

HELPFUL NOTES FROM NICK, VOL. 1: SNOOPS & SECRETS

WRITTEN BY **Nick Bachan** | JAN 6, 2016

I started this column so that you'd tell me all of your secrets.

Over the years, I've found that people open up to me quite easily. Even though that sounds like a villain's origin story, I've always used my powers for good. I empathize well, which is a veritable super power according to most contemporary think pieces. I've also observed how jobs can break our hearts.

Now I want to turn my attention and insights toward a dialogue about where our personal and professional lives intersect. I hope you'll join me.

SALARY SNOOP

Dear Nick,

I accidentally saw my co-worker's salary. She's making more than me! I'm humiliated. How do I ask for a raise?

Sincerely,

On my way to the poor house

Dear compensation crusader,

Don't feel humiliated! Your coworker simply asked for a number that you didn't originally think was on the table. Your accidental snoop is a gift, because you now have a concrete idea of what your position is worth to your employer.

The best time to ask for a raise is either during your next performance review, or immediately following your next professional "win." If your manager is game, confidently suggest a salary range that includes a number you now know to be attainable. Be sure to avoid any mention of what you saw on your coworker's screen!

FAKING IT

Dear Nick,

I've been faking it so long that I'm not sure how I made it. When speaking in public, I don't even know where the words come from. It's all going to crumble like coffee cake!

Sincerely,

Fraudulent fraudster

Dear supposed fraudster,

First of all, you have such a delicious way of describing your impending downfall!

Secondly, many people feel this way. Unless you're a hostile alien life form inhabiting the body of a human being in an attempt to infiltrate our society, you are simply hyperaware of the absurdity that is daily life.

It's liberating to embrace this absurdity, and to do away with a narrative of pure-preparedness. You may feel as though there is a "grading" system for life, and that eventually, you won't pass. Rest assured that this isn't the case! The words will come if you take things one day and one interaction at a time.

SUPPLIES IN DEMAND

Dear Nick,

I've been stealing pens, tape, and sometimes glue from my office—FOR YEARS. Now I'm riddled with guilt and don't know how to professionally atone for a lifetime of petty theft.

Sincerely,
Repentant paper clip collector

Dear stationery scavenger,

Can I borrow a pen or ten? I'm always losing them, and I bet you have an impressive collection.

Once you stop crucially depleting the adhesive capabilities of your workplace, there is probably no professional atonement required. On a personal level, however, you may want to consider acknowledging and addressing your compulsion to take things.

If this offense is exclusive to the workplace, you may be exhibiting rebellious behavior because you're unhappy with some aspect of your 9-5 existence (job title, compensation, coworkers, lack of upward mobility, etc.). It would be worthwhile to reflect on why you have been motivated to trivially cripple your place of work for so many years.

CREDIT SCORED

Dear Nick,

My co-worker and I collaborated on a project but he ended up taking all the credit when we presented it to the client. How do I bring this up? Do I tell our boss or just talk to him individually? Shouldn't our boss—and for that matter, the client—know the truth?

Sincerely,
Designer for justice

Dear accolades-based vigilante,

Go to the boss! Be calm and rational about it. Present an objective recap of your specific contributions and where they added value to both the bottom line and the client relationship. Your work will speak for itself once you confidently call attention to it.

Unfortunately, due to the competitiveness of the modern workplace, some people seek to build a reputation on the hard work of others. Another annoying truth is that reputations alone can translate to raises and promotions.

I was once prone to suffering silently for fear of being too "loud" and "entitled" in professional situations like this, but that isn't a sustainable approach. You have every right to stand up for your work.

SUSPICIOUS SOLITUDE

Dear Nick,

Sometimes, I walk into the supply closet by the bathrooms, close the door and just sit in there with the light off. It's peaceful, almost meditative. But the other day, my desk-mate walked in on me and it was...awkward to say the least. How do I explain this behavior

without losing access to my sanctuary?

*Sincerely,
Meditating in the shadows*

Dear closet thinker,

This is all about two things: location and perception.

Supply closets are reserved for murder, workplace love affairs, and hiding from bad guys in suspense thrillers. In terms of what your desk-mate perceived upon walking in, the fact that the lights were off is at least 80% of why that was awkward. The newly established narrative is that you have something to hide. You can easily clear this up by being honest about needing time to decompress and escape work for a few minutes. Everyone can understand that, even a nosy desk-mate.

Once you've explained yourself, scout a meditative location that is more conventional, but just as private. You'd be surprised what a walk outside or a trip to the break room with some headphones can do for your sanity. Most modern workplaces have areas specifically designated for quiet time, too.

IN CONCLUSION

Two common themes I'd like to address from this first batch of entries are:

- Breakdowns in communication
- Fear of judgment

If you consistently feel as though you can't communicate with your coworkers—the people with whom you interact with for 40-50 hours each week—you'll eventually need much more than a dark supply closet to feel somewhat sane. If you feel like you'll be negatively judged for speaking up in conversations about recognition and compensation, you may end up living in a supply closet full-time. Keep in mind that others will only value you as much as you value yourself. Muscling through the anxiety to emphasize your good work is always worthwhile.

Thank you for sharing and reading! Please continue to send all of your personal and professional quandaries to NickHelps@mathys-potestio.com.

Here to help,
Nick

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