

Today's goddess of justice: the office



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The 10th Circle of Dante's Inferno

*Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.
Ah me! How hard a thing it is to say
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,
Which in the very thought renews the fear.
So bitter is it, death is little more;
But of the good to treat, which there I found,
Speak will I of the other things I saw there.*

DANTE ALIGHIERI

It was once believed that the closer one is to the heavens, the closer one is to God. Yet at 8.29am as the fastest lift in the Southern Hemisphere takes you from ground to level 49 in under 20 seconds, you feel your ears pop, your soul drop, a day spent not with the deity but with the Devil's Advocate. Eighty units filled with idle banter, temperamental office equipment and dysfunctional characters. Once you come to understand the role that each character in your office plays, don your wool blend suit (purchased on sale) and don't take – office personalities – personally.

Mr Status Anxiety

Despite the 360 degree view from his external office, Mr Status Anxiety suffers from myopia. He is unable to see beyond St Kilda and South Yarra. A semi-private school boy, the only member of his family to earn a salary which falls within the highest tax bracket. Defined by the membership cards he keeps in his Bally wallet which his ex-girlfriend (one of many) purchased for him at the mid-year clearance in 2001.

Tennis at Kooyong. Brunch at Café Latte on Malvern Road. A jog around the 'tan. An imported beer at the George. Dinner at Donovans. Casual dress is defined as a Ralph Lauren Polo with the collar turned up, smart casual is a Ralph Lauren Polo with the collar down turned, and pleated beige pants from Country Road.

What he lacks in legal knowledge and excellence he makes up for in legal ego. A hunger for justice he certainly does not possess, however, chargeable units equate to promotion – confirmation of his "success" and the ability to distance himself further from his modest roots.

Do not approach Mr Status Anxiety unless you are armed with an MCC membership card or a surname that has appeared on the *BRW* 200 Rich List. Please note that Mr Status Anxiety is currently being investigated by the Environment Protection Authority due to the toxic fumes that emanate from his office, a combination of the French aftershave he uses and the hot air which he expels when he speaks.

Ms Law Students' Society

The stench of fake tan and peroxide follows her. An avid supporter of the Atkins diet – the lack of carbohydrates may explain her mood swings and occasional amnesia. Despite being in the same class at law school and completing four clerkships together she never seems to remember your name, especially out on a Friday night. Most of her friends work at the Paris End, she constantly laments about working at the "Kosovo" end of Collins Street.

Her office could be mistaken as her personal shrine – photographs of last summer at Portsea and Sorrento, the European trip and the Brownlows.

She is passionate about the law, however, is unlikely to practise post the *Herald Sun*-sponsored AFL wedding. She lacks printer etiquette and regularly causes havoc as she reshuffles completed print jobs. She rarely holds the lift and walks two paces faster in order to avoid conversation.

Please take care in approaching Ms Law Students' Society, she is irritable and has an inflated sense of self-importance, accordingly she considers everyone bar Eddie McGuire and senior partners as time wasters. Arm yourself with an item from Kookai, an exposed Jigsaw tag and a Mandarina Duck bag for extra protection.

The Golden Child

Award-winning, budget-making, profile-building, national hero. He was next in line to carry the Olympic torch after Freeman. This young man could auction his old Xaverian Football jumper at Christies at a price close to that received at the auction of Sir Donald Bradman's dental floss.

The Golden Child has mastered the art of intellectual intercourse with senior partners and entertaining banter with the office commoners. Greeted with smiles and recognition at directions hearings, plaintiff lawyers more than happy to make orders by consent, tipstaff ask about his weekend.

He is the only person in the firm to have achieved work/life balance and still be employed. Constantly planning weekends away, bushwalking in the Blue Mountains or surfing down the coast.

The most approachable of creatures found in the fluorescent light jungle aka the office, the Golden Child readily assists and rarely involves himself in office politics. He provides you with simple solutions to complex matters and does so within one unit, rather than an entire afternoon. He should be archived as a potential life-long partner or at least marinated for a delicious office romance.

Ms Machiavelli

The holder of the world record for the ability to use the most clichés in one conversation, she is on a

mission to break through the glass ceiling, showing no remorse for the senseless carnage of junior staff.

Every opportunity is a marketing opportunity. She has joined industry, women and sporting groups across the state. She analyses email addresses which have been carbon copied on non-work related email in the hope of getting that all important "contact".

She attends weekend-long "self-help" seminars and convinces the firm to pay. The world owes her something – NOW is the time to redeem it. She chooses the largest piece of cake at office functions, yet, contributes the least at collections.

Quid pro quo is the only Latin she can recall from Law School. She defines *pro bono* as publicity.

Ms Machiavelli sets the women's movement back at least 50 years, there is no sense of sisterhood – only social Darwinism. Femininity is either construed as a weakness or a ploy to move up the corporate ladder. Compassion cured by xenophobia and enthusiasm quashed by rumours of incompetency and the fostering of self-doubt.

Get out of the Machiavellian princess' war path, unless you are willing to forfeit your sanity and soul.

Ms Eye-Roller

The assistant that refuses to assist. Any request is accompanied by the painful rolling of her eyeballs. We just hope that one day, due to the constant rolling, her non-prescription coloured contacts become stuck behind her eyeballs.

She never has "capacity". She uses disclaimers in every conversation – "I'll try and get it done, but I'm quite busy with Mr Senior Partner's work at the moment, I'll try and get it to you by the end of the day".

She is a pessimist and preys on your self-doubt, "I've never seen that done before . . . well not like that . . . are you sure that's right?". She informs you of how many "sleeps" until she takes her annual leave to Bali. She feels the need to tell you how tired she is – after all she did work until 5.30pm.

The organisation of her wedding takes priority over typing and passing on of urgent messages. She spends hours calculating the date to re-colour her hair before the wedding in order to avoid re-growth but allowing enough time should something go tragically wrong with the colour.

Approach the Eye-Roller with care as she sits with HR over lunch. Avoid confrontation, as the Eye-Roller will soon transform into the Weeping Woman – tears streaming out as she stumbles out of your office in her cheap kitten heels.

To hell with the office inferno . . . Have you ever considered becoming a sole/soul practitioner? ■