

Welcome to the Company!

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Many people have asked me why, when I was an employee, I used to change jobs so often. The answer stands in between my own curiosity to take on new challenges, and the various assholes I had to deal with through the ages. Just as an example of this last case, here goes a true story, one that stands between being a candidate story for The Daily WTF, or as sample material for The No Asshole Rule book by Bob Sutton. You decide.

Prologue

A couple of years ago I found a job as a PHP + JavaScript developer in a small company in Geneva, Switzerland. I remember going to their offices two or three times, and having several interviews with various people there; one of them was the lead PHP developer of the company, the other being the CEO, a relatively well-known person in the tech area in Geneva; both shall remain nameless. The last interview I had was with the CTO, who would be my direct boss, as I was told.

They finally chose me, and very happily I signed the contract. I handed my resignation for my current job at the time, but had a couple of months of work to do before leaving (this is usual practice in Switzerland, one that I despise deeply, but that you are legally forced to follow). All in all, three months passed between me signing the contract and the first day of my new job.

The First Day

So one day, I headed to Geneva to start my new job. I arrive at around 9am to the address where the interviews had taken place, and, oh surprise... there was nothing. Stay with me: there was nothing. Not a sign in the wall indicating that the company used to be there, not a single desk, not a phone plugged on the wall. Nothing.

Puzzled (to say the least), I asked the first person I met in the hallway about the company, and she told me that they had left a couple of months ago. I asked if she knew where they went, but she told me that she did not.

I was really, really worried by now. Had I signed a contract with some kind of fake company that had just left the country to the Bahamas or Luxemburg? I called their phone number. The automated voice at the other end told me that the number was not in service.

Oh dear.

After what must have been like 60 minutes of going back and forth in the hallways asking for some kind of information about the company, one guy told me that they had moved not far from there. Finally a clue! He even gave me an address, so I left as quickly as I could. I was one hour late to my new job; you do not do that in Switzerland.

On my way, I could not help thinking things like, “why wouldn’t they call me to tell me that they moved to a new place? What’s going on?”

So around 1030am I arrived to this new address, got into the building, and checked in at a reception desk that was standing there. I asked the names of the people that had interviewed me. The guy told me that nobody with that name worked there. Then I asked, “I’m looking for the company such and such”, and he told me that no, this was a private bank (there are lots of them in Geneva), so I must have been given the wrong address.

Bummer. Back to step one.

The guy, nevertheless, told me one interesting thing; in the warehouses behind the bank there was this new “startup center” with brand new offices, and the company might as well be there. I thanked the guy, and started investigating the area.

The word “investigating” is the correct one. It felt like being Columbo looking for a murderer.

Indeed, behind the bank there was a huge, new complex with many new offices and small companies popping up. The building was an old factory that the city of Geneva had bought a couple of years before, and where you could rent cheap office space. Perfect for startups. But in the main entrance, there was no sign of the one I was looking for.

It was almost 11am, and I was about to give up. My cell phone had not rang, nobody called from their office; my wife told me that nobody had called home either. If they were around, they really did not care about me.

Just when I was about to leave the building, I asked one guy cleaning the hallway about the company name. He told me that he had never heard about it, but that there was a huge sign near the entrance of the parking with company names, and that given that the building was fairly new, not all company names had been set up in every entrance of the building, so I might as well check that one out.

I left the building, went to the entrance of the parking, and finally! I saw the

name of my new employer. Together with the indication of how to get there by foot: a 10 minute walk from where I was. I said to myself, well, what the heck. Let's go.

When I crossed the door, I saw yet another reception desk, this time with a huge sign behind the receptionist with the name of the company. This was finally the good one. That was at around 1115am; I had been touring Geneva for over 2 hours looking for this company by now.

I tell the girl that I am starting today my new job, and she tells me that it was her first day too, so she did not know anyone, so she guided me to an office marked "Human Resources", which looked quite appropriate for the occasion.

"Welcome to the company!"

The HR guy gets up from his desk, greets me and tells me that he started 2 weeks ago and that he did not know that I was starting that day, but that was OK, welcome to the company anyway! He guides me to the sector of the open space where the technical team works, and I finally see some familiar faces, together with some 30 people I had not seen three months ago.

The company had had an explosive growth in just 3 months.

Anyway, they point me to a crappy chair and table in the open space and they called that a "desk", and I said, OK, let's score some more points. Even better, the IT manager comes up to me and says "oh sorry, I don't have a computer for you, I didn't know you were coming today".

I sit down, awkwardly, as everyone resumed their tasks in an awkward silence, a mix of "I don't know anyone here" and "I hope it's 5pm soon". Probably one of the worst feelings I have had in a work environment in a while.

Meet the boss

30 minutes later (it was almost noon, and I was really starving by now), while I was sitting on my chair without having anything to do or anyone to talk to, a guy looking like a hawaiian surfer comes up to me and tells me that he was my boss. Which was strange, because he was not the CTO I mentioned earlier, but given that everything had changed so much, I was not surprised.

The surfer takes me to a meeting office, we sit down for what I think it is going to be my first work meeting, and he tells me that he has been appointed to this boss role last month, that they are dropping PHP altogether, and that they will be doing the new system using Java. The guy tells me that he knows that I despise Java (he read it on this very blog, actually) and that he does not like me not liking Java. But he cannot fire me, because he has not hired me, so my role is undefined and, as a matter of fact, I have nothing to do there.

It was 12am, and by now I know I will not be doing long in this company.

To make a long story short, a few days after that I went to the office of the CEO, I gave them my resignation letter, and they just told me, literally, “OK, bye”.

That was it.

Epilogue

After two years, I was told that the Java system was never finished. The company still exists but has completely changed its business model, and the CEO has left the country and moved his company with him.

I also learnt that the original PHP developer, one of the guys who interviewed me, the one who worked his ass off for 4 years building the only system that was actually bringing cash, was also being dismissed from the new team because he was not a Java guy. He was let go a couple of months after I left. Nobody cared that he actually knew how the original system worked, how the business worked, or that he gave 4 years of his work for a company that greeted him with another “OK, bye”.

My path to independence started that very day. Dealing with that kind of crap (of which I have many more nice anecdotes that I will write about very soon) is what tells me that I do not want to be an employee again. I prefer to starve rather than being treated like shit.

PS: you will not find the company name in my LinkedIn profile, for reasons that should be obvious by now.