MEDIATE THIS !

THE POLITE NEW HIRE AND THE CLUELESS OFFICE MENTOR

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Dear Mediator:

Our mid-sized firm just hired a new receptionist, a capable and friendly young man who is Korean-American. Our longest-serving employee always steps in to mentor new hires, which is usually great. But she is culturally tone-deaf, and her efforts to relate to this young colleague are awful. She tries to chat him up on subjects like Chinese food and the Japanese martial art of karate. He responds politely as the rest of us cringe. How do we clue her in without hurting her feelings?

Baffled in Mission Valley

Dear Baffled:

Your predicament illustrates why cultural awareness in the workplace is both a worthy social goal and a smart business strategy. The office mentor needs coaching to function more effectively as a member of a diverse team. The new hire needs to feel welcome so he will want to stay with the company.

Someone in a leadership position – the CEO or the HR director – can reboot your office dynamic in three steps: first, a potentially awkward conversation with the new hire; then, an inescapably awkward conversation with the mentor; then, a festive office gathering that will lift everyone's spirits because it will involve food.

Mediators begin the conflict resolution process with open-ended questions, and we listen carefully to the answers. Arrange an informal "just touching base" meeting with the young man. Put him at ease by praising his work and collegiality, then ask for general feedback about the office. Has he been able to navigate the copier's mood swings? Has he figured out the labyrinth of shared folders on the hard drive?

He may or may not be candid about thorny interpersonal issues. Either way, this exchange will reassure him that he is valued and supported by management.

Now for the tough conversation. It is never easy to tell people that their good intentions have produced bad outcomes. As with the new hire, the manager should begin by praising the mentor for her contributions, then segue into icebreaker questions. How did she become interested in mentoring, and what does she enjoy most about it?

Within that context, cultural awareness can be presented as a new skill that will strengthen her as a mentor. Putting people on the defensive with direct criticisms of their behavior is a losing tactic. Absent a serious breach of acceptable workplace conduct — which this situation is not — extending the benefit of the doubt is the best approach.

Leaving all other colleagues out of it, the manager should explain that she or he has noticed the mentor's mixing up of different Asian cultures. In our increasingly global society, such confusion is simple to set straight and important to get right.

Will the mentor feel stung? Probably. Learning that old habits must make way for new ones is usually discomfiting. And most of us could use guidance to keep pace with a rapidly evolving multicultural world.

GETTY IMAGES

This week's question deals with cultural awareness in the workplace and the need to provide strong management coaching.

Which brings us to the office party.

April is Celebrate Diversity Month, a tradition started in 2004 to recognize that diversity enriches us all. Many organizations schedule team-building events this month where workers are invited to showcase their ethnic heritages by bringing in a dish of food or wearing an article of clothing from the homeland.

The proliferation of DNA testing kits has given us new windows into our ancestry. Genealogy searches have become so popular that Ancestry.com, one of the oldest genealogy websites, was valued at $2.6 billion in 2016.

Host an office lunch in a room where you can display a world map or a globe. Ask each person to chart the roots of her or his family tree, and you may discover that you have more in common than you ever could have imagined.

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?** Please share your story with The Mediator via email at mediatethis@ncrconline.com or as an online submission by visiting www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

NOTEBOOKS

From Union -Tribune reporting staff

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

Menendez brothers reunited in S.D.

The Menendez brothers, who were convicted of killing their parents in their Beverly Hills mansion nearly three decades ago, have been reunited in a San Diego prison.

Erik Menendez, 47, has moved into the same housing unit as his 50-year-old brother, Lyle Menendez, Corrections department spokeswoman Terry Thornton said Thursday.

The brothers are serving life sentences for killing their parents, Jose and Kitty Menendez, in 1989.

Lyle Menendez was moved in February from Mule Creek State Prison in Northern California to the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in Otay Mesa, after his security classification was lowered. But the brothers lived in separate housing units and would not have seen each other, Thornton said. The prison houses nearly 3,900 male inmates.

That changed Wednesday, when Eric moved into the same housing unit as his brother, a unit where inmates agree to participate in educational and other rehabilitation programs without creating disruptions.

"They can and do interact with each other, all the inmates in that facility," she said, though she didn't know how the brothers reacted during their reunion.

The brothers had asked two decades ago, after they were sentenced, to be sent to the same prison.

Prison officials said then that they often balked at putting partners in crime together. Leslie Abramson, Erik Menendez's attorney, at the time called housing the brothers separately "exceedingly cruel."

