

ADVICE FOR CREATIVES NAVIGATING THE WORKPLACE

I am a recent college graduate and am new to a design team in a mid-size architectural design firm. I am often asked to do tasks that are not part of my job description. What's up with that?

– *Feeling Overutilized*

Judy: Ouch. I sense deep frustration in your inquiry. But you can turn this seemingly dire situation into an opportunity to build your personal brand.

In *The Wall Street Journal*, “My Advice to Grads: Start Mopping” (May 2018), Tyler Bonin writes about his experience working in a retail store while still in college. One of the least desirable tasks was to mop the floor—which included the public restroom. No one wanted to do it, but Bonin always volunteered. “My managers noticed. They named me employee of the month and promoted me to management for the holiday rush...I learned that a sense of entitlement is a burden. People who believe themselves above something, or entitled to something more because of their past achievements, will find that new opportunities slip away.”

Bonin’s innate propensity was to roll up his sleeves and do the best he could at any endeavor. It set a pattern for habits he would carry with him throughout his career. In your case, recognize that in any organization there will be tasks that are outside your job description. Have you entered the firm at a time when the team is stretched to the limits, when projects are nearing deadlines? Maybe this is an opportunity for you to concentrate on building relationships as one of your primary goals. Those you work alongside today may later be colleagues or even your manager in another organization. People move around frequently in today’s working community. Why not look at each day as an interview for a future job? How would you perform if part of a job interview required you to spend two hours with a team to demonstrate your skills? Would you turn down a request to run copies and set up a room for a meeting? Or would you do whatever was asked with enthusiasm?

If you have your own projects, do keep your assistance to a reasonable limit. Be realistic about how much time you can dedicate to assisting others. If you can see that the workload for your team is overwhelming, invite your manager to help you prioritize where to best focus your attention.

Bonin closed his article with this advice: “A task once considered beneath you could actually be the key to your success. Do the job nobody wants, because, believe it or not, somebody appreciates it.



Volunteer to learn and to provide value to others. Find a dream job by first doing the rote tasks in that field, without complaint. Pick up a mop.”

The next time you are asked to do a task that seems insignificant, picture a mop in your hands and start mopping. Visualize that you are opening doors to a dream job with colleagues who respect your humility, dedication and your design talent. As you move forward in your career, continue this practice and set an example for those just entering the workplace.



How can I convince my boss that there is value in attending a retail design conference?

– *Seeking Career ROI*

Judy: Prepare a one-page pitch in a simple format that promises new insights and inventive thinking. Begin by writing a brief paragraph about the conference with theme, dates and location. Name a few vendors and speakers with relevance to current or future projects. You can pull an abundance of facts directly from the conference website to build your introduction. Now move into an ABC format with “A” for agenda, “B” for benefits, “C” for cost, etc.

Agenda: Write an agenda with a short description of how your time will be spent each day. For example:

8 a.m.–9:30 a.m. Meet with new design agency at breakfast

10 a.m.–2 p.m. Walk exhibition floor and meet with vendors

2 p.m.–3 p.m. Attend a presentation on new trends in technology



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3 p.m.–6 p.m. Visit new concept retail stores
7 p.m.–10 p.m. Attend industry awards and other networking events

Benefits: List a few advantages for attending the conference; how you will save time by meeting with a multitude of vendors, see a wide range of offerings, continue your education and experience first-hand the newest retail store concepts in the area.

Cost: Include one line of total cost with breakdown of flight, hotel, meals and transportation.

Deliverables: Offer to prepare a 15-minute presentation for an upcoming team meeting with conference highlights like emerging trends and technologies, insights from speaker presentations and photos of the newest retail concept stores. Also offer to build a file for brochures and catalogs that you collect on the exhibition floor.

Earnings: Conclude with a statement of how you will be employing new insights, products and materials from the conference in current or future projects with a goal of increasing sales.

This ABC approach is a top-notch way for you to build a case on why you will add value by attending a conference. If you can deliver on your promise to influence sales, it is highly probable that you will be first in line to attend future conferences. I began to use this format early in my career and, over time, was able to increase the number of days allotted to each conference from two to five. I also volunteered for industry committees and boards and met dozens of leaders from global retail design organizations.

Attending conferences can be a link to education, inspiration and building relationships with like-minded others who honor the privilege of being part of the retail design industry.



JUDY BELL IS THE FOUNDER OF ENERGETIC RETAIL (ENERGETIC-RETAIL.COM) AND AUTHOR OF “SILENT SELLING.” SHE HELD AN INSPIRATIONAL ROLE FOR 22 YEARS AT TARGET CORP. AND NOW SHARES HER INSIGHTS ON NAVIGATING THE CREATIVE WORKPLACE WITH DESIGN:RETAIL IN THIS BI-ISSUE COLUMN. SEND YOUR QUESTIONS FOR “ASK JUDY” TO JESSIE.DOWD@EMERALDEXPO.COM.