

BETWEEN THE LINES

The stories behind this issue's stories.



SLEEPLESS IN EVANSVILLE

It's not as though I planned on sleeping with one of my sources. It was late, I was tired, and, well, it just sort of happened. Let me explain.

When Chick-fil-A ("Putting Customers First," page 79) opens a new restaurant, it tries to create the fast-food version of a movie premiere, with its cow mascot working the crowd, a barbershop quartet, and local TV and radio crews. The biggest draw is the giveaway: a year's worth of free chicken-sandwich meals (52 coupons) awarded to the first 100 customers. At the opening I attended in Evansville, Indiana, customers started camping out at 2 p.m. the day before. Dan Cathy, the company's president and chief operating officer, presided over the surreal nocturnal circus like an elfin Dick Clark counting down to the new year. He led

customers on a midnight tour of the kitchen and a group prayer after giving out free ice cream. Finally, at a little after one in the morning, he decided to hit the hay.

"Where's your tent?" he asked. I told him I was going to curl up in my rental car. He insisted I join him. His tent, pitched on a small patch of grass near the drive-through, was bigger than some of my old apartments. How could I resist? After three hours of fitful sleep (a DJ blasted music through the night), Cathy rose and was soon playing a bugle call on his trumpet as 100 groggy customers jogged inside the restaurant to receive their precious coupons.

At that hour, I couldn't stand the thought of chicken. I needed coffee. **Chuck Salter**



A Consultant Repents

I remember the day I started at Columbia Business School. The dean called out—as he always did—that my particular class was the most diverse ever. Why, there was even a certain person who had been nominated for an Emmy Award as head writer of a show on MTV Networks called "Pop-Up Video," some misguided goof who had pissed away a show-business career for the plodding rewards of life as a suit. That person, of course, was me.

A few years later, I was a management consultant—never home, friendless, getting fat. If I was always going to be tired, anyway, I figured, with only an aching emptiness to call my soul, I might as well complain. In print. That's why I wrote my exposé *House of Lies* (Warner Books, March 2005). And that's what inspired the suits (just kidding) at FAST COMPANY to unleash me on the late, lamented Consultant Debunking Unit (page 40), which returns after a too-long hiatus in a cold, dark place. If there's anything we consultants need, it's more sleep. And a regular debunking. **Martin Kihn**

Off the Beam

Back in the late 1990s, I "got" balance. I wrote about the best companies for work and family, celebrating employers that got it like I did. Now, here I am challenging it ("Balance Is Bunk," page 68). What, you might ask, gives? Three formative experiences drove this story. The first was my own haphazard journey as a husband and father, coming to terms the hard way with the impossibility of balancing work and family day to day. (An admission: I missed my original deadline for this story, but I did catch the new *Harry Potter* movie with my son.)

Then there were my travels as a journalist. I've met many successful people, and few worried much about getting home in time for dinner every night. Finally, there was my trip to Bangalore, India, in 2002, where I was awed by the fervor of the workers I met. These were people who had tasted opportunity and desperately wanted more. The implication seemed clear to me and still does: If anything, we're all going to be working harder, not less.

All of which isn't to say I don't value meals with my family, time for a workout, and sanity in general. I wrestle with that every day. I just don't expect to win all the time. **Keith H. Hammonds**

