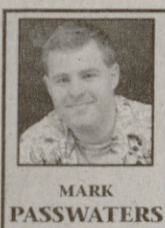


And the crowd goes silent

Texas' Dell Computer Corp. strikes out with unreasonable employee policy

Not long ago, Round Rock-based Dell Computer Corp. was an attractive employer because of the way it treated its employees. In a remarkably short span of time, Dell's image has changed. Dell is becoming a name to avoid in the Austin employment scene. Frustrated employees say Dell now expects 60-hour work weeks from its sales staff and requires mandatory overtime for its technical support employees. Dell's infringements on its employees' personal time does not stop there, however; Dell has decided that it holds authority over the ballpark as well.



MARK PASSWATERS

Round Rock is the home of the Round Rock Express baseball club, the AA affiliate of the Houston Astros. The Express, despite being only one year old, has developed a loyal fan base. In fact, the Express has drawn more than 600,000 fans to its home games, which are played at the Dell Diamond. What should be an enjoyable time at a baseball game for Dell employees has become an exercise in frustration due to Dell's ludicrous desire to micromanage its employees' lives, even at the expense of their personal freedoms.

Dell informed its employees in a mass email that it has instituted a behavior policy that all employees must follow at Express games. Claiming that "the behavior of Dell employees reflects upon the credibility, reputation, and integrity of the company," Dell has decided to restrict its employees' actions at the Dell Diamond. As one employee said, "Even when we're relaxing, we're at work."

Included in this absurd treatise on how grown-ups should act are the following: "Employees are expected to comply with the Code of Conduct and all applicable Dell policies and practices while at Express games." What does that mean? It means "avoiding behavior or language that is disruptive, unprofessional, offensive, or potentially slanderous and offensive," and "acting responsibly with respect to consumption of alcohol."

In other words, Mr. and Ms. Dell Employee, shut up and do not drink. There are a few dozen flaws and unrealistic expectations in Dell's policy, including a person's vantage point, enforcement, and those small things called Constitutional freedoms. Dell seems to think that, since it did

Round Rock such a big favor by paying the Express a sum of money to have its name plastered on the stadium, it can tell people how to act in their free time.

When Dell employees leave the "Round Rock Campus" for the day, they are off duty. They are free to do as they choose, as long as they do not break any laws. Apparently, the pantheon of bureaucratic gods at 1 Dell Way has forgotten this. It also seems to have forgotten how difficult it would be for a Dell employee to be caught violating its policies. Unless Dell has collaborated with Intel to implant a chip in all of its employees to monitor their activities, how will Dell know if its employees got their drink on at an Express game?

Dell's administrators are relying on snitching. They expect another Dell employee to come to work and tell management what a fool Jimmy Joe made of himself last night at the game. Those driven by moral obligations but also personal desires now wield a potentially powerful weapon over their co-workers. After all, the quickest way to make it to the top is to step on people, and this policy gives Dell employees a grand opportunity to do just that.

This behavior policy also intends to limit something as time honored in baseball as the seventh inning stretch: heckling. Booming shortstop David Matranga for throwing a ball into the dugout could be considered by some — his parents, primarily — to be offensive. Dell's policy discourages such conduct because booing players might somehow stop someone from buying a Dell computer. After all, Matranga was merely "fielding impaired." And, what if a Dell employee were to get on first baseman Aaron McNeal's case for chasing a curveball? This is also bad form; it is not nice to insult someone who is "contact challenged."

Telling a third-base coach to get back in the coaches' box? How disruptive! Scandal! Fire that man!

If Dell's policies on heckling take effect, Dell employees will watch baseball games the same way they would meetings of the old Soviet communist party congress: Sitting silently and applauding politely.

Dell's policy on alcohol is a reiteration of common sense. Nobody should get drunk at a baseball game, regardless of that person's employer. But what qualifies as too much? Someone sitting near Dell employees might decide that they violated the Code of Conduct after two beers and report

them. And what can those employees do? It is their word against that of a supposed "good Samaritan."

Really, all of this should be moot. Dell needs to be reminded that it does not own the stadium. The city of Round Rock and the Express own the stadium, so Dell's rules should be unenforceable. The fact that this company has arbitrarily decided that its "good name" is more important than its employees' rights as people in their time off is disgraceful. It is also disconcerting. If Dell is allowed to have its Code of Conduct in effect at Express games, then the rights of individuals will be eclipsed by a company's desires.

Dell would be well suited to step back and reassess its strategy toward its employees' going to Round Rock Express games. Its current policy is far too ambiguous and walks all over the rights of its employees. What should Dell tell its employees when they go to Express games? How about, "have a nice time"?

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ADRIAN CALCANEO/THE BATTALION

Play ball

Within the Houston city limits, there is a suburb called Bellaire. Within the city of Bellaire there is a little league baseball team known as the Bellaire Bruisers.



MELISSA BEDSOLE

Last week, these 12-year-olds turned in their Bruiser jerseys for new ones with "South" branded on the fronts, after becoming the Southern Little League Champions. Their families and friends then traveled to Pennsylvania as these little boys participated in a once-in-a-lifetime experience: playing in the Little League World Series.

Despite all the excitement, parents stand divided on whether this experience was good for these children. There is great concern about the pressure being put on these boys. Some people say too much emphasis is placed on what should be a game.

The critics of these activities say there is too much pressure on the children involved and that they are losing part of their childhood. Such arguments neglect to consider all the benefits that can come from participating in sports. The kids are learning lessons about ignoring the pressure to perform for the sake of others, and about setting and reaching huge goals.

