

Pass the Smoked Salmon: Muse Meets Mayor

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Last night my wife and I attended an early evening bash thrown by the local chamber of commerce. These shindigs are usually pretty good with door prizes and drinks and fancy-pants hors d'oeuvres. I was milling about feeling uncomfortable as I often do in a "non technology" crowd. I'm a talker by nature but in these crowds the conversation usually goes something like this:

- Bob (who owns a car dealership): So what does your company do?
- Muse: We are a web application development company specializing in complex applications.
- Bob: Oh I see... you design web sites.
- Muse: Well yes, but that's really a small part of what we do. We are really more on programming and problem solving side of the equation.
- Bob (glibly moving on): Hey, you work with computers let me ask you something.
- Muse (heart sinking): Ok
- Bob: When I try to print sometimes I get this error. Why is that?
- Muse (wishing a fight would break out and distract Bob): Well... (small sigh) ... I'm not sure. What does the error say?
- Bob: I don't know I click OK and it goes away. But when I try to print again it comes back.
- Muse: And what does it say the second time?
- Bob (Unaware of the Pavlovian Cycle he is in): I don't know I click OK and it goes away. What do you think it means?
- Muse: I'm afraid I have bad news. It might be time for a new printer.
- Bob: Rats... I knew it.
- Muse: Bob, let me ask you something... you work with cars right? I have this little chirping sound coming from the trunk of my 78 Nova every time I turn left on a Tuesday.... What do you think that means?

And on it goes. It's amazing how regular folks always boil down any technology job to "Oh... you work with computers" - by which they mean you tinker with hardware all day long. They automatically equate your skills to that of the local Best Buy Geek Squad. Not that there's anything wrong with being on the geek squad... some of my best freinds are hardware people.

Anyway, yesterday I was sort of not in a mood to mingle. Ann and I were in a line for some little mini roast beef sandwiches (thank you **Brandeis catering**) and we were chatting to ourselves waiting for the door prize drawings. A man who was working the room came up to me and said, "How are you this evening?" I turned and said fine and shook his hand and said "I'm Mark Kruger". He shook my hand with a practiced grip and said, "Nice to meet you I'm Jim Suttle". I nodded and made a comment about the food and then turned away.

Something was tickling the back of my mind... nagging at me like bad mayonnaise in the back of the fridge. Finally I got it (Ann's poking me helped a little too). Jim Suttle is Omaha's new mayor. I turned back and said "I'm sorry I guess I didn't put two and two together. It's really nice to meet you Mr. Mayor." He laughed and I laughed and Ann laughed and the waiter (a charming fellow with half an ounce of gold in his mouth) laughed. I could think of little else to say other than "You are shorter in person than on

TV" - which I thankfully kept to myself. Anyway, it was an awkward moment for me and funny for everyone else. Sometimes I wonder about the Muse... I have no lack of confidence yet I seem so inattentive at times. I wish I had brought my good friend **Tom Long** with me. He's got a sales radar like an Ageis cruiser. I bet he could have held the mayor's attention for 5 minutes or more. Anyway, now that the mayor and I are on speaking terms I'll have to invite him to one of my **candelight suppers**.