

ONE PERSON'S TRASH IS ANOTHER PERSON'S TREASURE

Moral of the story: *I have learned over the years that clean up crews don't always read your 'do not remove' notes, especially in large hotels. If you really want to preserve your work, keep it in your possession, or don't take your eyes off of it, or lock it up.*

I was working as a graphic recorder with a consultant friend of mine. We teamed up to help the top team of a publishing company develop a strategic plan. We were doing our work in a large hotel in New Jersey, USA. There were only 6 participants who had worked together often, so it was a relaxed atmosphere.

On the first full day of a 2-1/2 day meeting, we worked intensely. I recorded, the consultant facilitated and the participants were engaged and participating as well. We had lots of paper hung along the walls. After I would record a bit, the participants would come up to the wall and using the data that I captured and post it notes, do an analysis of what they saw emerging. There was a lot of conversation and a lot of moving post its around.

After going through several iterations, we were all exhausted by the end of the day, but people were very satisfied about where we had gotten. We knew there was one more day to finalize the plans so to celebrate our efforts to that point, we went to a nice dinner. Before heading out, we left everything on the wall because we would be meeting in the same place the next day and using all the material we had generated. We also didn't want to take them all down and have to put them all back up again in the morning.

In those days, we didn't have cameras in cell phones to capture the wall graphics before we left, so we hung up several signs for the clean up crew saying, "DO NOT REMOVE PAPERS FROM THE WALLS; WE WILL NEED THEM TOMORROW. PLEASE LEAVE AS IS".

After a nice, long dinner, the consultant and I decided to go back to the meeting room to review the graphics in preparation for the session the next day. It was probably after 11:30 pm. When we walked into the

room, our jaws dropped to the floor. The walls were bare! We freaked out. I was fit to be tied.

We hurried down to the concierge and demanded to know what happened to our precious records. I felt like someone had stolen my babies. I actually cried. After piecing things together and talking to a few of the staff, we discovered that the notes had gone into the hotel garbage bin in the basement.

It was well after midnight by this time. After all but harassing the concierge to let us go to the basement so we could retrieve our goods, she finally consented and led us down. The bin was a cage of at least 15' x 20' and contained ALL the garbage from that day at the hotel. She outfitted 2 staff people with boots and gloves. They were told to go in and search through the garbage to find the charts.

They found them. They were not harmed as much as they could have been. Some had wet stains, some were a bit torn, some were wadded up, some post its had come undone, but all and all, we could make do. While I was on the floor straightening them out as they were handed to me, I cried again. I was surprised that the papers we created together meant so much to me. It's true that I take my job seriously, but it's more than that. It was a collective dance and creation of art and science that got us to these charts, and they were so demeaned and debased.

The consultant and I took the notes back, rehung them, and tidied them up the best we could. It was almost 3 am when we went to bed. We came together the next morning and never missed a beat, but boy, were we tired.