

# 3

## Getting Cozy with Coworkers



*Monday, June 27*

A bad start today ... I arrive at work a few minutes late, just after 8:30. It's pretty empty inside, though. Maybe the rain has something to do with it, or maybe today is a financial holiday, something like Fund Your Big Fat Assets Day, and everyone stayed home.

Usually, Barry is the last to arrive in the morning, but he's already here. He plays some role in handling the online transactions, so maybe he has to be here when money comes pouring out of boots and into our system.

"Hey Barry, how was the weekend?" I say.

"Not bad, newbie," Barry says. "I cooked barbecue all day Sunday. Do you like barbecue? I make some mean barbecue ... you'll have to come to one of my world-famous parties."

"I will," I say, slowly backpedaling toward my cube. I came to Barry's desk to find something to work on, but I had stumbled into the beginning of a lecture on grilling.

"I went to visit my mom, but I didn't tell her the news yet," Barry continues. "I didn't want to upset her when I don't even know what I'll do."

We all have reasonable notions about moving, and Barry really does not want to go. He has lived in Louisville his entire life and has bounced around between multiple companies. He has been with Mettle the longest — six years — and started just weeks before Ken. Barry lived with his mother for a period

before buying his own house a couple of years back, but he's still her primary caretaker, running errands and clearing his schedule, "just in case." At this stage in the moving decision, Barry is pretty much convinced he won't be heading anywhere.

"Barry, you have plenty of time," I say. "We have two months to figure it out. But instead of contemplating that, can you help me find something to work on today?"

"Sure, I have plenty for you to do. Today would be the perfect day to have you work on fixing some of the errors in this batch script on the server. Maybe you can recognize the code and get the scripts to run. You're pretty good at Java, right?"

"I really don't know any of it."

"I see. Why don't you start flipping through this book and I'm sure by lunchtime, you'll figure out what the problem is."

Barry hands me his Java book. Actually, he lifts the book with all of his might and heaves it in my general direction. I take the book and stumble back to my desk, managing to lay it down without experiencing a hernia.

I've always wondered what it would look like to bind a book including every page of an encyclopedia in at least 23 languages, along with a special section for acknowledgments and an unabridged dictionary. I'm quite sure it's heavy enough to tip the scale and automatically win a prize at one of those carnival guess-your-weight games. Because I have nothing else to do, I figure it can't hurt to start thumbing through the book, assuming I can lift enough pages to safely make it past the table of contents.

I had just sifted through the first couple of paragraphs of the preface when I notice something out of the corner of my eye. I glance quickly to see Diya gliding past. I stand from my cube and watch Diya walk away from me and into her cube.

Jeff waves his hand in front of my face; apparently, I was stuck in a motionless gaze.

"Dude, if you're going to stare at Diya, you should at least be able to see her," Jeff says. "Unless you can see through cube

partitions.”

“What?” I say. “I wasn’t staring, I was ... just opening my handbook and ...”

“Why else would you be looking in that direction? She’s hot. If you wanted to look out the window, you could walk over to Don’s or Barry’s cubes. That would be a lot easier.”

Jeff is quick to notice my strong appreciation for beautiful women, perhaps because he shares the same admiration. And when a man is faced with the conquest of a beautiful woman, there’s only one thing to do: imitate Sean Connery.

Who knew the greatest womanizer of all time would spend his geriatric years as the mentor and spiritual guide to two lost IT employees? In fact, moments ago, Connery lent me his wisdom as I sent an email to Jeff with the subject line “Pleashheesse send me the fileshhh.”

Jeff reads the email, giggles, and pounds his desk.

“Damn it boy, we have quite a meshhh on our hands this morning,” Jeff says.

Some people would say the Connery impersonations are ridiculous, and while Jeff and I would like to think we’ve mastered the accent, we both know the truth: You can never really master the master.

I head back to my desk and again rifle through the Java book. Jeff begins his daily quest to parse his email. Sorting weekend spam on a Monday morning isn’t an easy task. Luckily for me, hardly anyone knows my email address. Or the fact that I work here.

“Did you get the basement finished?” Ken says, just before I do. I walk back over to see Jeff’s reaction. His head is planted on his desk.

