

## MEDIATE THIS !

## A FRAGRANCE-FREE AND TENSION-FILLED WORKPLACE

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

The National Conflict Resolution Center handles many disputes involving workplace tensions. We explore this category today with an example of an office worker who notifies management he has developed an acute "fragrance sensitivity."

He is requesting a "reasonable accommodation" of a fragrance-free workplace under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Other staff resent that they can no longer wear scented products to work. And because this employee has a history of interpersonal conflict, some colleagues question the legitimacy of his claim.

For most of civilization, artificial scent was prized for its ability to mask noxious odors. But in this still-new millennium, perfume's fortunes have fallen, especially in the business world.

The modern consensus was set forth in a 2009 study published by the American Society of Business and Behavioral Sciences. Its title has become a catchphrase: "Fragrance in the Workplace is the New Second-Hand Smoke."

As employers across the country are discovering, this problem is loaded with colliding needs and underlying issues. So it's a perfect candidate for a conflict resolution

approach.

ADA adherence is non-negotiable. Such implacability can make people bristle. If co-workers push back against compliance, the allergic employee might feel persecuted. Before long, the team could fall down a rabbit hole of hostility.

Management can prevent that by reframing the scenario. This isn't a zero-sum game where one person gains and everyone else loses. This is an opportunity to assess different options that could benefit all parties.

Interestingly, the ADA specifically instructs employers and employees to take part in an "interactive process," which is legalese for a dialogue. The outcome here should be guided by agreement and not imposed through executive fiat.

When it comes to change, we humans are more like cats than dogs. Alterations of familiar surroundings and routines are deeply unsettling. Tell a cat to give up his hovel for a palace, and he will ghost you in a flash.

So make this a team project. Show respect to all team members by asking for their input. The allergic employee must be an integral part of that. Engaging him in the process will give him ownership. And you'll need his assistance in



GETTY IMAGES

This week's column deals with "fragrance sensitivity" in the workplace and measures prescribed for dealing with it.

finding reasonable ways to accommodate him.

The game plan is to adopt common-sense measures outlined in the "Model Fragrance Free Workplace Policy" posted on the website of the California Department of Health's Work-Related Asthma Prevention Program. They are:

- Ask employees to refrain from wearing scents or using scented products at work.
- Post a sign in common areas asking visitors to refrain from scented products.
- Work with building maintenance

on using fragrance-free cleaning products.

- Make sure the offices are fully ventilated, and encourage staff to take fresh-air breaks.

Such policies are a good practice for any business, and they will resolve most fragrance issues. Some employees (and management already knows who they are) might offer to go the extra step and use only designated "fragrance-free" products. They can serve as buffers if a new space configuration is necessary.

In cases involving extreme

sensitivity, employers have given allergic workers the latitude to work off-site or telecommute from home. That decision must be approached carefully. It could spark a cascade of requests for across-the-board flexible schedules (which might not be a bad thing).

Let's return to the uncharitable premise that this employee is gaming the ADA system. Is he empowered to keep upping his demands?

No. The law is clear that disabled employees "must be qualified to perform the essential functions of the job." An employer who has made good-faith accommodation efforts has grounds to consider termination.

But it shouldn't come to that. Resolving this conflict through consensus can change the interpersonal dynamics of this workforce in ways that will benefit everyone.

Steven P. Dinkin is a professional mediator who has served as president of the San-Diego based National Conflict Resolution Center since 2003. **Do you have a conflict that needs a resolution?** Share your story with The Mediator via email at [mediatethis@ncrconline.com](mailto:mediatethis@ncrconline.com) or as an online submission by visiting [www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis](http://www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis). All submissions will be kept anonymous.

## NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

## OUTDOORS: ERNIE COWAN

## Take time to learn nature's language

If you listen with your heart, nature has a language.

It's obscure, often without sound and it might take years to fully understand the message.

Native Americans, historically in tune with the natural world, often speak about the language of nature. Their long connection with the land allowed them to understand what was being said because they knew that if they took care of nature, it would take care of them.

Most of us today don't spend enough time outdoors to learn this language, but we can begin to get some insight when the messages are the most intense.

I spent some time hiking in the forest last week and what nature was saying was pretty clear.

The forest I was visiting is known as the elfin forest. Most California residents would call it sagebrush, or maybe chaparral. It's that thick, low blanket of often impenetrable vegetation that covers hillsides of our inland valleys and foothills.

This is a forest, but a stunted version with dozens of plants and animals creating an ecosystem just like you would find in the tall forests of higher mountains. Climate and soil have created this pygmy environment.

As I walked, the language of nature was intense. It didn't take long to realize that today there is great happiness among the residents of the elfin forest.

