

A sandwich encounter

By Lee E. Meadows, Ph.D.

Apparently, my reference to the world as a "living classroom" came back to haunt me despite my best efforts to blame it on Socrates. The combination of academic scholarship and professional consulting has drawn me back into the world of air travel. As a result, I find that I am in airports waiting to complete the next leg of a journey.

On a recent flight back from Atlanta, I had the good sense to arrive early enough to endure the security check, the ride on the tram and the slow ascent on the escalator to my gate area where the sea of travelers was reminiscent of a crowd rushing scene from a 1920s film. I had a 90 minute wait before boarding, realized I was hungry and availed myself of the long line of familiar, fast food brands, watering holes and quaint but unknown food vendors. I decided to break from tradition and go with a lesser-known food vendor. I rationalized that it was my way of helping the economy.

My vendor of choice was a sandwich shop that specialized in homemade offerings at airport prices. I checked the menu and decided on a non-descript, peanut butter and jelly sandwich. I figured that a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, like microwave popcorn, is a difficult process to disrupt. As my turn to order approached, I told the young person taking the order that I wanted a peanut butter and jelly sandwich along with a medium ice tea. He passed the order on to the person responsible for making my sandwich. I eased down to the part of the counter where the completed item would be given to me.

As I was waiting, I could not help but be intrigued by what I heard. The young lady who was making my sandwich was ranting. "I hate this job! I hate this job! I hate this job!" If the goal was to make sure that everyone in line heard her rant, then mission accomplished. My dilemma became apparent. To say some-

thing or to not say something, that was the question. As a professor of Management for Walsh College, I am always in a teaching mode, but as a weary traveler, I just wanted to fly home.

So, if you freeze frame, here is what you would have seen. On my right shoulder was the visual conscious of me, dressed to do a formal presentation for a client, whispering in my right ear "Leave it alone, Lee! She's a bad hire and this organization is responsible for the consequences of its hiring decisions." On my left shoulder, the other visual conscious of me, dressed to give a lecture to my Walsh students, leaned into my left ear and said, "You're a teacher and you have to help her realize the consequences of her actions. It is a teaching moment and you have to act!"

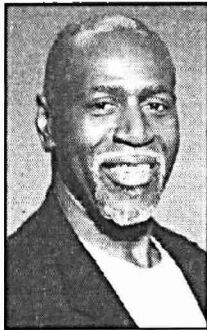
So, we unfreeze the frame and return to the moment when she brought me my sandwich. I knew what I had to do. As she handed me the sandwich, I said, "Young lady, I have a question I want you to think about." She gave me that student-caught-surfing-the-net-during-a-lecture look as I continued on. "Ask yourself, what did I do to put myself in a position where I am working a job that I hate?"

"Excuse me, sir," she replied, "but that's none of your business."

"On the contrary, young lady. The moment you went public, it became my business and the business of everyone who came here to get a sandwich and depart for destinations unknown to share with everyone they meet about their encounter at this sandwich shop."

She gave me the sandwich, rolled her eyes and turned to fill the next order. By then, several customers had left and I went to my waiting area. I sat down, thought about the encounter, and threw away the sandwich.

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