Secretaries’ Day

A Vignette

By Maryanne Peters

I was up for up. People know that I am good fun, it is just that I am too busy to have any time for things like “Secretaries’ Day”. What is that anyway? Just the girls holding out to be taken to lunch one day a year.

So, when all the support staff in the office said that for forgetting that special event, I was going to spend a special Secretaries’ Day dressed in drag and attending to those duties for our new CEO Pamela Haywright, I was prepared to go along with the joke. At least it would silence them.

Maybe the first time I genuinely forgot, but now I can concede that all the other times I was just avoiding them. All the reps were busy which is why we needed somebody in the office filling that role – keeping track of us, arranging meetings, booking travel and accommodation, forwarding updated material, picking up laundry, reminding us of important engagements … like Secretaries’ Day. So, when they did, it was willful deafness on my part.

We shared 3 secretaries. The others made it up to those they owed gratitude, but I didn’t. They were pissed with me, and I understand why. They went over my head when Pam got the job. I am not sure what they said to her, but she came out as mad as hell, even though I had already agreed to do it. Yes, my job depended on me accepting the punishment they had chosen for me, and she would make sure that I did.

“This is not my idea, but I am not having you make fun of women, Joe,” Pam said. “You will present yourself properly at work. I will arrange for the salon I use regularly to take you in for an early appointment and to take charge. Go along with what they will do. And make an effort. If you do it right, I might just take you to lunch.”

So, I went to the salon which had opened up very early to take me. They had instructions from Pam and the secretaries on what to do. This was not a smear of makeup, a bad wig and an old sports bra with rolled up socks in the cups. No way.

As I said, I was up for it. I could go along with this for a day. I could take the stick-on breasts. They were so convincing with that string of pearls hiding the edge, that you would never guess they were’t real. The black bra and the unbuttoned blouse was my idea. Now, that was the kind of secretary I could approve of. And the skirt a little shorter than the one Pam had approved for me, simply because if you have good legs and the salon has waxed them free of hair, why not show them off? And how better to do that than super high red heels to have me tower above everybody else in the office. I had to buy those, from a discount shoe shop.

I just walked in, trilling a cheerful “good morning” in my practiced high voice. I took my seat outside Pam’s office and checked my lipstick – perfect. What more does a girl have to do?

But the truth is that there was a lot that was wrong about the way that Pam ran her office. After being in the manager’s seat for a while I know what she needs and when she needs it. I found that I was quite good at the job, and that I quite liked it. And it was a chance to show how things should be done.

I suppose that I sort of found my place. It was only supposed to be for a day, but Pam pointed out some shortcomings – not in my work but more my presentation.

“Come back in tomorrow and do it right,” said Pam. “You have done well. I will definitely take you out to lunch.”

It was only supposed to be one day, but I was ready for a second. My hair still looked good and my legs still felt smooth, and I was looking forward to a free lunch.

Then tomorrow turned into another day, and then another. I started to appreciate having a place to work at. My old job was all over the place, and I seemed to discover that is not the way I like to work. I always thought that I enjoyed the hectic buzz of being in one place and then another, and calling my secretary to ask whether I was supposed to be somewhere else. It is the very opposite of the job I now found myself doing. A secretary must be in one place and know everything.

Pam was easy to manage compared to reps, but I saw that 80% of her management seemed to be driven by overseeing people like the person I used to be. I needed to have all the information from all the secretaries, and supply it to her on request.

It seemed like for the first time in my life I was able to take the time to pull myself together and consider how I got to the place I was in and whether I liked it there. I came to some conclusions that surprised me.

It was like I needed to be running all the time as the man I used to me. I now realized that I was running away from something. It is not until you stop that you realize that you have been running in circles the whole time. I needed to pause and look at myself in the mirror, so that is what I did. There was a woman looking back.

I have read about it quite a lot since. The whole idea of gender was not something I ever thought about. You are assigned your gender just like you are given your product to sell. You don’t question what it is you just do what you must do. But maybe you should ask the question? What am I selling? Do I really belong where they put me? Am I really better suited to secretarial work than sales? In my heart of hearts am I truly a man?

Only when you put aside manhood, even if only for a week or two, do you come to realize that you might not belong there.

The other reps were doing what they did, and I was doing what the other women did. I was one of them now, and I started to understand that was in more ways than one. Men can be scatterbrained. They are competitive and easily motivated by greed or the fears of being bettered or dominated. Women are more organized, and understanding of what drives men. I was that.

As for that free lunch, Pam kept on putting it off, the way I used to do, just to make a point. And then one day she took me to lunch and asked me whether I would like a permanent position as her secretary, and as a woman. I was delighted to say yes.

 I am sort of the Queen Bee around here these days. I work for Pam and I lead by example. I show the other secretaries how they should do their job, and also how they should present themselves. I am not saying that they should all adopt my own “professional and sexy” style, but they should be turned out properly.

But I discovered that my style has its own consequences. I suppose that I developed it from the male perspective. I felt that a woman, and a secretary, should look alluring. It is a male thing I guess, and Pam did nothing to discourage it.

“You are always well turned out,” she said. “If you choose to dress for men then I am not going to question it.”

To my mind I was not “dressing for men” but when you appear to be doing that you will attract the attentions of men. That is what happened. It was not that I ever considered myself attracted to men, because as a man I wasn’t. It is that you respond to attraction with attraction. I found myself wanting the men who wanted me.

I suppose that is what drove me to transition. The whole experience was one of continuing realization of who and what I was. I am a woman and I am a secretary

The End

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