

are personal calls OK at work? what if it's an argument?

by Alison Green on April 11, 2022

A reader writes:

I have an office with a door that closes, but fairly thin walls. What are the rules on personal calls? Obviously not overly numerous, but the occasional one?

I ask because: I made a personal call today that (very unexpectedly) turned into an argument. I kept my voice down and civil in tone, but it was an argument. The walls are thin. I am so embarrassed; while there's no reason to believe someone might have overheard, they could have (I share walls with coworkers). I truly did not expect this and would not have made the call had I thought we would argue. Some arguments occur exactly this way though -- without expectation. If that's the fact of the matter, then is it ever appropriate to make personal calls at work, even when on break time/in an office with a closing door?

It depends on your office culture, but in most offices it's fine to make occasional personal calls, particularly when you have your own office with a door that closes.

With normal (non-argument) conversations, the constraints are less about being overheard and more about keeping the calls in moderation so you don't look like you're neglecting your work. But moderation doesn't mean none! Occasional calls to sort out logistics or deal with things that are much more easily handled during business hours are generally fine. When it looks bad (or starts annoying people) is when you're having longer calls just to socialize. So basically: a short call asking what to pick up for dinner or sorting out a billing issue is generally fine. A call with friends or family just to catch up or chat is usually better saved for your own time.

If a call turns argumentative, that's definitely something you don't want coworkers to have to overhear — it can be really hard to focus when you can hear someone arguing with their S.O. through the wall next to you, and it can push negativity into other people's workspaces (even if they just hear angry tones but can't make out words). Because of that, I'd try to cut it off pretty quickly if the conversation takes that kind of turn, by saying you'll need to finish the conversation later. If that's not possible (some conversations really do need to be had right then and there), sometimes relocating will work, like to outside or a car or even a private stairwell if that's an option.

employee doesn't want to use a name for themselves

by Alison Green on April 11, 2022

A reader writes:

I manage a team of twelve people within an exponentially larger organization. One of my employees has chosen to longer use a name. Due to past family trauma, they find their old (dead) name painful but have yet to settle on a replacement, preferring to be called nothing at all. While I 100% support this personally, I'm finding that it's causing issues professionally.

For the most part, the team is supportive. People try their best not to dead name this individual but have some difficulty with communication, especially in group situations. Examples:

? We have an open office plan with individual desks as well as task-specific stations. Everyone is within earshot, so typically, if one person needs to speak to someone else, we address them by their name ("Hey, Moira?") which allows everyone else to tune out. However, with this employee, one now needs to hover over their desk to get their attention, followed by the "prairie dog effect" of everyone else bobbing and swiveling to determine if they're being spoken to.

? Meetings and group discussions aren't a problem if everyone is in a circle making eye contact, but that's never going to happen. This is a key employee whose expertise is often sought, but it can be hard to navigate around how to address them and get their attention. Often other team members often slip up and say things like, "DeadName, could you weigh in on this?" Obviously, it hurts this employee's feelings to be deadnamed, but people find it hard to address them or single them out in a group situation without a name, especially if it's hard to make eye contact.

? There's also an issue of how to reference them. For example, people from other departments frequently ask me who oversees a project. For another employee, I'd just say, "That would be Twyla," but that doesn't work here. Usually, I give their job title but have gotten pushback because our duties are flexible and, technically, they are not the only person with that job title. Also, if it's a new questioner, they inevitably ask what the employee's name is, which leads to a discussion I feel out of place having. Or they want to know who they are, which means I must lead them to the employee in question and introduce them. (Pointing or descriptions seem awkward.)

This is true for written communication, too:

? Unfortunately, the techs at our home office cannot find a workaround for the company convention of `firstname.lastname @ company.com`, which means that people (usually from outside the team) who don't know this employee, will address emails to "Hi, DeadName." This is upsetting to the employee. Also, we cannot come up with a professional-sounding solution for their email signature without a name.

*? We do team emails in which people are assigned tasks for a particular project. It usually looks like:
David: Can you please adjust the copy of the attached presentation and pass it to Stevie to proofread?
Stevie: After proofreading, please pass to Alexis for publication?*

The only acceptable workaround I've found for this is a blank space underline like: "____: Please check the numbers on the presentation and add your analysis."

