

Being There

Peg Tittle

I recently read a lament about work attitudes, about how more and more people seem to think that just being there is enough, that their paycheque is for putting in time rather than for actually doing anything--let alone for doing a good anything: people feel no guilt about the mistakes they make, nor do they feel any desire to do better.

I'd like to offer some comments in defense, or at least in explanation, of that position. First, teachers give marks for attendance--for just being there. And no matter how many mistakes you make, you'll still pass. So, hey, who says the students don't pay attention?

Second, the job you've been hired to do is probably so trivial and boring, it's impossible to keep it without sending your brain out to lunch while you're there.

Third, showing initiative has, in my experience, backfired more often than not. Do a good job, yes, but be careful not to do too good a job--be careful not to do, or even point out, what your supervisor should've done. That's called insubordination and it's just cause for dismissal. Seriously.

For example, when I worked at a detention centre, I noticed one night that the previous shift's reports had several spelling errors. I corrected it. For this, I was reprimanded. So, later, when I saw a coworker collecting statistics in a most onerous fashion (not only without computer assistance, but without using a symbol key--he'd write out the full referral agency every time rather than assigning, say, numbers to each of the six possibilities and providing a key), I did not make a suggestion to our supervisor. I guess you could say I showed no initiative; I guess you could say I displayed no desire for improvement.

Gone are the days when one gets a raise or a promotion for a job well done. The salary grid and the advancement ladder are based solely on number of years, on seniority--on how long you've been there.