“Are you kidding? Not even close,” Jeff says. “I need help with pretty much everything. I want to start the drywall soon, but I’m still unsure about the plumbing items.”

“I can help you one weekend with the drywall, assuming Mary lets me,” Ken says. “How soon do you think it will be?”

“I’d like to have it finished sometime during my lifetime! At least now I can key off the August 15 date as the time I need to finish it. It’s too bad I won’t get to enjoy it for very long.”

“Who says you have to move?” I say, also waving hello to Ken.

“At this point, it seems like a no-brainer,” says Jeff. “The deal is too good to pass up. I think we’re in about as good of a situation as we could be.”

I nod, although I don’t completely agree. Then again, I don’t disagree. I haven’t reviewed all the material yet. I had hoped to find balloons and noisemakers in my goodie bag. Instead, I found was a page that said I would receive an \$8,000 bonus and moving expenses plus other amenities if I moved.

Sweet! That’s enough to purchase a helium tank, too!

I’ve been here only a short time, but Mettle is giving me the benefits of a seasoned employee. I can’t complain. I’ve also been impressed with the organization and presentation of the material, which includes handouts about the parent company, living in Cincinnati, Q&A about benefits, and a link to a website devoted solely to the move. I plan to check out all of it later this week.

I assume, however, that Jeff and Ken are already in the preliminary steps of discussing with their wives the best plan of action. Even though Ken is the elder, he hardly looks the part. His youthful nature probably comes from a myriad of things: his Japanese heritage, his delay of marriage until his late 30s, and his zeal for eating healthily and watching his weight. He has a lovely wife, two young sons, and a sizable house just over the river in Indiana. If Mettle were to make a poster of a happy-looking family, Ken’s could be in front of the camera.

The prospect of moving seems exciting to Ken, if for nothing else as an opportunity to enhance his computing skills, for this job ... or the next. While both he and his wife, Mary, have family in Louisville, moving won’t create too many obstacles regarding personal matters. Mary is a stay-at-home mom, and

as long as Ken is able to keep the same flexible schedule with the company, everything will likely work out.

On the other hand, Jeff has been married for just two years. He is from Memphis and has been with Mettle exactly five years. Jeff and Laura, his wife, don't have any children, and she works as a physical therapist just down the road from where I live. Besides Don, Jeff is the most gung-ho about moving. He is also interested in learning new business skills from the parent company, but he is just biding time until he is able to pursue his dream: graphic design school in California. He reasons that a couple of years of working and saving money will allow him to do just that. Until that time, he is using every spare minute to produce possible portfolio pieces.

"Instead of working on the basement exclusively this weekend, I did more 3-D rendering," Jeff says as Ken and I lurch closer to his screen. "I think with this new software I'm using, I'll be able to do the texture layering for these 3-D scenes."

Jeff shows the images to Ken, but before I can move closer to check Jeff's monitor, Barry storms over and nudges Jeff's chair.

"So, you've been playing on your computer instead of getting your fat ass in gear to finish the basement, eh?" says a grinning Barry. It is important to mention that Jeff is not grossly overweight, nor is Barry toned like Arnold Schwarzenegger during his heyday. I'm starting to find that Barry's puzzling asides are relatively normal.

Everyone continues to gaze at Jeff's monitor and ignore Barry, which gives Barry the notion that he should continue.

"Has anyone turned in their offer letter yet?" Barry asks.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Don has," Ken says. "The guy just sold his house ... his cousins live in Dayton. I don't think there's much thought to it."

"What about you, Diya, are you going to Cincinnati?" shouts Barry, who expects her to respond from 30 feet and three partition walls away. She doesn't answer, but no doubt

hears Barry's booming voice. I decide to sneak over to Diya's cube. At least it gives me the opportunity to stare at her.

"Sorry about Barry yelling like a madman over there," I begin, trying not to disturb her, as it appears she's again doing something ridiculously important.

"That's OK, Jason, I'm used to it by now," Diya says. "How was your weekend?"

"It wasn't too bad. I went to Cincinnati to meet up with a friend ... actually it was sort of a date."