? We order weekly coffee and pastries from the cafe downstairs, and there's been drama over names on the cups. If I'm the one ordering, I ask the barista to just put a happy face or star on the employee's order, but often it's not me and other team members forgets. Or sometimes the barista insists on following their corporate policy of a name on every cup. (Fictional character names work for that. Congrats, you're "Hagrid.")

Here's the crux: my grandboss feels strongly that, for office purposes, this employee needs to "just pick a name and stick with it." While this feels morally/interpersonally wrong to me, I'm not sure how I can push back. HR seems flummoxed by the situation but suggested we be "as accommodating as possible within reason." Do you have any advice as to how to best navigate these issues or deal with the grandboss's ruling?

Yeah, they need to have a way to be referenced at work. I don't agree with your boss that they have to permanently stick with whatever they select, but they do need to pick something so that other people can function efficiently, even if they change it down the road.

It's not reasonable to expect a business to function without a way to refer to individual employees.

They can use an initial or other letter, a nickname, or a placeholder name, but they need to designate some way for other people to refer to them while they're settling on a more permanent replacement.

my company has a "Men's Forum," employee responds to feedback by saying her former boss loved her, and more

by Alison Green on April 11, 2022

It's five answers to five questions. Here we go?

1. My organization has a "Men's Forum"

My organization recently sent out an email announcing its annual "Men's Forum" and I immediately felt icky about it. To me, it feels different than a women's forum or an ERG for minorities because it focuses on a group that, historically, is not marginalized. For context, I work in finance which has a history of "the good old boys club." The email even mentions "men and their allies" which also feels wrong to me.

Ick, yes. What is the event's mission? Unless it's to be an ally to women and other marginalized groups in your field or office, what exactly is the need it's responding to? Affinity groups exist to help demographics that have been systemically marginalized and kept out of spaces controlled by the dominant group. The point is to level the playing field in places where it's unbalanced and good lord, that's not men in finance.

If this "Men's Forum" exists to provide special networking or development opportunities to men, it's hard to see it as anything other than a hostile response to similar efforts for women and people of color.

2. When I give my employee feedback, she tells me her previous boss loved her

I started a new job a few months ago, as a manager to a small team. I was brought on by my current boss, who I've worked with in a previous role for years. His advice to me was that the team needs help stepping up as a major business strategy change just happened, and this team is struggling to adapt.

I joined and was pleased to see most of the team was actually totally fine with the changes and adapting fine. With one notable exception, Jane. Jane's work is subpar but worse, she doesn't take feedback and has been a bit of a bully to her peers outside of our org.

The problem is I've given her this feedback, and she often responds with the following:

? The previous boss said she was great.

? It's not fair of me to give her feedback that her work is not up to par.

? (Such and such other employee) said they thought the work was fine.

I feel bad that she feels like I'm out to get her, but it is my responsibility to give her feedback on the quality of her work and how her behavior affects others. Is there some good way to handle that her previous bosses may have been pleased with her performance, but that's not the case with me as the organization has changed? I don't want to be unfair but I also feel totally stuck.

Yeah, you've got to address it head-on ? because right now she's dismissing your feedback and telling you why she doesn't need to pay attention to it. The next time it happens, say something like, "I understand that was the case in the past. The needs of the role have changed since then, and what I need now is _____. I need to see that you're taking this feedback seriously and incorporating it into your work." And if she still pushes back and/or you don't see changes, then the next conversation is, "I'm concerned that you're hanging on to feedback you've received in the past and not hearing what I'm telling you now. The issues I'm raising are serious ones, and I need to see you make the changes we've discussed. If you don't do that, your job would be in jeopardy so it's important to take this seriously." That's also the stage where you should move to a formal improvement plan, including letting her go at the end of it if she can't make the changes you need.

Ultimately, though, it's up to her to hear what you're saying. Your responsibility is to be as clear and direct as possible, and to make sure you're not softening the message out of a desire to be nice. (Remind yourself that it's far nicer to give her a chance to hear what she needs to change to avoid being fired.) From there, it's up to her to decide whether she's going to take you seriously. Remember, too, that your job isn't to convince her to agree with you, but to be clear about the bar for her job and what the consequences are if she won't meet that bar. (It's preferable if she agrees! But you need to move forward regardless.)

3. My boss wants me to give up my seniority if I'm promoted

I've been working for the same nonprofit for 22 years in a variety of roles. Currently I'm in a leadership position and report directly to the executive director. The director is new in the last two years and has made significant changes -- some great and some questionable (in my view). They have a leadership style that can be quite controlling and, due to this, I am eager to get off the leadership team and have a bit of distance. I'm currently looking for other work but there is an option for me to move positions within the organization into a role that I would love. I'm considering this.

