

## Work Daze: Pierced!

by *Bob\_Goldman*

Boy, are you good! The fact that you managed to go to work after the change to Daylight Saving Time proves that you are a truly exemplary employee.

Travelers say it usually takes a day to recover from each time zone you pass through when flying across the country or around the globe. A time change right under your feet or right under your mattress - if you're the boring type who is asleep at 2 a.m. - can be a severe body blow that requires a long recovery period, at least until November when Daylight Savings Time ends, and you have to contend with a whole new period of adjustment.

Bob Goldman has been an advertising executive at a Fortune 500 company in the San Francisco Bay area.

Personally, I would still be in bed this morning if not for the urgent employment news that got me up and at my desk with quill in hand.

It's difficult to grasp in this modern world of 2007, but there are employers out there who discriminate against employees who have pierced their tongues. An urgent letter to one of the unemployment sob sisters who handle such complaints recently crossed my computer screen. I have to admit that I was not aware of the rank discrimination faced every workday by the pierced and tattooed.

I am not claiming that those bearing body art are subject to the same intolerance that those of us cursed with habitual laziness face, but at least we can use stealth to hide our sloth. The pierced and the tattooed are right out there for all the world to see.

According to a survey conducted in 2004, Harris Interactive found that 16 percent of all adults have at least one tattoo. When you look at Americans aged 25 to 29, the percentage of tattooed jumps up to 36 percent. That's a lot of ink and it could cause a great big stink.

In the difficult years since the Harris pool, that number has to have at least doubled. I know I never even considered being tattooed until January 2007 when I felt the need to express my solidarity with Britney - on my forehead.

With more young people entering the work force, it is clear that more tattoos will be visible in the workplace. According to a story in the Pittsburg Post-Gazette, more young women are choosing tattoos for their ankles or other visible places when they used to hide them on a shoulder or below the bikini line, said Duke Miller, owner of Cool Tats for Cool Cats by Duke in North Huntingdon, Pa.

When it comes to eyebrow, ear, nose, lip and especially, tongue piercing, it is almost impossible to hide your sheet metal work. I know people who have gone years without opening their mouths in staff meetings, but eventually you have to open up, if only to chomp down on a bear claw.

So what should you do if you have adorned yourself with a stud, pierce or a tat, and now face workplace discrimination - some uptight management type who insists you can't clearly answer the phone with a rivet in your tongue, or properly deal with customers with the Charge of the Light Brigade tattooed on your arms?

In exploring the great divide between dress codes and body art, I uncovered an article in the New Hampshire Business Review that discussed the liabilities employers face when banning tattoos and body piercing in the workplace. For instance, the warehouse giant Costco found itself in court for religious discrimination when trying to demagnetize a highly studded employee who claimed to be a member of the Church of Body Modification. The employee lost.

Another innocent employee who failed to win his discrimination law suit was ordered to wear a shirt at work to cover a tattoo of a hooded figure standing before a burning cross, which the court inexplicably viewed as a "racist and violent symbol." Another victory for Ralph Lauren and the Polo lobby.

The smart way to stay out of the crossfire in the battle between employee self-expression and employer repression is to compromise. Who would argue with a piercing if you used it to cut the time you spent searching for office supplies by chaining your stapler to your face. And if you must have a tattoo, why not put an image of your supervisor on your chest, or on your butt. No one will see it, of course, but think how your attitude will improve when you know you are not only working for the man, but sitting on him, as well.

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