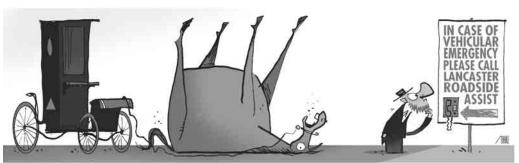
D2 Sunday, October 24, 2004

The Washington Post

The Style Invitational Week 581: Evil Things in Store



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Dave Prevar of Annapolis wrote in to relate this "Loser Idea Moment": "I was looking for some over-the-counter back pain relief, and guess where the store stocked it? The bottom shelf, naturally. It took me a while just to get down there, and I hung on to a shelf to get back up. While I was down there, I even helped an older feller with his selection.

This week's contest: Think of similarly evil or just plain stupid practices that the staff of a retail or other establishment might perpetrate. Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives a big yellow sponge sent to The Washington Post to promote "The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie," which we have no reason to believe will be any better made than this plain old sponge—not even in the SpongeBob shape—on which is printed, almost illegibly, the name of the movie and a little bit of the title character's face. Even the Empress feels a little bad about giving that crappy a prize, so she'll throw in an old Loser Pen.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to *losers@washpost.com* or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 1. Put the week number in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Nov. 21. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Brendan Beary of Great Mills

Report from Week 577, in which the Empress invited you to "alter slightly" any TV show title and describe the new version. Among the more than 2,200 entries were a number of good titles sent too often, such as "My Three Sins," "60 Minuets," "I Love Loosely," "The McLaughlin Grope," "Hogan's Herpes," "Fiends" and "The Pimple Life."

♦ Fourth runner-up: Goner Pyle, USMC: Sgt. Carter asks, Pvt. Pyle tells. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

♦ Third runner-up: Onanza: Tales of a ranch with a lot of men and no women. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

♦ Second runner-up: Queer Eve for the Straight Guy: In this sitcom set in ancient times, the human race struggles to get going. Starring Barbara Eden. (Dan McCauley, Staunton, Va.)

First runner-up, winner of the tacky deer lamp: Cuckoo Fran and Ollie: "Crossfire's" new matchup: Drescher vs. North. (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

♦ And the winner of the Inker: Mayorbarry, BFD: Despite repeated cancellations, the show keeps getting renewed. (Jack Cackler, Falls Church)

Honorable Mentions:

My So-Called Lift: Dissatisfied patients confront their plastic surgeons. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

The Wimple Life: Paris and Nicole join a convent. Poverty, chastity, obediencewha? (Jeffrey Contompasis, Ashburn; Will Cramer and Julie Thomas, Herndon)

The Pan From Uncle: Newlyweds smile bravely as they open crappy wedding presents. (Judith Cottrill, New York)

The Flaying Nun: Sister Bertrille is assigned to a class of gum-chewers and eraser-throwers. (Peter Metrinko, Plymouth, Minn.)

Bunsmoke: Watch the Olympic luge team in training! (Judith Cottrill) Have Gnu, Will Travel: Richard Boone

roams the veldt fighting bad guys. (Richard Lempert)

Gnats Landing: The joys of summer picnicking. (Peter Metrinko)

Let's Fake a Deal: There's a goat behind Door Number 1, Number 2 and Number 3! (Dot Yufer, Newton, W.Va.)

PeaceMaster Theatre: Scenes from the life of Jesus. (Jim Mall, Chicago)

Tip Tuck: A peek into the lives (and G-

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Uncommon Sense

he desire to reduce any body of knowl-edge to something that fits on a Tshirt—or, in the case of academic knowledge that's subject to testing, on the cuff of a real shirt—is understandable. So Miss Manners tries to be patient with the nice people who tell her that her noble field is, "after all, just a matter of common sense.

So much for the world's fascinating variety of cultural and ceremonial traditions. So much for the ever-developing interplay of behavior with changing social thought and technology. So much for the ethical and practical task of applying conflicting obligations to the complications of real situations.