My question is around the conditions laid out to me by the director. They are suggesting that since I've worked there so long, it would

be detrimental to the organization to have me keep my seniority. If I take the new position, I would have to formally resign from my current position and essentially apply for the new role (even though I'm guaranteed it) so that my 22 years is wiped out. The new position would also be a one-year term, although I'm told the intention is to keep it after that. I don't see much protection for me as an employee if they decide to end the role. In my area, employees of more than 10 years must be given severance of at least eight weeks if let go. If I can negotiate terms that state eight weeks severance if let go, is that enough? Should I be questioning other aspects of this?

It sounds awfully sketchy. They're saying it's "detrimental" to the organization to give you the benefits that *they* offered you in exchange for your long tenure, and they're trying to get you to do something that disadvantages you and advantages them. Are there other benefits besides severance you'd be giving up too, like the amount of vacation you get? There's no reason you should have give up any of that.

And you definitely shouldn't have to formally resign in order to be considered for a new role; that is some real BS. If they want you to apply, fine — but there's exactly zero reason why you'd need to formally resign meanwhile, and it would put you in a much more precarious position.

Definitely say you're not comfortable resigning without a new role and that you'd need severance codified in a written agreement if you give up tenure-linked benefits ? but I'd strongly question the whole thing.

4. Calling students "clients" when transitioning out of teaching

I have a question about transitioning to a new field. How do I include job specifics on my resume that aren't relevant to the new industry? I am trying to move out of teaching into nonprofit program coordination. I want the new potential employers to see me as more than "just" a teacher. I have some impressive accomplishments as a teacher that I can put a number on (I was the leadership coach for the senior class and we got to 100% graduation; I took over the standardized test prep program and rose pass rates from 17% to 76%) but they're all so ? teacher-y. A job coach who specializes in teacher transitions advised turning it all into corporate speak ("measurable performance improvements for 200 clients"), but it sounds so phony to me! Is it disingenuous to use this kind of language? I am confident I can do the work I am applying for, I just have a hard time explaining how in a snappy bullet point. Is there anything else I can do to stand out and show off for a job I haven't done yet?

I would find it odd to see a teacher referring to students as "clients." And if a hiring manager doesn't understand that's what "clients" means in this context and asks about it in the interview, it will be awkward to explain that you really mean students. It feels too much like trying to dress up what you did into something else. And there's no need to do that anyway, because your accomplishments are impressive and stand on their own. You don't need to be coy with the language.

That said, can you get additional details in there? If I were a hiring manager outside of your field, I'd want to know more about *how* you did those things so I could better understand the skills you used that might translate into our work. You can't put a lengthy explanation on your resume, of course, but adding even one explanatory line of context to each of those achievements could give hiring managers outside of your field a better sense of what you might bring to theirs.

5. Can my boss legally pay me through PayPal?

Nearly a year ago, I was brought on to work at a startup as a contract writer. Originally I was being paid through a payroll service with direct deposit. However, there was always at least a week or two delay when getting paid.

At some point, my boss claimed this payroll service was too complicated to use for his contractors and he would be switching to PayPal. I was fine with this, until I realized that PayPal takes a significant fee. I am charged this fee. They take it out of my wages. I asked if it was possible to switch back to the payroll service, but he claimed it was not.

Is this legal? I'm tempted to try again and ask if he would be willing to mail a check or brainstorm other ideas. This is really only the tip of the iceberg with this company and I'm already looking for other options.

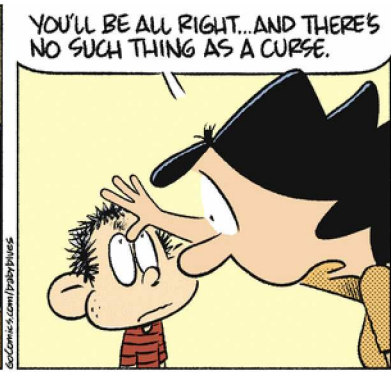
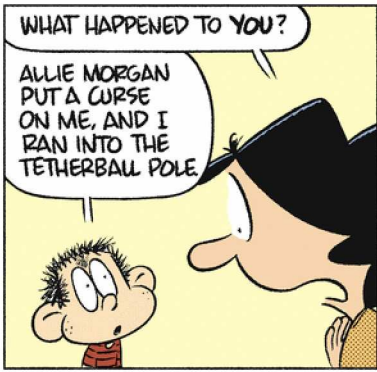
Some states have laws restricting the fees that employees can be charged for using payroll cards, but I haven't been able to find anything addressing PayPal specifically.

