



Source: Sue Pleming, 'Rice makes unannounced visit to Baghdad, praises crackdown', Reuters, *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 18/02/07.

Tags: [disenchantment](#), [streets](#), [workplace](#)

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In my left hand is a greasy paper bag—my lunch. My right hand is in my lap, palm-up, nursing a paper-cut. The tree that shelters me is a paper-bark; its base littered with fallen wisps and scraps. It is textured and beautiful, layers of light grey, off-white and pink. Small knots and bumps prevent the peeling of a perfect sheet. If I look closely, the grass too is paper; folded at the tips like the heads of paper cranes. And my life at this moment is like an origami rose-bud, straightening its creases, beginning to unfold...

I studied for three years to receive a piece of paper. A piece of paper that will help me write impressive things on other pieces of paper; a piece of paper that summarises the things that make me, me. All the things that scream 'Hire me! I'm worth the paper you will be paying me.'

Stacked on my desk is nothing but paper; notepads and books of varying sizes, post-it notes and piles of blindingly white A4 sheets; laserprinted, stapled and paper-clipped, haphazardly sorted into jagged towers, remnants of trees.

The office space is elliptical, wide and stretching. The high ceiling, like a light grey sky crowded with rectangular, suspended stars. Huge concrete pylons hold the mass in place, far above a weaving maze of fenced-off areas, large and small domains.

The windows are like one-way mirrors, canvassing the traffic and the street. Pedestrians pause to check their own reflections; brief nods and coy smiles. Children are more candid. A freckly boy runs off the gravel path and through the wood-chipped garden, stopping only inches from my seat before pressing his nose flat against the glass. His mother is chatting animatedly to a passer-by, while the child's tiny upturned nose, wide, ballooned eyes and sparsely toothed smile captivate my attention. His mother, glancing over to check his whereabouts, is distracted by her own reflection. She turns slightly to view her own backside in profile, a disapproving frown. Her son's cheeky smile is followed by an inaudible but unmistakable snort of laughter. My view of the boy is blocked by long strands of snot and his chubby hands spreading it across the glass.

A friendly colleague appears from behind a pylon, standing tall over the miniature blue walls of my cubicle. He laughs good-naturedly at my predicament, my furrowed brow and my inflamed nostrils.

'Meeting at one,' he says, noticing my eyes widen. 'Boardroom two. Print the agenda from the G-drive, in the 'Planning and Meetings' folder. Bring your notepad and a pen.'

Oh good, I thought, a meeting. I open the computer file and scan the long list of documents, chronologically ordered. I open the one for today. There it is: 'Distribution of tasks,' finally!

The essential criteria for my position listed the following: —Diploma in communication, public relations or a relevant field.

—Excellent written and verbal communication skills and demonstrated experience in writing media releases, advertisements, correspondence and a range of promotional materials.

—Ability to work under pressure to meet tight deadlines and effectively work on a number of projects at the same time by planning and prioritising workload.

'Effectively work on a number of projects at the same time...' huh. Since I was employed here three months ago, the only thing I have done is sort press clippings: read and organise stacks and stacks of articles that everyone else in the department has written, hole punch them, put them neatly into a folder with hand numbered pages, put the folder in the large cabinet at the end of the corridor and lock the door behind me.

'Diploma in communication,' I've got that, but I have not communicated with anyone outside of the office since I arrived here. The only thing I have written is the numbers on the bottom right-hand corners of the pages and the only deadline I have ever had is, 'the cafeteria shuts at two.'

Throughout the meeting I smile courteously and make notes, I speak when I am spoken to and comment on the number of press clippings this month compared to last—as judged by the number of folders and hand-numbered pages.

Tasks and duties are distributed, marked by initials on the whiteboard. I sit serenely, but inside I am screaming, 'GIVE ME SOMETHING TO DO, I BEG YOU!'

Why was I even asked to come here? To this meeting, to this place? Why hire a university graduate to do a job that the child with the snotty smear could do in his sleep?

I feel as though my life is clad in paper. Clad in worthless press clippings that, after so much hard work to write and edit, distribute and collect, are merely hole-punched and archived.

Another friendly, smiling face, 'Thanks for coming. I thought you should get an understanding of how things happen here.'

'Oh, that's okay. Thanks for having me,' I reply, smiling back.

He turns to leave, but stops, 'When you're ready, the February clippings are starting to flow in. There is already a huge pile on my desk. Looks like it will be a busy month for you.'

'Yeah, sure.' Deflated.

He walks away. I tear at the combed edge of my notepad. Paper snows to the floor. I crumple the notes in my hand into a thick ball and aim for the bin. It rebounds from the rim and falls to the floor.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by R E Dean.*