Well, common sense certainly helps, Miss Manners admits. You just wouldn't want to be stuck with it alone in a strange situation where you don't want to offend people of whose customs you know little or nothing. But even then, it couldn't hurt.

Common sense might have the sense to tell you to admit your ignorance and plead for etiquette instruction instead of bludgeoning your way through, unaware of the horrifying signals you may be sending.

So where is all that common sense in common situations, where it is so badly needed? Miss Manners is exasperated to find it in remarkably short supply when it comes to the simplest and most obvious matters.

Example No. 1: The failure to answer invitations, especially formal ones, usually issued for weddings, is as widespread as it is insulting to the hosts, for whom it has serious consequences.

Therefore, Miss Manners used to think that only the callous would omit doing this.

There are plenty of such folks around, who brazenly tell those kind enough to invite them that they have no way of knowing if they will feel like attending on that date. But there are others who seem genuinely puzzled about what to do. If a reply is not specifically requested, or there is no reply card enclosed, or it comes with a return envelope but no stamp, they figure that no reply is warranted. One Gentle Reader said that since she was not planning to go and the reply card asked for the number of people attending and a meal choice, she had not used it or otherwise answered the invitation.

Example No. 2: People who receive announcements of graduations, engagements, weddings or other happy events, when there is no invitation involved, ask Miss Manners whether they can ignore them or are obliged to give a present, as if these are the only possible choices.

Example No. 3: Having received presents, sometimes in the form of checks, the recipients plead that the donors must realize that they are too busy to write letters of thanks, or that they have a year in which to do so, or that it would be offensive to do so at all, as this would imply that the generosity was calculated for an expected return in the way of gratitude.

And these are people who seem to mean well and are actively inquiring about what would be proper. Where, Miss Manners wonders, is their common sense?

Shouldn't it tell them that all social overtures require and deserve an answer? If a friend said, "Do you want to go to the movies tonight?" or a colleague suggested getting a cup of coffee, they might accept or decline—but would they remain silent?

Do they also greet friends' happy news with silence? Don't they respond with congratulations?

If they send a present, are they ashamed of themselves as selfish if they want to know right away that it arrived and was appreciated?

Etiquette can supply the form and the frills for such responses. But it does need to build on some common sense.

Dear Miss Manners:

Is it bad manners to be in a restaurant and, after a meal course, pile up your dishes to make it a bit easier for the waitress? Would they be insulted by this? My wife always does it, and I would think they would appreciate the help and thoughts.

Would you be insulted if one of your clients or customers pitched in and started doing your job for you?

Before you say, "Great, then I wouldn't have to do it," Miss Manners asks you to consider the possible results. Suppose that person bungled the job? Suppose the boss caught you foisting off your work?

You and your wife mean well, but piling plates is improper table service. And you wouldn't want the dining-room manager to think that you were reduced to piling up your plates because the waitress had neglected to clear them in good time.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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DEAR ABBY

Dear Abby:

Please settle an argument I'm having with my fe. Our 18 from ADHD. Last June, my wife insisted that Crystal get a summer job. After weeks of searching, the only job Crystal could find was selling door-to-door.

like to enjoy all the hard work we have put into our yard and enjoy our patio again.

Rogaine's Heroes: Hair-raising adventures! (Russell Beland, Springfield)

America's Most Wasted: "Dude, that dude just needs to chill, dude!" "Whoa, dude, you're right!" "Hey, dude, that's your picture there, dude!" "Whoa, dude, you're right!" (Dan Nooter, Washington)

While You Were Cut: Teams perform surprise home renovations while the owners are undergoing surgery. (Chris Doyle)

Bewatched: Cute attorney general has to just wiggle his nose to make the Bill of Rights disappear. (Jack Cackler)

Family Freud: Not exactly the Huxtables. Only on HBO. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

The Newlywed Same: The civil union game show. (Dave Komornik, Danville, Va.)