But PayPal would be terrible to use for payroll, given the fees, the fact that it won't create a record of your payroll deductions (for things like taxes and insurance), and the occasional reports of PayPal freezing someone's money in their account. (They're also not governed by the same regulations that protect you at a bank, so if nothing else make sure you're moving your money to your bank account right away every time you're paid.) It's also just ? sketchy. Legitimate businesses don't generally pay through PayPal, let alone pass Paypal fees on to their employees.

But I'm wondering if your boss is even deducting payroll taxes as he's legally required to do. You mentioned being a contractor, but you sound very much like an employee. It's not up to your boss how to categorize you; under federal law, you need to meet certain criteria to be eligible to be paid as a contractor (i.e., with no taxes taken out). If he's treating you like an employee but paying you like a contractor, he's violating the law and you're going to end up with a big tax bill at the end of the year. (If I'm wrong about what's going on and you do in fact meet the legal definition for a contractor, then there's nothing terribly wrong with what he's doing — but

my company has a "Men's Forum," employee responds to feedback by saying her former boss loved her, and more — Ask a Manager

you should ask to be made whole for the fees you're being charged.)

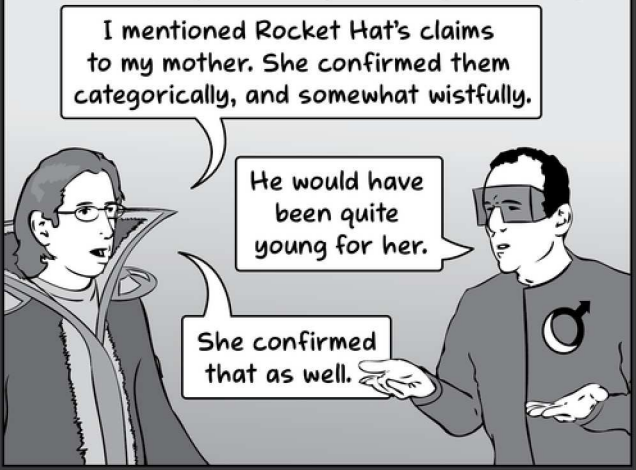


How to Process New Information

New information often comes to you at surprising times, and in surprising ways.



If the information seems too outlandish to be true, try to verify it independently.



Once you are certain the information is true, accept it, and decide how to react.



In time the shock will wear off, and this revelation will be eclipsed by new ones.



© 2022: SCOTT MEYER

BASICINSTRUCTIONS.NET



Carolyn Hax: Husband can't make decisions without changing his mind

By Carolyn HaxColumnist Today at 12:00 a.m. EDTBy Carolyn HaxColumnist Today at 12:00 a.m. EDT

Adapted from an online discussion.

Hi Carolyn! *My husband can't make a decision without changing it, often several times, after (in my mind) the decision has been made and it's time to move on. The stress of changing things back and forth is worse to me than making a less-than-optimal decision. I really want to move on. Whereas for him this is almost a reflex that is part of his decision-making process.*

It's making me angry all the time. Any ideas to help me reframe this so I can avoid losing my mind? His annoying habits have definitely grated on me more since too much pandemic togetherness. How much I should try to change vs. try to deal?

— **Angry**

Angry: So. Much. Togetherness.

You don't say how big these decisions are, but, here's a try: Can you build into your expectations a period of mind-changing after every decision he makes? So, he says X, and instead of going off to the X races, you start the clock on the flip-flopping period. Base your expectations on what your history with him has told you is his typical waffle duration. Then, at the end of that, start taking his decision as final.

This would work best if you could bring him in on it: say, you both agree he gets a grace period of [mutually bearable unit of time]. The conversation will be easier to start if you've already talked about this temperament mismatch; if you haven't, then you're overdue. Just save it for when your anger is at a low ebb and frame it as reconciling differences in style.

As for excessive togetherness, maybe adopt some solitary, "interior" habits or hobbies, like audiobooks with headphones. Or, painting, crafts, tinkering. Agree mutually to this limited but inviolable alone time, a little bubble of self where you relax and regroup.