This tiny forest has become patient. It often waits long periods through heat and drought before enough rain falls for new growth to appear, flowers to bloom and water to again fill the creeks with the melody of moisture gurgling over rounded river rocks. Right now, there are actual broad creek flows and the banks are lined with blankets of green, clusters of bright flowers and rocks covered with fresh moss that was only recently gray and seemingly dead. Nature has come to life.

Today's outing was in a location named for this environment. I was hiking in the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve, a 784-acre hidden gem operated by the Olivehain Municipal Water District. The reserve protects and allows visitors a chance to experience some of Southern California's most iconic environments.

There are more than 11 miles of hiking, mountain biking and equestrian trails, places to picnic, mountain view points, and



ERNIE COWAN

Escondido Creek is now flowing in the Elfin Forest Recreational Reserve.

a nature center tucked into the hills adjacent to Escondido Creek along Harmony Grove Road.

I had elected to start from the Harmony Grove Nature Center and follow the 1.4-mile Way Up Trail. This offers exposure to the full spectrum of habitat from the lush riparian stream bottom to the thick fields of chaparral covering the adjacent hillsides.

The afternoon sun created soft pools of light on the carpet of grass. Clusters of bright yellow woodsorrel huddled in some of these puddles of sunlight. Any child will tell you that these flowers are better known as sourgrass. Just nibble on the stem and you will understand.

In the sanctuary of large oak trees, the lemonade sumac was already budding and even a few of the tiny pink flowers were open. In the damp ground next to shaded portions of the trail there were small patches of the delicate lace fern.

As you climb from the creek, you emerge from the oaks into full sunlight and are surrounded by the classic habitat of the elfin forest. Here the hillsides have already begun to take on a white hue as a species of white mountain lilac begins to bloom.

Soon the white will morph into purple as another species of wild mountain lilac springs into blossom because of our ample rainfall. Laurel sumac will be scattered in the plant mix, and soon the scarlet blooms of the sticky monkey flower will provide even more color.

I didn't complete the nearly 3-mile Way Up loop. I started in the afternoon and time ran out because there was so much to see.

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## THE READERS' REPRESENTATIVE: ADRIAN VORE

## The different layers of stories in print

Several weeks back a reader emailed the Reader's Representative to complain about a "caption" he felt was misleading. He wrote "caption" several times.

I could not figure out, though, which caption he was referencing. It turned out it wasn't a caption at all, but a headline.

This was a first, but readers have also called headlines "titles."

This might be an opportunity, I thought, to offer some explanation and description of elements readers see in print and online.

**Headlines:** These large-size words above a story should capture the essence of the news in the article. Ideally they should have an active verb to reflect the action. Words such as "are" and "is" can be omitted when trying to fit the space in print. They also should provide some information on the location of the news. Bold face is used for hard-news type stories — council decisions, fires, etc. Light face is used for feature stories, such as a profile. Designers also will vary the use of bold and light face to make a page more visually appealing. Copy editors write headlines for stories that appear in print. U-T reporters write the headlines for their stories online.

**Deckhead:** Or "dek" in newspaper jargon. This is a secondary headline that appears below the main head. Copy editors use this to expand on the news. Location can be included if the copy editor was unable to fit that into the main head. It also is a good place to add an opposing voice if the story has two points of view.

**Captions:** Also called "cutlines" in the newsroom. Photographers provide information for the caption, the description of who's doing what. Copy editors use that information to write the caption. Reporters, or their editors, do the same when including a photo with their stories online.

**Jumplines:** Jumplines are the words that appear at the bottom of stories on a section front. The same word appears on the continuation, or jump, of the story on an inside page. Copy editors try to choose a word from the headline to use for the jump word. Some jumps on the inside pages have an added description of the story next to the jump word. Those are called jump readouts. They generally are used if space allows. If a page designer is trying to make a story fit on the page, they'll remove the readout and use just a jump word.

**Column vs. news story:** Most columns that appear on the news pages will have the writer's picture and "columnist" under the name. Some columns will have the name of

the column and the writer's name at the top of the article. That treatment appears with this column, for example. Columns, such as Michael Smolens or Diane Bell, also appear "ragged right." That is, they are not justified on the right side the way news stories appear. Columnists are allowed editorial leeway, unlike reporters writing a straight news story. Columnists can offer their opinion.

## Community locations

Where is Sabre Springs? Bay Terraces? Guatay? Reader Tom Wilcox of Del Mar emailed suggesting stories that mention some of the smaller communities in San Diego and the county should include a brief description of the community's location.

"When an article references a certain area of our city or county, it would help to have a ... reference point to the area or neighborhood ... especially if the area or neighborhood is not well known by its name," Wilcox wrote.