Big Bother: An audience is forced to sit through yet another bunch-of-peoplestuck-in-a-house reality show. (Wayne Rodgers, Satellite Beach, Fla.)

Antique Road Ho: A poignant drama about a broken-down hooker still working the street. (Russell Beland)

The Fraidy Bunch: A family is constantly on guard against pollen, war, strangers, people who are too nice, identity theft and big dogs. (Jean Sorensen, Herndon)

Cross Fire: The wacky Keystone Klan makes mischief in diverse neighborhoods. (Doug Pinkham, Oakton)

Eighth Is Enough: The Wizards pursue their perennial quest to finish just high enough in their conference to make the playoffs. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

The Six Million Dollar Can: A sitcom starting J. Lo. (Brendan Beary)

Fit Albert: Newly svelte "Today" show weatherman Al Roker gives exercise tips. (Jeff Evan, Millsboro, Del.)

The Family Gay: Each family has one. This week: the Cheneys from Washington, D.C.! (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Cups: From the producers of "Baywatch": Busty policewomen chase perps in slomo. (Chris J. Strolin, Belleville, Ill.)

Different Strikes: National and American league umpires alternate in the World Series. (Richard Lempert, Arlington)

Rather Knows Best: CBS's newest disaster show. (Judith Cottrill, Peter Metrinko)

F--- Troop: On the campaign trail with Vice President Cheney and his entourage. (Thad Humphries, Warrenton)

The Golden Girl: Bea Arthur attends three funerals. (Ben Schwalb, Severna Park)

Next Week: Ask Backwards, or At Trebek and Call

strings) of drag queens working as exotic dancers. (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

Perky Mason: Life in the Ancient Order of Hibernians brightens up when Reese Witherspoon becomes its newest member. (Kyle Bonney, Fairfax)

Petticoat Injunction: Real-life courtroom drama from sexual harassment cases. (Russell Beland)

Magnum, P.I.G.: A private investigator chooses his caseload entirely by his chances of sleeping with his clients. (Kyle Hendrickson, Dunkirk)

The Price Is Sight: Guess wrong and you give your corneas to a lucky member of our studio audience! (Kyle Bonney)

American Bandstank: William Hung joins a rock group in this spinoff talent contest. (Judith Cottrill)

The Honey Mooners: A "Nova" documentary on how bees communicate by wiggling their butts. (Richard Lempert)

6 Minutes: A new version of the newsmagazine with all unconfirmed allegations edited out. (Frank Mullen III, Aledo, III.)

The Nopranos: It's Season 6. Who's left? (Judith Cottrill)

Twin Geeks: Bill Gates and Ken Jennings talk software. (Jean Sorensen)

20-20: The hour-long final point in the Championship of Pong. (Dan Nooter)

Homo Improvement: Straight eye for the queer guy. (Chris Doyle)

Your Show of Showns: All reruns all the time. (John Held, Fairfax)

The George W. Lopez Show: President Bush legally changes his name in a blatant grab for the Latino vote. (Duncan Mac-Gregor, Grapevine, Tex.)

BBC Smackdown! Alistair Cooke faces off against Sister Wendy in their longawaited revenge match. (Jerry Ewing, Orlando)

Wilt & Grace: The Playboy Channel brings you Part 1 of a 20,000-part series. Tomorrow: Wilt & Felicia. (Pam Sweeney)

They're ruthless and they're greedy, Tyrannically Tikriti, Their spider holes are seedy, The Saddam Family! (Brendan Beary)

He's creepy and we do say, Like sons Uday and Qusay, A danger to the U-SA. The Saddam Family! (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

And Last: Meet the 'Press: The editor of The Style Invitational discourses on wordplay, meter, tacky promotional items and poop. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

I was afraid that door-to-door sales might put my daughter in danger, so I quietly approached the owner of a small business nearby and naid her to give Crystal a job. Crystal did well, and it turned out to be a positive work experience-her first for someone outside the family.