Lyle, then 21, and Erik, then 18, admitted they fatally shot-gunned their father and mother, but said they feared their parents were about to kill them to prevent the disclosure of the father's long-term sexual molestation of Erik.

Associated Press

POLITICS: MICHAEL JAMES ROCHA

Expect laughs at vote sign-up event

Vote classy, San Diego.

Ron Burgundy is dusting off his suit as part of a non-partisan campaign to encourage young people to vote in the November 2018 midterm elections.

His first stop? Oceanside.

On Thursday, Will Ferrell — aka San Diego newsman Burgundy in the "Anchorman" movies — will join comedian Billy Eichner as part of "Funny Or Die's" "Glam Up The Midterms" national campaign, which kicks off in California's 49th Congressional District, a crucial seat being vacated by longtime incumbent Darrell Issa, R-Vista. Issa announced in January that he will not seek re-election.

"I could not be more excited for our first official 'Glam Up the Midterms' live event in CA-49 next week, especially since I'll be joined by a real San Diego legend in the one and only Ron Burgundy," Eichner said. "Best of all, we'll be registering a lot of people to vote in advance of the upcoming primary in CA-49 and the midterms in November."

To be eligible to attend the evening event — location unknown at this time — attendees must register to vote or sign up for election alerts at headcount.org/glamup2018.

HeadCount — the non-partisan, nonprofit organization behind the voter-registration effort — registered more than 5,000 voters last month at March For Our Lives events across the nation. Since 2004, it has registered nearly half a million voters.

"I had a dream last night that several small town Americans called me and were begging me to have more TV and film personalities lecture them about politics," said Eichner, known for his irreverent but enlightening "Billy on the Street" series on "Funny Or Die." "So I'm here to answer their prayers!"

"In all seriousness, I have certainly skipped more than a few midterm elections in my day — and now I deeply regret it. So, after years of shouting at people on 'Billy on the Street,' I've decided it's time to use my voice to do some good and to encourage young people all across the country not to make the same mistakes I did. Say what you will about me, I have a lot of energy and I can't wait to use it to help get out the vote ..."

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THE READERS' REPRESENTATIVE: ADRIAN VORE

News content and ads don't mix

Reader John Raymond emailed recently about a coincidental but unfortunate juxtaposition of a story and an advertisement. It appeared on Thursday, March 29.

"If it wasn't so sad it would be funny. On Page A13 of today's paper it shows a man looking at a hole in his roof caused by shrapnel. Right below it an ad for roof top sky lights," Raymond wrote.

The story was about a missile attack by Yemeni rebels on an area of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The article was accompanied by a picture of man looking up at damage in his roof as light streams in through the hole. Below the story was an ad for solar tube lighting and skylights.

Raymond wondered if the story's and the ad's play was on purpose. I thought other readers might have had the same question from time to time.

The answer is no. The newsroom and advertising departments are separate. The two do not mix.

Ads are placed on pages, and newsroom editors and page designers fill the space around the ads with news stories and photos. Rarely do we (I'm the B-section editor) pay attention to the ads. And we would never try to pair a story with an ad that would happen to share some similarity with news content.

However, news editors and designers might try to avoid placing some stories near certain kinds of ads. For instance, paid obituaries are handled by the classified advertising department. News editors and designers try not to run stories about a slaying or fatal crash, for instance, on the paid obituary page. Sometimes, though, because of space limitations, it can't be avoided.

I have heard of terrible coincidences of a plane crash story running on top of an ad for an airline, but I have never seen it personally, despite being in the business for more than 30 years.

Page designer and copy editor Amanda Selvidio once noticed a juxtaposition that was head-shakingly coincidental and actually humorous.

In a column at the end of January, Diane Bell wrote about a woman who found a pearl in a clam she had ordered at Poseidon Restaurant in Del Mar. The column item continued onto an inside B-section page. It just so happened that on that same page appeared an ad for a restaurant offering deals on oyster dinners.

Seasonal change to the weather page

What happened to the "wildfire watch" on the weather page? a reader from La Mesa asked in a phone call to the Readers' Rep.

The wildfire watch ranks the fire danger levels in the Cleveland National Forest for the day as high, low, extreme, moderate, very high, critical and N/A.

In Wednesday's paper, the wildfire watch was replaced by the "beach report," which lists the polluted waters to avoid. (La Jolla Children's Pool is a mainstay.)

AccuWeather supplies all the information for the weather page, except for U-T staffer Rob Krier's weather question. It swaps out the wildfire watch for the beach report every spring. In the fall, wildfire watch returns. The thinking is people head to the water more often in the spring and summer. In fall, the threat of wildfire traditionally rises.