"Oh really?" Diya says. "Was she nice? Did you like her? Did you have a good time?"

"The date was OK. She's just really young, and our lives don't seem to mesh very well at this stage."

"Well, if you move to Cincinnati, you will already have a girlfriend there!"

"Yeah, maybe I should try to pick up girlfriends in every city, in case the company moves somewhere else!"

Well, that wasn't a very good pickup line. Then again, does it really matter? All I know about Diya at this point is she's 29 (a few months older than me) and from India, and she has been with the company for two years. It seems logical that she would move to Cincinnati, only because her job seems to be an integral one. Instead of prying, I sense it is time to maneuver back to my cube and find something else to do.

But there still isn't anything for me to do — at least, nothing I can do on my own. I thought Barry was going to start me with fixing scripts that need debugging, but he's immersed in something else. I think about asking Jeff if I can do some of his work, but he's on the phone, maybe talking to someone in the building, or maybe trying to find the right materials to build a water slide and Olympic-size pool for his basement.

Switching between skimming the Java book and eavesdropping on Jeff doesn't quench my need to do something. Surely there is work to be done; both Jeff and Barry are supposed to continue the training process so I can build the annuity website

files and work on the updates. There's also a rumor that I'll be working on reorganizing the intranet (Mettle's internal website). I hate being at work with nothing to do.

Since the announcement last Wednesday, my thoughts have been consumed by the relocation decision. Before that, during my first seven days here, I had remained solidly unattached to Mettle and my coworkers. I had grandiose ideas about starting a job in such rich surroundings, with people from all walks of life, various ethnicities, religions, office chair sitting habits, etc. But as an outsider, I assumed I could keep my distance while I decided if this was the best place for me.

And now, on the eleventh day at my new place of business, I've made a sudden realization. Mettle is the place I need to be. It is just the close-knit, thought-provoking atmosphere I have been craving since I left my last job.

Then again, it would be nice to have some freakin' work to do.

It was difficult to assess how I would fit in at the beginning, but that is not an issue anymore. Belonging to a team of web developers is great — until the team no longer exists. And while I jumped into an optimal situation with the team here, the clock is already ticking on how long this will continue. August 15 seems like a decade away from today. Jeff visits my cube to give me the latest about the move to Cincinnati.

"It looks like there's a chance I might be switching teams," Jeff whispers. "Raj just told me he's pretty certain most of the people down in creative services won't be moving, so they'll need someone to do the graphics."

Raj, a good guy and not a lying sack of shit, oversees the e-commerce graphic design work on the fifth floor. He's familiar enough with Jeff's goals and looking to expand the competency of his group. Jeff isn't a programmer by trade, but then again, his current position doesn't necessitate a hard-core programmer like Barry. Jeff's best opportunity would include more design work and less monotonous code building.

“So when will you know if you switch departments?” I say.

“It won’t be soon,” Jeff says. “It’s more like something that could happen eventually.”

“Will that affect the number of people we have up here?”

“In the long run, perhaps. At first, Northern Lineage won’t meddle too much in what we are doing. They’ll have to learn our processes before they get too involved. The way Raj talks, there is going to be some restructuring within Mettle before the actual move. But who knows if that will even happen.”

“Do we know anything that will actually happen?”

“In reality, I guess the only thing I know is that the company is moving to Cincy.”

Jeff heads back to his cube. So much for the web team staying intact. It’s tough to figure out if you’re in the right place if everyone around you is moving. Maybe they can just throw us all in a centrifuge and separate the employees into designers, programmers, and liquids.

Before I turn another page in the Java book, I notice that Diya responded to my earlier email. I had written her minutes before she arrived this morning. I think I remember asking her to dinner.

---

So Jason...I had to leave on Friday because of my MBA class. I think I will be free over the weekend but I am not sure yet because a friend's sister is visiting and she wanted me to come home for dinner sometime this week... Let me have your number so that I can call u or u can have my cell number. So how is ur day going so far? I am very tired and I need a break...

---

Through all the craziness here, I managed to score a date with the hottest girl in the building. Despite not receiving any balloons today, the answer to Diya’s question is simple: My day is fabulous.