Re: Waffling: *What industry is your husband in? I work in an intense job in health care administration where we have decisions that affect an awful lot of people on our hands every day, all day. I can't get to 110 percent certainty on pizza vs. Burger King because I am exhausted by deciding things all day long, and honestly wish I got recommendations that I could follow and only adjust if really needed, instead of being pressed to drain more of the few effs I have left. Recommending your best outcome vs. asking completely open-ended questions could help.*

— **Exhausted**

Exhausted: Decision fatigue is a real thing — yes. And thank you for the work you do, making tough calls for others.

More readers' thoughts:

Â· My husband does this. I've learned to ask, "Are you at 99 percent or only at 60 percent for this decision?" He'll usually answer me pretty accurately as to whether he's still thinking out loud or has really made the decision. I don't, personally, move on or rely on any decision until he's said he's at 99 percent.

Â· My husband's "waffle time" expires only when the final decision *must* be made. It's taken me over 15 years to realize this, and I still get flustered by it. My only suggestion is to adjust your expectations and find a way to roll with it.

Keep up with Carolyn's chat, even when life gets busy. Sign up for notifications here.

CommentsGift Article

How do you mourn the end of a friendship?

By Damon Young Contributing columnist | Follow Today at 10:00 a.m. EDT
By Damon Young Contributing columnist | Follow Today at 10:00 a.m. EDT

I feel like the best way to describe the odyssey of grief I've been on since my mom died nine years ago is that it's like how it felt to drive from Pittsburgh to Austin and back that one time. Or how it might feel to build a treehouse. Tedious. Somehow both sleepy and sharp-edged. But not impossible, because I had directions. A path. Of course, there's no one way to grieve. There are wrong ways, but no right ways. But most people have either experienced a parent dying, or will eventually. And witnessing how other people deal — plus the slight but still real comfort of knowing you're not alone — is a template.

It helped that I had platforms to work through my grief by honoring her and contextualizing her death. Facebook statuses. An essay for Esquire. A chapter in my book. But there was a point reached last year, I think, where this sort of public remembrance no longer felt necessary. I wasn't grieving as much as I was retraumatizing myself with the memory of grief. So I just stopped doing that.

Grieving death is almost the same dynamic as grieving the end of a romantic relationship. The hard parts are a bit harder, actually. Especially if you still want to be together. (Especially, especially if you still want to be together, but they choose to be with someone else.) But then sometimes it just stops itself. One day you wake up and it's just done. It's weird like that. It works like an inverted hurricane. If you can withstand the eye of the storm, you'll have sun in your eyes soon. And if you need help on how to deal, or maybe just some community to feel less alone, there are movies and songs and paintings and plays all about that type of heartbreak.

You could also just lay in bed for a week. Or write "Layla." Either works.

But what happens when you lose a friend you loved — and maybe still love? The person is not gone; They're still alive and presumably well. But the relationship? Dead. What are the mechanics of grief there?

The construction of that question makes it feel rhetorical. Like I plan to spend the rest of this essay building toward a pre-discovered epiphany. But no. This is a plea. None of the best-practiced pathways for grieving seem to work very well here.

It's not like the finality of death, where you have no choice but to move on. Or the equilibrium shift of the end of a romance, where things mostly end because one person in it has decided to free themselves of it. But while most romantic relationships are sexually monogamous — or, rather, exist under the veneer of monogamy — there's no governing the number of friendships you're able to have. Sometimes friendships are cleared and refreshed so that a person can spend more time with newer, better (for them) friends. But mostly you can keep both the old and the new. It's optimal, even, to have a healthy mix of people from different stages of your life. Some will take up more space than others. But space shifts, and there can be room for everyone. Which means that when a person decides to end a friendship with you, they've decided that even the smallest bit of you on the peripheries of their life is too much for them. It is the cleanest form of rejection.

This is a plea. None of the best-practiced pathways for grieving seem to work very well here.

The rejection also unlocks a new level of vulnerability. But not the type of vulnerable you might have been with them. It's different. It's like — I don't know. It's like you showed them the you-est possible you, and they decided, after seeing it, that their life is better without you in it. Which just makes you scared about what they saw. You can't see what they see. You can't have that perspective. But you know what they did after they saw you. What they saw, for whatever reason, scared them away from you. How can that not scare you too?

Maybe it's not all about you, though. Maybe they still love you. Maybe you just represent, for them, a time or a place that makes them feel less like life and more like death. Maybe it was for your own good, to protect both of you from what might happen when you're fused together. Maybe it had nothing to do with you.

