



Dave, the Ogre ...

This week's story might be a bit difficult, both because the topic is actually quite 'ambitious' - worthy of a book in itself - and also because - yet again - I suppose it paints me in a less than flattering light ... But let's try!

Our little printmaking business is coming along quite well, and our prints are becoming hugely popular in the marketplace, but we are dramatically short of resources (time, money, people) to undertake all the things we want to do. It's the 'people' part of that trio that is the biggest problem - there is simply no pool of trained printers and carvers out there for us to select from.

So when I got a call the other day from an acquaintance who runs a small workshop giving lessons in printmaking to hobbyists, and who said that he had a student who looked like promising material for our workshop, I pricked up my ears and paid careful attention to what he said. He was quite enthusiastic, so we agreed that the young lady could come over to see me, and we arranged a time.

When she arrived, the two of us went to a coffee shop across the street (this was at our new location in Asakusa) and we began to get acquainted. I was a bit disheartened right at the beginning of our conversation, when I learned that she was a graduate from an art university. This was not a good sign, but when she pulled her portfolio out of her bag and passed it across for my inspection, I put on my game face, and had a look.

Now I should mention right away that it wasn't the 'quality' of the art that I was afraid of. There are many types of people in this world, with many different ways of thinking and looking at things, and I certainly don't expect everybody to make work that suits my own particular viewpoint. It was the *dates* of the works that I was interested in, and indeed, I was to be disappointed.

All the work in the portfolio was done while she was in school, obviously as part of her assigned course work. When I got to the last piece, and saw that it was dated three years ago, I asked her "This is all work that you produced in school; can you show me some that you have done since then?" I knew the answer in advance. There was none.

In three years, this young lady - who introduced herself as an 'artist printmaker' - had produced nothing. Now in my business I of course do meet plenty of artist types - my friend Jed Henry is a prime example. I tell you, that guy just can't stop drawing! It might be an exaggeration to say that his hands start to shake if he hasn't produced something in the past few hours, but my point is valid - it just pours out of him ... sketches of people, scribbled drawings of imaginary animals, full scenes for possible print designs ... there is simply no end to it.

That's what it means to be an artist! Not a four-year plod through a curriculum where you get spoon-fed everything a step at a time, and then ejected from the other end after your time is up. And because you've never had to think for yourself about what to make, or *why* to make it, you just stand there not knowing what to do next ...

Now why should this be of any interest to me? I certainly never intended to hire this girl as a designer; the idea was that she would train as a printer with us.

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But I'm not looking for the kind of person who could just sit there for three years! In my own life, any number of times I have found myself at a dead end. "Well, that didn't really work out very well ... now what?" And each time I simply grabbed at one or another of the ideas that have been buzzing around in my head, and got started.

That is the kind of person I want on our team - somebody who can self-start, who can feel passionate about their work, and who won't need to be told what to do all the time.

I don't actually remember what I said to her in our conversation - I'm sure I wasn't hostile to her in any way - but it wasn't more than a couple of minutes after I closed the portfolio that the waterworks began. The waitress brought her some tissues, and I waited quietly until she (partly) got herself under control. We talked about nothing much for the rest of the time, and we then left the restaurant and she took her leave.

Sigh. What am I to do? I'm not a Steve Jobs; I'm actually a guy who cares about the people working here. I like them, respect them, and try to treat them fairly and with kindness.

But an 'A Team' doesn't just assemble itself. It has to be hammered into shape; it has to be forged to match the vision we see for our future. I *have* to be ready to say "No; I'm sorry. There is no place for you here."

And - it seems - be ready to pass out tissues as necessary ...

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