

An office without chocolate lacks a certain sweetness

By Amy Yelin, 7/17/05

The Candy Man has been MIA for 21 days now.

I know this because every time I open the filing cabinet where the candy should be, I'm greeted with the same desolate image of our candy "machine" (picture a cardboard box with a slot for the required 60 cents, circa 1972) offering only the following four items: a bag of raisins, one Slim Jim, a box of Nerds, and (most disturbingly) a package of Andy Capp Hot Fries.

My colleagues have also succumbed to daily stalking of the cabinet. Like animals sneaking up on potential prey, they approach the filing cabinet cautiously. Hopefully.

Next comes the sound of the metal door sliding across its hinges, and finally, the cry of disappointment when they are greeted once again by the nearly candy-less box inside.

The failed mission is always followed by the question on everyone's mind:

"When's the candy man coming back?"

But no one seems to know.

"Is he on vacation?" one person asks.

"Maybe he's dead," another speculates.

Slowly, the lack of candy chocolate eats away at office morale. We snap at each other, all of us growing a little more irritable, a little more depressed.

We glare menacingly at the vendor who dares to walk down the hall eating a Nestlé Crunch. We work in a collective sugar-starved daze, our faces drawn and pale, like unhappy ghosts, highlighted by the glow of our computer monitors. On day 20 of the candy man's disappearance, I go out to lunch and am pleasantly surprised to discover it's now Girl Scout cookie season. Two pig-tailed girls smile at me from behind a table.

"Wanna buy a box?" one of them asks.

"Absolutely," I say, my mouth watering, my eyes on the Thin Mints. "How much are they?"

"Five dollars each, and if you want, you can also buy a box of cookies for the soldiers in Iraq." She points to the cardboard box marked "IRAC," (sic) the outside of which is decorated with little red hearts and American flags. Both girls watch me hopefully, their eyes curious, awaiting my response.

I pull out my wallet and find I have exactly \$5, enough for one box. I stand there for a moment, weighing my options: cookies for me and my colleagues... vs. a treat for the men and women defending our country in Iraq. It takes me a moment, but then I know what I must do. I hand the girls my five dollar bill, pick up my box of cookies, and drop it in the donation box for the soldiers. The girls smile.

I have almost turned and walked away when I am suddenly overcome by a disturbing image of my co-workers. They are standing together, looking at me in disappointment, shaking their heads. "How could you?" I hear one of them say. "What about us..." Then one woman mouths the word "C-O-O-K-I-E-S" in slow motion, and next thing I know I am grabbing the box of Thin Mints out of the IRAC box and shrugging at the confused faces of the girl scouts.

"Next time," I say, fleeing like a criminal toward my car.

The recent disappearance of the candy man has caused me to more thoughtfully consider the power of chocolate and its importance in the office. Chocolate seems to be a motivating force, a stress-fighter, a bonding mechanism between colleagues and last, but certainly not least, a popularity enhancer. (As you might imagine, on the day I brought back the Thin Mints, I was the most beloved person in the office at least for a few hours.) A recent survey sponsored by LifeSavers even suggests that those who set out a candy dish and share the goodies with their co-workers may benefit from greater workplace success, including more bonuses and raises than their candy dish lacking co-workers.

And then, of course, there's the science behind chocolate's allure. Although not all the connections between chocolate and body chemistry have been proven conclusively, chocolate is rumored to trigger the release of chemicals in the body that bring us a sense of well being, provide an often much needed mental boost, and mimic feelings we get when we are "in love." This might explain why so many apples and bananas have rotted away on my desk as I reached for the Tootsie Rolls instead. This might also explain why one normally soft-spoken colleague interrupted a recent staff meeting with her eye-rolling, euphoric response as she bit into the head of one of my scrumptious chocolate-filled mini-penguins (a gift from my mother-in-law who, I might add, is also very popular in my office these days).

On day 30, completely unaware of the chaos he had created, the candy man finally returned. As suspected, he had been on vacation, although we also

learned that the schedule of his visits was indeed changing. Instead of every three weeks, as we had come to expect, he would now be satisfying our chocolate fix only every six to eight weeks.

After learning the hard way what happens when the chocolate at the office runs out, I've started keeping a constant stash of M&Ms on my book shelf. It's a habit I strongly recommend to employees everywhere...if not just for the little mental boost and well-being it provides during the day, perhaps for the little bonus it might reap you down the road.

Then again, if things are really bad in your office, you might want to forgo the M&Ms, and skip straight to the chocolate penguins instead