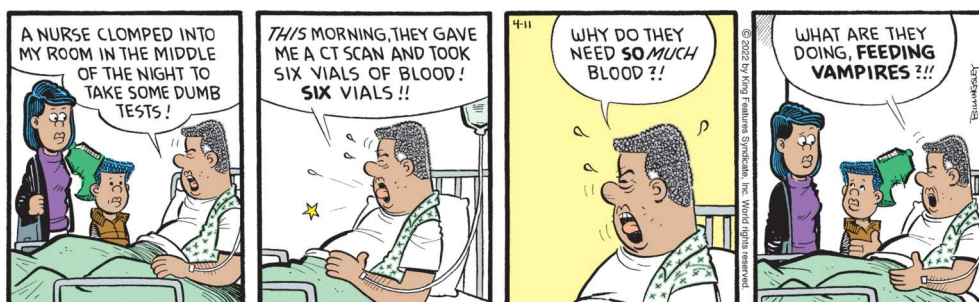
You know, sometimes the process of writing about a lack of clarity on a situation has a way of clarifying things for me. I think the mechanics of writing, for me, can be a landscaping service, removing the weeds and debris out of my brain. But with this, with learning how to mourn the end of a friendship, I'm no closer to an answer than when I began writing. I was hoping I'd figure it out by now. Was sure I would, actually.

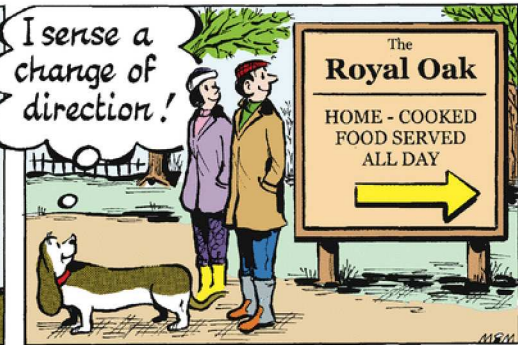
I was wrong.

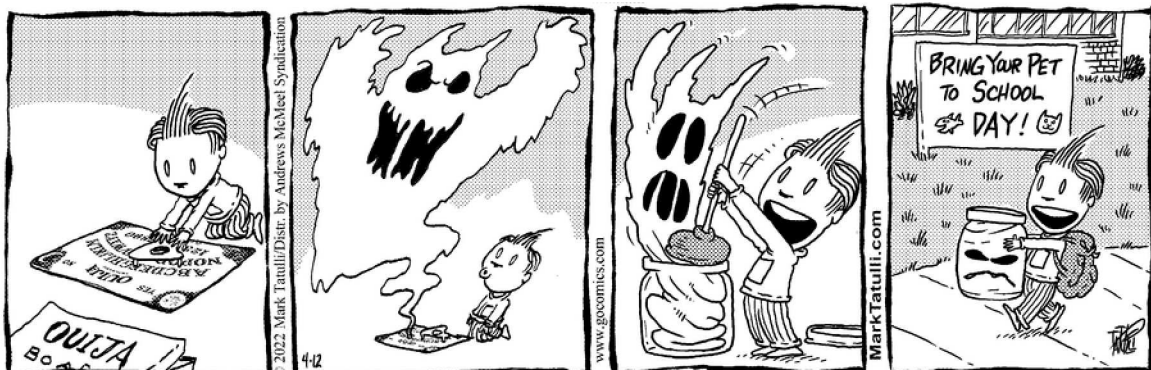
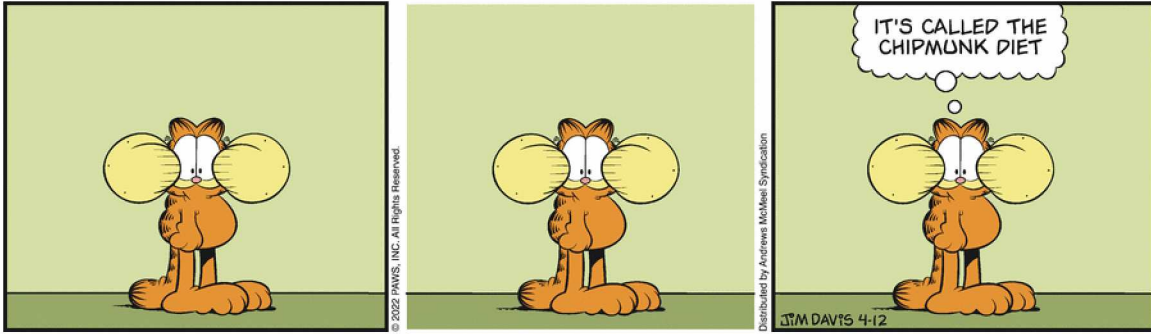
Comments Gift Article



"Diaper changes are a nightmare, but it's the nursing that really gets to me."







