

Scrub One Tile

My son Matthew and I watched a movie called *Catch Me If You Can*, and one of the things that caught our attention was “Why do the Yankee’s always win?” People will inevitably say something like, “They have the best players.” But the true reason is that their opponents are too busy looking at the pinstripes. That is so true in so many situations – you or your opponents are too busy looking at the pinstripes and lose track of the real issue.

Here is such an example in this true story.

When I was 18-years-old, I got a very low ranking job of being a dishwasher in a hospital. Nasty, nasty work. Dirty dishes, greasy floors, rotten smelling food and many pet cockroaches. You start at this job and you have nowhere to go but up.

Porter was my official title. “Porter, come mop the floor;” “Porter, go clean the toilets.” You get the idea.

Once the dieticians wanted us to steam clean the floors and when we did, hundreds of cockroaches went running for their lives straight into the dietician’s office. We were told to never do that again. Well, I digress.

Since I am digressing, I want to share with you something I learned in the kitchen and can be used in all jobs where you are supervised. Always have something in

your hands at all times. You don't actually have to be using it, but visually when the boss looks in your direction, he will assume that you are using it.

In my case, in the kitchen, I would always carry around a broom or be pushing a rolling trash can. Whenever the boss looked my way, she assumed I was sweeping the floor or emptying the trash and would leave me alone. She usually assumed wrong.

In offices, workers carry around clipboards. I mean if you have a clipboard, then you have got to be doing something important. At the very least have a written sheet of paper that you can pretend needs to be copied, faxed or filed somewhere. No one seems to follow-up in these areas, I guess they are only looking at the pinstripes.

One glorious day in the hospital kitchen, I was told to scrub the walls. Yeah, for me! Really, I am thinking this is a bunch of shit. Damn it, I don't want to scrub no stinkin' wall. The kitchen gods suck today. Well, at least I had a plan

The first thing I did was walk around the kitchen, telling all of my kitchen friends how I was getting screwed, having to scrub the walls. I bad-mouthed management which always seemed to be a moral booster for the co-workers. We, indentured servants, could always unite against "The Man". It made us feel better knowing we were a team, a team that was often screwed.

This first part of my plan took about an hour, so the first hour of the day was over. One less hour to spend on that nasty, dirty wall.

The next part of my plan was the “big production.” This consisted of making an elaborate show of what I was doing. I am getting out the large bucket on wheels, for a task as great as this, the small bucket simply wouldn’t do. I am getting my supplies together, the scrub brushes (yes, I will need more than one for this humongous job), the ladder and the footstool (these mighty walls towered in at nearly 8 feet), and a slew of different cleaning products. I mean if you are going to clean the walls, you definitely want a variety of degreasers, soaps, and Windex. I have no idea why I carried Windex over to the wall, as it had no windows, but it was all part of the “big production.”

I filled the big bucket up with hot water and soap, making lots of bubbles and hot water vapor so the bosses and co-workers could smell the wonderful cleaning products. A friend of mine taught me that if you make a lot of noise when you are working, then others assume you are working very hard. Well, I was banging my cleaning gear around trying to let it be heard that the lowly porter was working.

So, let’s see now ... I believe I had the five senses covered with this project. They could see I was working, hear the banging of my work bucket, and smell the soap. When and if I actually cleaned something, they could feel the wall, and when I was done, they could theoretically eat off of it to cover the sense of taste. Yes, yes the “big production” was in full swing.

However, by now it was break time and I sure needed one. After returning from break, the hot soapy water was now cool and needed to be replaced. Bummer. God, I hate it

when that happens. Now I have to push my big bucket back to the sink and drain out the water and refill it with more hot water and soap. If I don't get a move on, it will soon be lunch and I will have to do this again. Where did the time go? The day is nearly half over, and I have been working steady, yet no actual soapy water has touched a wall yet.

After lunch, I select one brick tile to clean. Yes, just one. I mean, I would rather get one tile cleaned properly than the whole wall cleaned properly. I know you can follow my logic on this one.

I selected the perfect tile, not too high, not too low, just right. I also selected one close to a corner so I would receive maximum exposure so anyone and everyone could see what a good and thorough job I was doing. I received lots of compliments from co-workers and bosses alike. They would be caught up in their own worlds, just passing by and would look up and see the "big production" with me scrubbing away furiously. Of course, I only scrubbed when someone was walking by, and only then, I would scrub my one and only favorite brick tile.

It was so nice to receive so many positive comments for my hard work. I received more pats on the back from this than when I was doing my actual work of washing dishes and emptying trash. One boss said she could see such a difference in the whole wall, how it was all sparkling. That is funny since no soapy water touched the wall except for my favorite brick unless some was accidentally splashed against the other bricks.

At the end of the successful day, I went home with a new found self-esteem. I was never again asked to clean the walls, and for that I am kind of sad.

– Dale McCombs, 2014

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