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The past few weeks have been an adventure for me, with a pinched nerve, lots of doctor visits and tests, and other less than pleasant artifacts of the aging process taking center stage. Parallel to this evolving health drama was an employment-related one. I decided that I needed a new job, and so I put out some feelers, one of which came back positive. I flew out for the strangest interview of my life and on the plane ride home I started thinking about the job interview process in general. I've sat through probably four dozen interviews in my career—on both sides of the table—so I have at least a moderate sample size from personal experience.

I have reached the conclusion that there are really three main categories of interviews: *Traditional*, *Avant-garde*, and *Out There*. In the “traditional” interview they ask questions like, “Where do you want to be in five years?” and “What is your greatest strength/weakness?” The “avant-garde” approach is more relaxed and concentrates on esoteric questions such as, “If you had an infinite research budget, what projects would you work on?” or “You’re going to be stranded on a desert island and you can take three tools to help start your own business. Which tools do you choose?” These are a little more creative and geared toward finding employees who think, rather than merely prattle platitudes.

Way beyond the boundaries of custom and best business practices you’ll find the “out there” interview. This tragicomic creature is of fairly recent origin and probably a chimera engendered by the collective brain damage of the sixties combined with the corporate insanity that was the dot-com era. The questions you’ll encounter in these freak shows are hard, nay impossible, to predict, but I’ll give you a general idea. “A man walks into a grocery store and asks the produce clerk for two kumquats and a kiwi fruit. How many pairs of shoes does he own?” “A major hurricane will be hitting your hometown in 24 hours. The local hardware stores are sold out of plywood. Is the school board mostly liberal or conservative?” “Why do men’s briefs have a fly in front, but not in back?” “What would ecru smell like?” My advice if you encounter a firm that employs the “out there” interview is to answer in some equally surrealistic fashion and hope they don’t try to hire you. Performance reviews in a place like that are bound to be something akin to verbal waterboarding.

I would very much like to say that this segues neatly into my next subject, but that would be a filthy lie because they are no more closely related than an OS vendor’s earnings report is to their commitment to releasing secure, thoroughly tested code. Entitlement, ladles and gentlemints, is what I wish to discuss. Past generations, even to a certain extent my own, which is sandwiched somewhere between

long-haired hippy peaceniks and Izod-touting yuppies-to-be (really I'm Water-gate/disco-era, but I avoid that admission like the pathogenic ruin-every-decent-thing-it-touches plague it was), placed a significant emphasis on the concept of sweat-equity. That is, we encouraged people to scrabble their way up from humble beginnings to positions of influence and affluence by hard work and honest dealings and lionized those who did.

Now, I'm perfectly well aware that every generation thinks the one preceding it tried their darnedest to destroy the world and the one following is soft and pampered and expects everything to be handed to them on a silver platter, but there really is *something* screwy going on here this time. Perhaps it's an artifact of our ever-increasing standard of living, perhaps merely the inevitable result of the confluence of pervasive social media and twenty-four-by-seven inundation by tidbits covering every conceivable aspect of the lives of the world's celebrities, but whatever the contributory factors, there are a great many people under 30 out there who seem to think that success and all that goes with it is somehow magically *owed* to them.

I hate to be yet another bearer of inconvenient truth, but it simply ain't so. If anything, you young'uns may actually have to sweat even more profusely than my lot did, because the economy is in the tank. If at first you don't succeed, that doesn't mean you need to sue someone for damages, though: just try again. You'd be surprised how often that works. When I hit the job market after grad school, of course, we were in the Reagan years and the young revolutionaries weren't worried about much beyond whether to go with the six- or 12-month CD. My generation bridged the awkward gap from sit-ins to youth investment seminars.

I will close this outrageously circuitous ramble by addressing a rather well-known multimedia products vendor's recent rash of security embarrassments. As of this writing there have been nine—that's right, nine—separate incidents connected with this single "mesoscale hack." With any complex product, or in this case suite of products, the occasional lone security vulnerability exploit is understandable, perhaps even inevitable. But this chorus line of gaping flaws is a little beyond the pale, even for our insecurity-apatetic information technology culture. One difference here, though, is that while an American or European company might slough off even an insult of this magnitude as a cost of doing business (which, by the way, it definitely is not, or should not be, anyway), the corporate culture of this particular firm will almost certainly require at least one ritual sacrifice at the executive management level. A noble, if somewhat futile, gesture in a decidedly un-noble period of economic history.

Contrast that with what happens when, say, a major US defense contractor experiences a massive exfiltration of unclassified but highly proprietary military weapons technology data. There is an internal investigation launched, Congress and everyone else concerned is reassured that the problem has been handled and effective damage control measures have been taken, and within a ridiculously short period of time the issue just fades to black. Stock prices aren't even affected over the long term, for Pete's sake. No real consequences always equates to no real corrective steps. Ring around the rosy, pockets full of apathy.

By the way, I didn't get that job—but that's OK. It was definitely an "out there."