I'M TRYING TO IDENTIFY ALL THE WATERFOWL WE SHMIGHT SEE.

MAYBE I CAN HELP YOU QUACK THIS CASE.

HAR HAR

THAT'S A LAME DUCK.

mutts.com

PUTTS © 2022 PRODUK PRODUK LLC - DISTRIBUTED BY K&L FEATURES SYNDICATE 4/11

SINCE ROB GOT LAID OFF, THE GIRLS HAVE GOTTEN USED TO HAVING HIM AROUND.

Is Daddy always gonna be home?

No, Sweetie. He's still looking for work.

I like him home. Can't he work here like you?

No, babe. Dad's job is to manage people and projects.

...that job's already taken.

He can manage us. He can be our boss an' tell us what to do.

(chuckle) That's not how it works. Anyway...

Liberson

4/13 © 2020 Tom Liberson. Dist. By King Features Syndicate, Inc.

HEY, BLOCKHEAD! SOMEONE NAMED "TRUFFLES" WANTS TO TALK TO YOU!

HELLO, LINUS? I JUST CALLED TO SAY GOODBYE... I'M NOT GOING TO BE STAYING WITH MY GRAMPA ANY MORE... I'M GOING HOME...

BUT I NEVER GOT TO SEE YOU AGAIN! I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO FIND YOUR GRANDFATHER'S FARM AGAIN! I WANTED TO SEE YOU, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW THE WAY!

SOMEBODY ELSE DIDN'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE!

© 1978 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Dist. by Andrews McMeel

www.snoopy.com

4/12

AND WHAT CAN I GET YOU TWO TO DRINK?

GIVE US YOUR BEST WINE.

I HAAAAAATE MY JOB... IT IS SOOOOOO BORING AND THE CUSTOMERS ARE SOOOOOOO STUPID...

WAITERS SHOULD ABSTAIN FROM ALL FORMS OF HUMOR.

©2022 Sheehan Press/Dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication

4/12

Stella, you are invited to our birthday party.

I will come, but only if you can answer me one riddle.

Will there be cake?

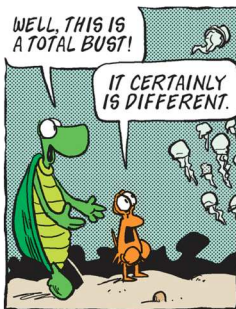
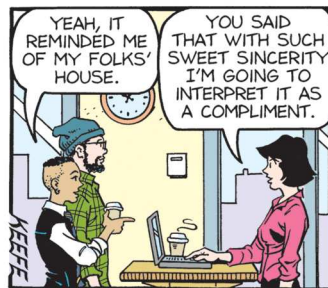
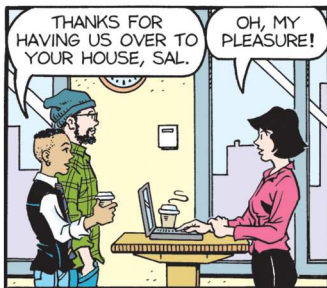
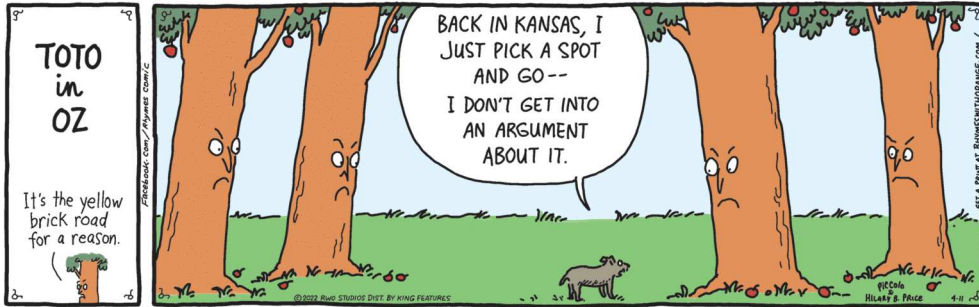
Yes.

