

# You dress weird, You walk funny, So I can't trust you!

I confess that I am a horrible judge of people. Business leaders frequently attribute their success to an ability to intuitively sense winners and to select powerful team players. In spite of being a confirmed skeptic, the ability to sense these and other inner traits of people is an attribute I actually believe exists. Too bad I don't have it, even as it applies to my own family.

My sister recently recommended a book called "The Secret Life of Dogs" to me. The recommendation took the form of a yellow post-it note with title and author scrawled on it. My first sense was that she had identified this book as valuable to me because it would reveal the hidden motivations behind my doggy life. Perhaps, I thought, she hoped for my rebirth, and my life would be altered from that of a lazy, smelly, dirty old dog who pees outdoors to one replete with meaning and ripe with social graces. I don't know why I thought this. She's always accepted me graciously, warts and all.

But the past didn't matter, my inability to judge motivation prevailed. Well, I was wrong. I got the book from the Milford library and it was about dog behaviour, not people. She felt it would interest me because my dog Bob is so big and poorly trained. Well, that makes two of us, but nevertheless illuminated my ability to misjudge people.

Once, a component of my job was to interview prospective employees, and I hated it. You see, I'd make up my mind as to the fitness of an individual for employment after about sixty seconds of conversation. Sometimes I made up my mind as the candidate walked through the door. They could say nothing to change my mind. "I like this person", I'd think, and then ignore all inappropriate remarks, seizing on the few positive ones. It worked the other way, too. "Jerk", I'd think, and the next twenty minutes were an utter waste of time because the outcome was predetermined.

I felt my inability to judge people paired with my tendency to make snap judgments made me fatally flawed as an interviewer. I begged to be excused from this duty, but my superiors were unwavering in their own misjudgment. I knew they were dim bulbs, they had proven it by hiring me.

The way candidates dressed for the interview was my primary method of selection. I was greatly relieved when a slovenly unkempt person appeared, for I could refuse

employment with confidence. So what if he was the new Albert Einstein? The old adage says, "You can't tell a book by its cover", but if you're not going to read the book what's the alternative? This, of course, is why attire is so important. It's the cover on the book of people. Those of us unable to judge character and proclivities through behaviour and conversation use clothing as the measure. Is this fair? Is this reliable? Of course not, but it's all we've got.

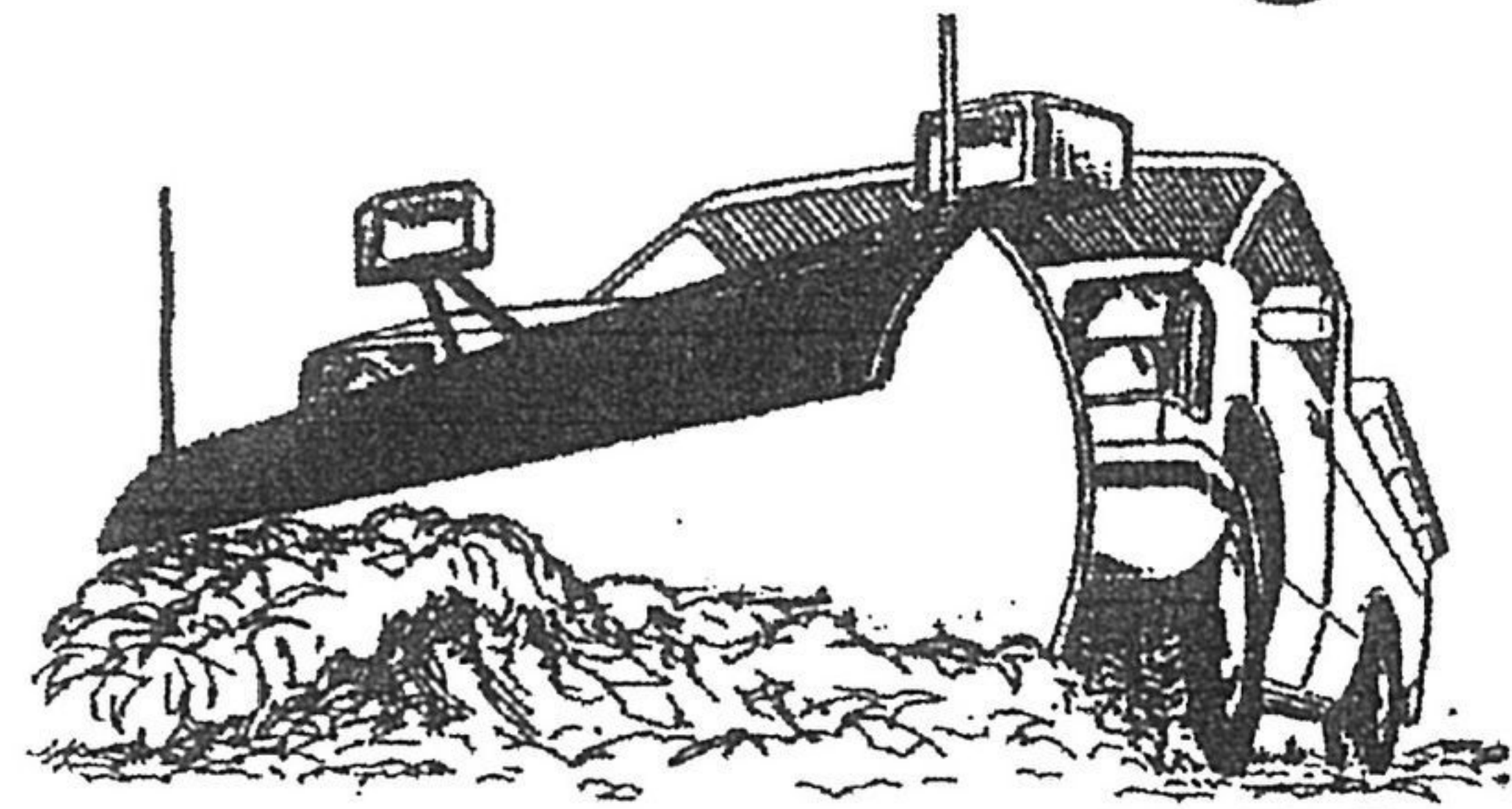
That's why I'm upset about the dress codes in business today. Dress down Friday has been replaced with casual dress all week. In the normal course of events, I know business people are not to be trusted because they have self-interest at heart. But for gosh sakes, they should at least try to impart the superficial appearance of trustworthiness. But no, they dress as if they wish the customer would buy whatever they're selling and promptly leave the premises so they can trip out on the latest designer drug.

I once delivered a Junior Achievement course at a high school in Toronto. The kids wore grungy, tough looking attire. The teachers dressed as though they would be painting the gymnasium next period. For parents, it must have been a toss up whether their kids should dress like the spaced out wiggy kids they were, or whether they should

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