"For example, I have lived in San Diego County for many years, but I really have no idea where 'Rolando' is especially in relation to downtown or the airport, which almost everyone knows. A small ... description like: 'Rolando is 20 miles northeast of downtown San Diego' would help orient the reader and make the article more relevant."

I agree. Communities such as Mira Mesa or Rancho Bernardo might not need those additions, but I think they would help readers locate the less well-known ones. Community names most commonly appear in the public safety items. By the way, Sabre Springs is in northern San Diego, near Poway; Bay Terraces is in southeastern San Diego; and Guatay is an unincorporated community in East County.

## Archives make their return

During 2018, U-T archivist and researcher Merrie Montegudo assembled a daily feature called "From the Archives." It was a past story that ran in the U-T to mark the paper's 150th year. (The first edition of the San Diego Union was published Oct. 10, 1868.)

The stories were like opening a time capsule of San Diego's history. Readers enjoyed the daily look back. Because of the popularity of the feature, Montegudo will continue them, but on a more abbreviated schedule. They are now set to run Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays in the Local section.

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## FROM THE ARCHIVES

## SAN DIEGO NURSE SEES ACTIVE SERVICE AT THE FRONT DURING WWI

An Army Nurse from San Diego describes her life on the front lines during World War I in these excerpts from a letter published 100 years ago.

From *The San Diego Union*,  
Feb. 3, 1919:

## SAN DIEGO GIRL SEES ACTIVE SERVICE AS NURSE AT FRONT; NOW IN EVACUATION HOSPITAL

Miss Florence Hulbert One of First American Women at Chateau-Thierry.

San Diego has a representative in evacuation hospital No. 3 of the American expeditionary forces in Germany in Miss Florence Hulbert, A.N.C., daughter of Dr. R. G. Hulbert, who has offices in the Watts building. She is a local girl and a graduate of the San Diego high school. She is also a graduate of a French hospital in San Francisco and speaks French fluently. She has been in Europe six months. Her father has just received the following letter which gives and interesting account of her experiences:

"I received your letter of Nov. 10 yesterday. It was sent to the base and was sent to me from there. It is the only letter I have received

from you in a long time. I have sure received very little mail from anyone since I came overseas. We travel around so much and, of course, change of address accounts for it....

"I was only at the base hospital No. 46 for one week. Since then I have been out to the front on active service ever since my arrival, nearly six months ago. I will soon wear a gold stripe for my six months' foreign service. I left New York the 4th of July, arriving at Liverpool the 12th at 2 p.m. Came over on the Aquatania, next to the largest ship on the seas, the Fatherland being the biggest. We had a convoy for a few hours out of New York and then not again until 24 hours before our arrival in England. We had 7000 troops aboard; it took them all afternoon to disembark and unload the ship....

## ARRIVED IN PARIS ON THE 15TH.

"There was an air raid; also Big Bertha was bombing Paris. That was my first entry into the war. We went on our way next morning over to where our base was located at Bazoilles-Sur-Meuse ... Then when there for a week, orders for eight nurses for Chateau Thierry drive. We left again for Paris, and went to La Ferte Sous Jouarre, then to Verdolot near Jouy, where they bombed that hospital so much; then into Chateau Thierry itself. We



## HEAR ROAR OF GUNS

"Well, we were afterwards transferred or ordered to evacuation hospital No. 3 at Crezancy near there, and have been with them ever since. We came over to Tour for the St. Mihiel drive to Thierry, later to Champagne front, then to Mt. Frenet for the Argonne drive. So we heard the roar of the guns nearly all the time. When we could not we were always able to see the flash of the guns on the sky line. We were near Verdun when the armistice was signed. We heard the cannon for 24 hours after, also the last shot at 11 o'clock of the 11th of November. Then the hospital rested for three weeks, but I and two other nurses were sent with two medical officers, five corps men and 12 ambulances to Montmedy, near the Belgian border. Montmedy was to have been the next objective if the armistice had not been signed....

"The Germans evacuated Montmedy without doing much damage, only cutting down telegraph poles, etc., taking all food and everything they could lay their hands on, etc., so the people were without food and sick. We took rations around to the different towns and gave them medicines until they could get the French assistance. We were there nearly three weeks until the hospital came here to Germany, so we were ordered back with our own organization, but the civilian work was great. I would not have missed it for anything. I will send you a postcard of our hospital here. They are the long buildings you see in the square. The city lies beyond.

\*Boches is a derogatory term for a German soldier used by the Allies during WWI.

HISTORICAL PHOTOS AND ARTICLES FROM THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE ARCHIVES ARE COMPILED BY MERRIE.MONTEGUDO@SDUNIONTRIBUNE.COM