My wife just found out what I did and she is irate. I didn't tell her because she is such a penny-pincher—she complained about piano lessons for Crystal during her senior year because "she was going to college anyway."

Is what I did so terribly wrong? I think it was a good thing.

In the Doghouse in Michigan

Although you did not mention the toll that having ADHD has taken on your daughter, I'm sure it has been significant. You weren't wrong to want to level the playing field for your daughter and ensure her safety. The benefit to both of you is that she now has a summer of work experience behind her-and the confidence that goes along with it—and you had peace of mind. You behaved like a concerned and loving father, and that is laudable.

Dear Abby:

My husband and I have a problem with the little boy who lives across the street. Any time we pull into our driveway, the youngster will come right over to greet us with 100 questions before we can even exit the vehicle.

If we're in our front yard, he will come over and won't leave, even though we tell him we're busy doing yard work. It has reached the point where we look out the window before we go outside. If he comes over, we go inside immediately. We would

left alone.

How can we handle this without hurting the child's feelings and keep peace with our neighbors? It has plagued us for far too long.

> Prisoners in Our Own Home, Norwich. Conn.

You have described a very lonely little boy. I am sure if he had other things to do, and friends to play with, he wouldn't be depending on you for human contact. However, since you and your husband are not child-oriented, I advise you to speak to the boy's parents and urge them to get their son into some activities where he can be entertained and interact with his peers. You would be doing the boy a favor.

Dear Abby:

I have known "Cassie" for more than a year. We both like each other a lot, but she has asked me to "give her a few weeks" because she needs to regain the trust she lost because of her ex. Well, it has been six weeks, and we barely even talk anymore because she's so busy with work and extracurricular activities. What should I do? Matthew in Indiana

Get busy with your work and extracurricular activities. That way you'll have less time to worry about Cassie, who, from my perspective, is nowhere near ready for another relationship with anyone.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.

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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

s the game at the Mad Hatter's went on, the players grew more and more annoyed at the Queen of Hearts, a vocal kibitzer. Only Alice had escaped the lash of the Queen's criticism.

Finally, the Hatter landed at a grand slam that looked cold. North was the Dormouse, and his four diamonds were a "splinter" bid, showing spade support and diamond shortness. When the Hatter cue-bid twice in clubs, North went all the way.

Alice led the king of diamonds, and the Hatter surveyed dummy with dismay.

"We underbid it," the Hatter sighed.

"You can't bid more than seven," Alice said severely.

"In Wonderland," offered the March Hare, East, "we often bid nine.

Meanwhile, the Hatter leered at the Queen of Hearts and pointedly discarded her from dummy, winning with the ace of diamonds.

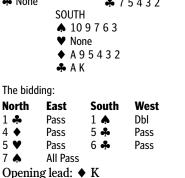
"You dunderhead!" the Queen shrieked.

The Hatter then led a trump to dummy and quivered when the Hare showed out. If declarer drew trumps, he could take the A-K of clubs but couldn't reach dummy's clubs. So the Hatter led a club to his ace next, but Alice ruffed.

"Off with his head!" the Queen of Hearts bellowed.

To guard against foul breaks, South must throw a club from dummy at Trick One. He leads a trump to dummy, ruffs a heart, returns with a trump and ruffs the queen of hearts. South then draws trumps, pitching his ace of clubs. He discards his king of clubs on the ace of hearts and claims.

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♥ A Q 4 ♦ None **•** Q J 10 9 8 6 WEST EAST **8** 5 4 2 None **♥** K 10 8 3 ♥ J97652 ♦ KQJ106 ♦ 87 🗣 None **4** 7 5 4 3 2

North

1 🗭

4 🔶

5♥

7 🌲

N-S vulnerable

NORTH (D)

AKOJ