

Rocky Mountain News / The Rubber Ceiling
Workday snowstorm has many varieties of flakes

There's nothing like the magic of softly falling snow to fill a corporate stiff with childlike wonder. Is it the wonder of each perfectly formed, perfectly unique flake? Is it the wonder of seeing familiar surroundings transformed? No, in the business world, as in the classroom, the wonder is the same: we all gaze out the window, thinking, "I wonder if they'll let us go home early."

In my younger days I sneered at the elements, driven by genetic material apparently passed down from ants to let no obstacle keep me from my appointed rounds. I drew inspiration from my would-be cowboy of a boss, who, in those pre-SUV days, drove around town in an enormous pick-up truck with 4-wheel drive. I wanted to be every bit as tough, so I'd careen through blizzards in a little Toyota with a lawn-mower engine and balding tires. My reward for making it to the office was laughing at the wimps who called in claiming to be snowbound.

I got over it somewhere along the line. I think it was right after I hit the median half a mile from the office following two hours on snow-packed roads, then spent the rest of the day waiting for a tow truck. I now see a snowstorm as a message from the cosmos to chill out. If school is delayed or cancelled for the kids, I have a built-in excuse. So I hope against hope on snowy mornings that the school district won't feel macho. Of course, I never admit this to my children. Instead, I torture them with tales of my childhood when I walked to school for miles and miles, uphill, through blizzards, hurricanes, and swarms of locusts.

The best scenario of all was the one at my darling engineer's office last week. So many people tried to work from home during the storm that the computer system couldn't handle the traffic. Hard-working employees were forced to sit back, read the paper, and have a cup of hot cocoa. If that isn't divine providence, I don't know what is. Unfortunately, my husband's department is responsible for keeping the system humming, so they were in it up to their ears. Which just goes to prove that one man's hot cocoa is another man's Maalox.

If you do get to the office, there's fun in store. An anything-goes attitude seems to prevail amongst the hardy folk who mush to work through the snow. You can wear darn near anything, as long as there's fleece or thermal insulation involved. Shed your boots as soon as you arrive, and pad around in your socks all day. Even if the CEO shows up, he'll understand. You can arrive hours late and leave hours early, blame it all on traffic, and still get points for being one of the brave little soldiers who spent all day at the office. And, since most of your meetings will be cancelled, you'll have free time during which you can call or e-mail friends in sunnier climes and impress them with tall tales featuring yourself as Nanook.

And then there's the eternal mystery: no matter how sparse the turnout on a snowy day, the office microwave always blows up, and the vending machines are always empty. Will wonders never cease?

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