Not a total goodbye from Showley

U-T reporter Roger Showley might have retired after 44 years at the paper, but readers still might see his byline from time to time. He said he plans to freelance for the business section and possibly write some commentaries for the editorial pages.

As mentioned in last Sunday's Back Story on A2, readers can stay in touch with Showley at rmshowley@yahoo.com.

LBJ and Katharine Graham

About two weeks ago I visited the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. The library features several exhibits in which you can listen to phone conversations involving the president. LBJ would routinely record conversations, one of which might particularly interest newspapers readers.

He spoke to Washington Post Publisher Katharine Graham. He told her how frustrated he was that Washington lawmakers had left the capital during a Thanksgiving break, and no one was working. He told her he reached one person who was hunting and another who was on a beach. He suggested The Post write a story, "not a mean one," he said, that simply told readers what their politicians were doing instead of working.

Graham graciously managed to not commit one way or another as the conversation ended. It brings up an ethical question. Do you write the story?

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FROM THE ARCHIVES | LOOKING BACK OVER 150 YEARS

SAN DIEGANS LEAVE FOR INTERNMENT CAMPS

The San Diego Union-Tribune will mark its 150th anniversary in 2018 by presenting a significant front page from the archives each day throughout the year.

Wednesday, April 8, 1942

On April 7, 1942 more than 1,100 men, women and children boarded two trains at the Santa Fe Depot, forced to leave their homes and jobs after the U.S. government ordered Japanese-Americans into prison camps during World War II. (The headline on this story, as well as others on the page, featured a pejorative term for those of Japanese ancestry, a word frequently used in coverage during this era.)

Here are the first few paragraphs of the story:

CHEERS MINGLED WITH TEARS AS NIPPON FAMILIES DEPART IN TWO 16-CAR TRAINS FOR SANTA ANITA

With a cheer and a tear and a hope that war clouds soon would roll away, San Diego's Japanese and Japanese-Americans left last night in two 16-car trains for Santa Anita, en route to new homes outside the western combat area. In the group were 1150 men, women and children. The tears were reserved for the parting from San Diego, where many of them were born. There were none for the goodbyes exchanged as members of a family part, because there were no family partings. There were 306 family groups in the exodus and one of them took up a whole car on one of those trains. There were 52 men, women and children in that family and its branches.

Thousands of San Diegans went to the depot to see the Japanese leave.

Some of them accompanied Japanese who were their neighbors for years. Mountainous piles of luggage were jammed into three baggage cars on the trains and the departing Nipponese all had hand baggage as well. The evacuees ranged in age from babies in arms to patriarchal old men.

LARK FOR YOUNGSTERS

It was a lark for the youngsters, a bit more serious for their big brothers and sisters and something close to tragedy for a few of the older persons. A child with a "Remember Pearl Harbor" on his sweater calmly looked over a comic book as he waited with his parents for the train to leave. a young American-born Japanese and his wife, married Sunday, made the departure the start of a honeymoon.

The San Diego Union

U.S. SUB SINKS 2 SHIPS IN CHINA SEA

4-Day Jap Toll Totals 12 Craft

"I guess it is all right to be going," said Joseph K. Sano, who fought with American forces as an air corps sergeant in World War I, before he left with his wife and three children. "But when we make an offensive war out of this and send our bombers over Japan I'd like to be in the attacking force." Sano is a member of Chula Vista post, American Legion, and went to the station in an auto driven by one of his Legion friends.

'TAKING MOVE IN STRIDE'

"It is part of our duty as Americans to go," said Sam Fujita, executive secretary of the Japanese-American Citizens league. "If our departure will improve public morale, it is our job to accept it in the best spirit possible. This seems to be the best way we can be of service and we're taking it in our stride."

Married on Sunday, Fujita is making the trip a honeymoon excursion, he said, as he walked to the train with his pretty bride. During the registration that preceded evacuation, Fujita and his sister, Audrey Fujita, served as interpreters in the civil control office and, according to Ray Mathewson, coordinator in the registration headquarters, did excellent work.

"It is one of those things," was the philosophical comment of Frank H. Otsuka, president of the Japanese-American Citizens' league. "Our government says to go and we're eager to cooperate. It would be an untruth to say we're not sorry to go, but it seems to be for the best."

Some of the Japanese nationals maintained grim expressions as they huddled in family groups, or voiced demands on the train that the families be not separated.

ONLINE: View this and other anniversary front pages online at sandiegouniontribune.com/150-years.