

## The Society of Pissants

by Rick Baratta

Jonathan Swift once observed that whenever a person of talent or genius arose you would know them by the many dunces that immediately assembled to pull the person down. Whether the person was an inventor like da Vinci or an explorer like Henry Hudson there was always a pack of dunces at his heels, yapping and nipping and making life frustrating and downright unpleasant. According to Swift this Confederacy of Dunces trying their best to pull down a great man was a sure sign of that man's greatness.

Though I cannot justify this confederacy I believe it can be explained. There is plenty of jealousy and envy in this world. There is also a great deal of perverted satisfaction to be had by besmirching a good man's reputation or insinuating that the hero has feet of clay. If you cannot achieve any heights yourself you can make it rather uncomfortable for anyone else to achieve them.

Kipling certainly knew what he was speaking of when he described these people as too little to love or to hate and then varied his theme with:

Mistletoe killing an oak,  
Rats gnawing cables in two,  
Moths making holes in a cloak,  
How they must love what they do!

The only good point about the confederacy is that they prefer really great and talented individuals. Although many police officers are not shy about pointing out their good points, few claim that they have aspired to greatness. Consequently police officers have never been bothered by dunces.'

But we are be-devilled by Pissants!

A Pissant is a small bug that bites your ankle just as you're about to get that blasted bolt threaded into the engine after struggling for twenty minutes in an impossible position on your back underneath the car.

Pissants come in many shapes and sizes. They don't hurt you greatly but they do bother the hell out of you. When you've put in several days developing a matching grant proposal and the boss complains about your grammar he's a pissant.

Columbus nearly didn't sail because the Port Inspector objected to his having "round" departure stamps on his pass port instead of "square" ones. That inspector was a pissant.

When Christ raised the dead the local mortician reported Him to the Roman Medical Society for practising medicine without a license. A real pure-bred pissant.

Most Pissants are also whiners and complainers, and quibblers and carpers. They are also demoralizing in that they take joy from people who want to do more, give more, work harder, accomplish, achieve and succeed. In any volunteer organization the Pissants do nothing but wail, whimper and whine about the job others are doing.

Association officers, the working ones that is, dread the sight of Pissants at meetings. They can be expected to start off the meeting by complaining that the meeting notice was not posted in the right place, or it was posted too late, or it was printed too small. They then sit back and prepare themselves with a mouthful of asinine suggestions and/or totally destructive criticism which they are pleased to regurgitate at the slightest provocation. The slightest provocation is usually a recommendation for something constructive or helpful or creative from a working member. The pissant (impatient type) refuses to wait for the working member to continue before he is jumping up and down like he has to go to the loo. He fires off half a dozen non-sequiturs and then yields the floor to the next pissant (the delay type). This one has spent the entire meeting mentally working out his objections so as to best impress the audience rather than help the situation. He is followed by the third pissant (me too type) who never has any problem with a proposal until a brother pissant shows his stuff. Then he mournfully and regretfully, "has to agree with . . ." There are usually a lot of me too Pissants around.

It doesn't make much difference that the experienced association leaders have tried to anticipate all possible objections (both real and pissant type) and tries heroically to speak to the issue and objections before hand. A pissant will always have his, "show me where its in the by-laws" handy, or, "no one is going to shove this down my throat!" A real good show stopper is, "What about the Internal Revenue Service? Have you checked that we won't have tax problems, or jeopardize our legal status?" How about "It's not in the budget!" or "Who gave you authority to . . . ?"

The problem is exacerbated when the Pissants are the elected leaders. Then you can expect to be shot down by the chair at any new suggestion or idea that breaks with the accepted and traditional way of doing things. This pissant of a leader will always object to anything he hasn't thought of himself, or any activity that could bring change, or the unfamiliar. His idea of leadership will always be to maintain the status quo and to ward off any attempts by the membership to move out of accepted areas.

What do you do with Pissants? Not too much we're afraid. You fall back on the faith that most of the people that you are working for are worth your efforts and that the Pissants are in the minority. If you belong to the One Percent Club (that's the few workers in any organization) you already know this. You know that constructive criticism is healthy and necessary and you also know about Pissants and the necessity of ignoring them and forging ahead with the job at hand.

But for those of you that are neither workers nor Pissants, I suggest that you can help a little. The next time you are at a meeting and a pissant starts in; please tell him to shut up. Say, "Neither you nor I are doing the work. Why don't we let this fellow get on with it?" Now that sounds fair, doesn't it?

In closing allow me to indulge in some literary doggerel.

We are all in the same boat, but some don't know it.  
and some are too busy rocking to row it  
Some complain about the raising water,  
and others are yelling what the other fellows oughta  
do to save our collective hide;

while Pissants complain about the ride,  
call for a meeting (over the side).  
And a few poor unfortunates, while all this is going  
on are sweating and bailing and rowing.

"Pissants of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your ignorance."

With apologies to Jonathan Swift,

Rick Baratta

