



Muffins Redux

It has been a couple of years since I introduced you to my 'international' muffins - the ones I make here using two kinds of mix: one imported from Canada, and one local. The point of using two types was that the overseas mixes are usually pretty 'heavy' and dense, while the Japanese ones are very light and sweet. Using a blend of the two gives a nicely balanced muffin - to *my* taste anyway - and with the addition of a splash of vanilla essence in the mix, and a chunk of cheese on top when it goes into the oven, I am turning out quite a nice little 'product'.

Now. As you know from recent stories, there are two ladies working here part-time training at becoming printers. They are only part time because they are both mothers, have any number of family responsibilities, and are simply not able to work a full day. Nor are they able to get here very early; they get their morning chores done (getting their family off to school and work), then drop a young child off at the daycare center before heading over to my place. So it is already mid-morning before they actually get here and get set up. They usually work until mid-afternoon - around two or three - and then head off to resume their 'mothering' duties.

This slightly wonky schedule doesn't bother me at all. They are 'in training', and thus work at their own pace, on projects that I assign them. They have no deadlines.

But we have a problem with lunch. I myself usually get to the workshop shortly after eight, and by the time noon rolls around I am *hungry*. In their early days, they needed constant supervision, so I simply held off on having lunch on the days they were here, finally grabbing a bite in mid-afternoon once they had left.

This was far from satisfactory, as my stomach would start to rumble, causing giggles all around, "David-san, aren't you going to get lunch?" I felt that it would be impolite to sit there and eat in front of them, so just demurred. One day a couple of weeks ago though, I had had a very early breakfast, so when noon approached and I just couldn't stand it any longer, went upstairs to make my usual batch of muffins. I say 'batch', because I always make them six at a time, eating two that day, and the others over the next two days.

And of course - what else could I do? - I brought the tray downstairs, along with small plates and some butter and jam, and offered them to the ladies too. They needed no encouragement, instantly downing tools, grabbing thermoses from their bags, and tucking in.

They made all the right appreciative noises about the muffins, and we enjoyed our lunch together among the woodblocks and tools, before they then returned to their work.

Skip ahead a few days, to the next time that the three of us were here together. (They are not here every day, nor do their schedules exactly match.) Noon approached, and I was wondering how I should handle the lunch question, when one of them spoke up, "David-san, you must be getting hungry! Please don't go too long without eating ..."

From my printing bench, I looked back over my shoulder. The two of them sat there grinning at me. What would *you* have done?

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I caved. I went upstairs, mixed enough for a half-dozen muffins, and came back to work, bringing the kitchen timer with me. When it went off 25 minutes later, I went up to retrieve the goodies, and we had another nice lunch together.

But no way can I continue like this! My carefully hoarded supply of Canadian muffin mix (which I bring back in my suitcase every time I go over there) will not last long at this rate! And *should* hourly-rate employees get a paid lunch break, *with* lunch thrown in - made by the boss, to boot?

I mentioned earlier that I really need to find somebody to act as my 'business manager' here, and I think I had better get that person on board as soon as possible. I was planning to look for a nice cheerful and easy-going person for that job, but the more I think about it, the more I realize that it might be better to have somebody who knows how to play 'bad cop' instead!

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