That is the correct answer.

©2022 Dana Simpson. Dist. Andrews McMeel. ©2022/04/11

groomings.com

4-12





isabellabannerman.com

© 2022 Isabella Bannerman
SIX CHIX © 2022 King Features Syndicate, Inc.

Wild
Leopard Prints

Domesticated
Leopard Prints



THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF SPECULATION ON THE MOTIVATION FOR BUCCANEERS HEAD COACH BRUCE ARIANS TO HAND THAT JOB OVER TO TODD BOWLES AND MOVE UP TO THE FRONT OFFICE.



SOME PEOPLE SUSPECT TOM BRADY'S INVOLVEMENT. OTHERS THINK ARIANS MIGHT HAVE WANTED TO REWARD HIS LONGTIME FRIEND BOWLES.



FEW SPECULATE ON WHAT EFFECT B.A. WOULD HAVE ON THE FRONT OFFICE CULTURE.

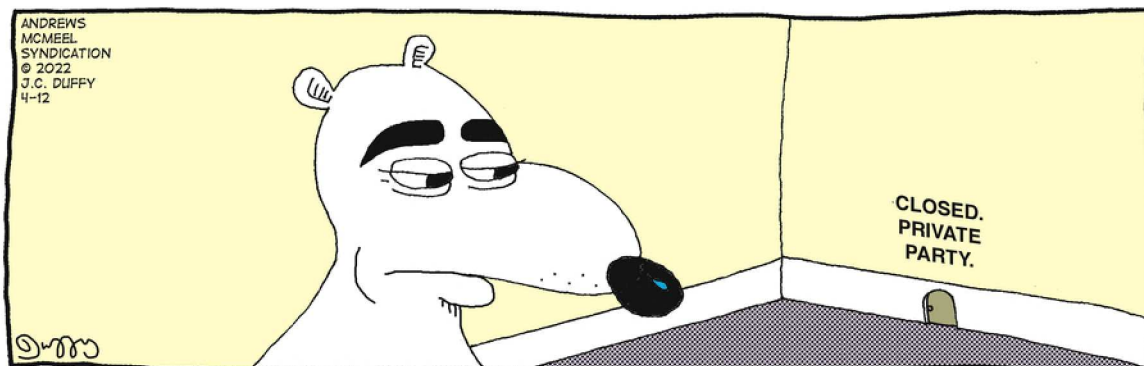
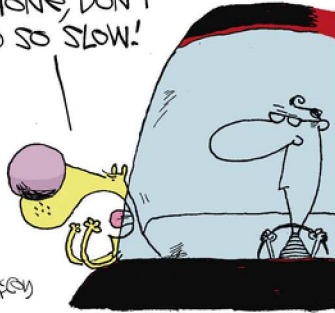
WHAT THE *@##* ARE YOU @*#* DOING?!

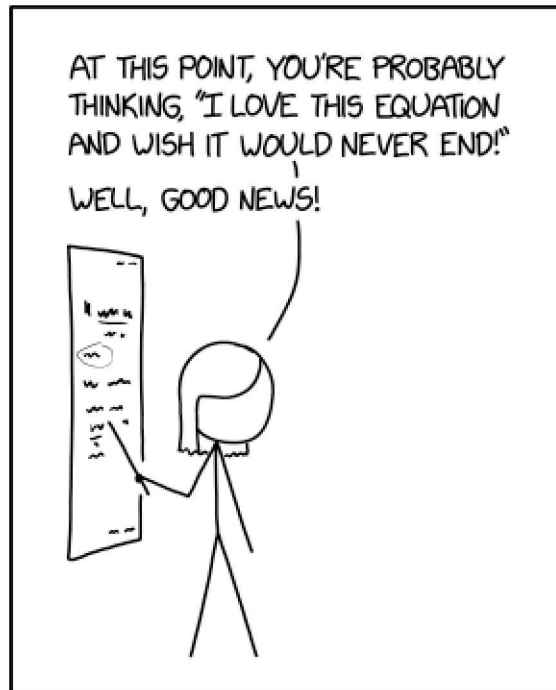
4-12
© 2022 Bill Hinds. All Rights Reserved. Distributed by Andrews McMeel



OFF THE PHONE, DON'T GO SO SLOW!

4/12
© NCSY





TAYLOR SERIES EXPANSION IS THE WORST.