Maybe they were tired at times and felt like going home, but that does not mean that the players were pressured to perform or work beyond their capacity. Baseball is still a game to them. They are not professionals playing for a living; they are little boys playing their favorite game with their neighborhood pals. They are really no different from any other group of little leaguers, except these boys are good. They are so good that their talent won them a spot in the

Little League experience harmless

54th Little League World Series, where they were defeated by a team from Venezuela.

Yes, they were defeated, but they did not necessarily leave with broken hearts. These boys had the opportunity to play in a game many could only dream about.

Their coach, Terry McConn, said he will remember "just watching the kids and how they focused when there's a lot of distractions out there with the media." These kids did not care about the media. They were not playing to impress people that they did not know who happened to tune into their game. They were playing for each other and for their parents, who cheered for them from the sidelines.

Now it is all over, but these boys are not devastated. They are ready to get their lives back to normal. They can appreciate the experience but they are content to go back to playing in the streets of Bellaire. Alex Atherton, Bellaire's first baseman and pitcher, told the media, "We're going to get a lot of recognition from different people and lots of homework."

Who could deny that one of the best things about this whole experience to these 12-year-olds is that, as they kept winning, they kept being excused from school?

In a recent article, Bill Plaschke of The Los Angeles Times expressed his opinion that "the dangerous chemistry of youth baseball — the mixing of adult egos with childhood insecurities — is tough enough without having the culmination placed before a camera."

That sentence completely depicts the way many people who are not closely involved with these children have over-analyzed the entire situation. It is doubtful that these 12-year-olds have egos any different from other kids their age. And any spotlight that may be shining on them will fade by this time next week.

"Little League is for play, for fun, for

neighborhoods, but with increased publicity and exposure, there is a risk of transforming it into a game that kids are playing for adults' gratification," said Dr. Marc Shatz, a Beverly Hills psychologist and former University of California/Los Angeles (UCLA) sports psychologist. "TV makes everything larger than life for kids. It distorts their reality. They don't get a chance to be themselves, to experience developmentally what they need to experience."

If these kids have anything on their minds other than their favorite sport, it is due to people, like Dr. Shatz, who have planted those ideas. If everyone just let them play their game for their trophies, then there would be no problem with egos, pressures and other ideas that simply are not true.

These boys have so much to be excited about. Each came home with memories that will last them a lifetime.

"At first we were disappointed," Bellaire catcher Terrence McConn said. "But we figured we were the U.S. Champs, and then we were fine."

As Brian Thaggart of The Houston Chronicle explained, "The finality of a season that ended with a rare loss was tough to swallow at first for Bellaire, but less than an hour after the game, the players were back at their residence halls signing autographs and mugging for television cameras."

Back home in Bellaire, coach McConn said, "They're already back to normal and having fun, they fell a little short, but they're still champs. We had a heck of a ride."

The players from Bellaire may have been once known as the Bruisers, but despite the efforts of outsiders, they returned home with their bodies and childhood free of scars.

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Bush's military stance just one brick in the road ahead for him

When Republican presidential hopeful George W. Bush made his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention on Aug. 3, many people waited in anticipation for the announcement of his platform. To their surprise, listeners also received a critique on the United States' military preparedness.



BRIANNE PORTER

"If called on by the commander-in-chief today, two entire divisions of the Army would have to report, 'Not ready for duty, sir,'" Bush said. This statement has led to many arguments about its truth and who specifically was to blame for the reductions in the military. As the story unfolded, it was discovered that military reductions started with Bush's father. More importantly, cutbacks were implemented when Bush's running mate Dick Cheney was the secretary of defense under President Bush. This lack of knowledge about the military reductions could possibly hurt Bush's presidential aspirations.

Mistakes like this one will not help Bush's chances in the presidential race. Other politicians have fallen out favor with the press and political pundits with mistakes similar to this one. After President Jimmy Carter quoted his discussions about nuclear conflicts with his young daughter Amy, the media failed to take him seriously.

Along the same lines, when Bush announced his desire to run for president, many people were skeptical about his lack of political experience. Critics cited the fact that the only public office he has held is governor of Texas. As the campaign swung into motion, however, some of these doubts subsided. But now, after showing his lack of knowledge of the origins of the military reductions, he is once again not being seen as credible.

When politicians attack the policies of their opponents, having the facts in order is a must. It seems that someone on Bush's

staff dropped the ball. Both Bush and Cheney have acknowledged that it was the Republican administration of Bush's father that began these reductions, but they state that the Clinton administration reduced the military more. On CBS's "Face the Nation," Cheney said that "the Clinton administration had taken those reductions far beyond what was originally envisioned in terms of our build-down."

Secretary of Defense William Cohen — a Republican — supports the Clinton-Gore defense reductions and says that this year's defense spending is back up to \$60 billion. Cohen said last week that the United States has "the finest fighting force in the history of the world," according to CNN. The Bush-Cheney campaign is deeply rooted in the idea that the U.S. military is in need of a buildup. According to Bush's acceptance speech, the military is "low on parts, pay and morale." Yet, many government officials, including Cohen, believe that the military is ready when it is needed.

Whether the military is ready is not the central issue. The issue is the credibility of Bush's statements on the campaign trail. This mistake could shift the race toward Gore, which is something many Republicans fear.

As a presidential hopeful who has not always been taken seriously, a problem such as this one can destroy the credibility that Bush has worked hard to increase after a similar problem in the early days of the race.

When Bush was quizzed by members of the press about current international leaders, he was not able to answer all the questions. By working to rectify the damage, Bush needs once again to prove to the American public that he knows what is going on and he has his facts straight.

If he continues to rely on his record as governor of Texas and does not show his knowledge American and world issues, his political future may not be very bright.

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