

# Boston Works

VIEW FROM THE CUBE | EILEEN MCAVOY BOYLEN

## A sycophant plots, even if the boss doesn't care

**A**nd when you count 150 flushes, post the 'out of order' sign." This was hardly the strategic instruction I'd expected to receive in my first real client service assignment. But, Peg was no ordinary client. And this was no ordinary assignment. My experiences with Peg could fill a syllabus on organizational behavior. I learned many lessons from her, but, in the end, I may have missed the most important one.

We were managing an event in Central Park for the agency's largest client. In addition to arranging the talent, contracts, and event promotion, we were to entertain Peg's boss, Brent, the senior vice president of marketing. More than entertaining, we were to anticipate and attend to Brent's every need. Peg, a career sycophant, was acutely concerned about Brent's need to relieve himself in a manner befitting his stature.

"Handy House" facilities were fine for everyone else, but these substandard facilities would never do for Peg's boss. Oh, no.

Thus began my most important mission, code named "Operation VIP Pee." I'd never realized the myriad of options for outdoor relief; luxury mobile restroom suites were a whole new world. These units ranged from the basic one-occupant stall featuring waterless soap and nonskid epoxy floors to an eight-unit trailer sufficient for a month's stay at the Grand Canyon. Would the moderate unit with air conditioning and china sinks do the trick? Or, would Brent require the full-size trailer featuring marble fixtures, cut flowers, and Berber carpeting? So many choices. And Peg's career was riding on the right hopper.

The problem with all these units was the 200-flush maximum.



Three views inside a California company's "platinum suite," which rents for \$3,500 a night, combine to make a composite image. It has interior lighting, soap dispensers, and carpeting; for an added fee, the company will supply black-tie attendants.

Brent would be arriving late, and the units might be "full." So, Peg had us stand outside the "suite" counting flushes with a clicker. Once we hit 150, we marked the unit "out of order" awaiting Brent's arrival. Unfortunately Brent never showed. Peg's hopes dashed, all our efforts literally down the drain.

But, Peg was undeterred. With an agency perpetually available to do her work for her, she'd made a lifelong career of sucking up. Our job was to take care of the work. Her job was to take care of her boss. And she did it with the dedication of a Botticelli martyr.

Peg's life revolved around The Company. Single and in her 50s,

she weaved tales of her polo pony, "Skip"; the men she dated; and her exciting life as a Manhattan socialite. Belying this jolly façade was her dependence upon the agency for social connections.

We often felt like "professional escorts" accompanying her to the theater, charity galas, and expensive restaurants, all, of course, at agency expense. If Jeopardy had a category for "Menu Items at The Palm," I'd be unbeatable.

Peg made a habit of learning the personal interests of upper management. If Brent liked tennis, she'd recommend the company buy ad space at the US Open. If Brent had liked crossword puzzles, we'd be airing "Puzzles in the

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Park" on ABC. Her sponsorship ideas never reflected brand strategy unless, of course, she thought her boss would like them.

In Brent's defense, he seemed mostly oblivious to Peg's fawning. Yet sometimes he appeared uncomfortable. I kept a photograph of one such awkward moment. Like the Central Park event, Brent

arrived fashionably late. He missed the elegant cocktail party overlooking the Manhattan skyline. He missed the concert which meant two of us spent billable hours occupying his seats, already sealed with duct tape so no one else could sit there. Most important, he was not there to sample the vast array of decadent chocolate desserts — which Peg had chosen especially for Brent.

So, like an avenging seagull, she swooped into action. We were dispatched to pound the door of the closed restaurant across the park. We used every trick in our arsenal (and wallets) to get a left-over tray from the catered event. We teetered across the grass in

high heels, parting the crowds with platters held high, to personally serve Brent the missed desserts. Brent had the good grace to look mortified and the pictures show it.

So, was Peg finally exposed as the suck-up she really was? Did they realize she was useless and fire her? No. Two mergers and six restructurings later, Peg still has her job. Go figure. I began my career convinced the key to success was hard work. Years later I learned this was not always true. Sometimes it is more important to keep your boss happy — even if it means standing outside a latrine with a clicker in the middle of Central Park.