception of issues (A), (B) and (C), I see no problem. I'll let you know what I decide sometime in the future. Again, thank you for your hard work. The firm appreciates it.

HUMAN RESOURCE SPECIALIST

I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but your supervisor came to me about your column. I tried to support you, I really did, but she's convinced (A), (B) and (C) are serious problems. I must say I was impressed she knew the alphabet, but her points were typically ludicrous. I hope you're not attached to writing the Staff's Corner, but you're obviously too controversial for the likes of your supervisor. Did I mention I write rap?

LEGAL ASSISTANT

My work was killed
By (A), (B) and (C)
But I'll try not to be dour,
I'll keep on working
Do what I'm told
Get paid by the hour
The institutional
Is not constitutional
Will I ever get it through my skull
When hierarchical authority
Rules the majority
Satisfaction is close to null
Their need for control
Conformity their goal
Makes me want to spit
I'll clean my desk
I'll make it shine
Because today I quit
Well maybe not
I'm just confused
I get like this
When my work's refused
I guess I'll stop
Trying to unite

My every day job
With my personal life
The day I get my Pulitzer
Or some facsimile thereof
I'll kiss this place good bye
Set my sights above