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## **RE: Division Unification**

Memo

To: All division employees

From: Sandra Slomak

RE: Division Unification

As you know, Boss Ponder likes to say that we should all aim for division unification. Better workers, he says, produce better projects; better projects make for better teams; better teams create a better office, which brings better leadership, all of which contributes to a better, more unified division, which, in turn, makes our company succeed. The company is considered successful when it makes more money. And it is the division's office's leader's team's members – each of us – who make that happen.

To motivate us into further unifying our division, Boss Ponder tells us to get our "ducks in a row," to "think outside the box," and to always leave "room on our plate." Achieving these three goals, he says, will no doubt put "a feather in our cap."

More than once, he has noted that members of our division's team must "wear many hats" in order to succeed. This in particular caught my attention because I have yet to see anyone in our division, save for myself, wear a single hat, let alone several. I did a good stretch of knitting a few years back, after my father died, and those of you who work on my team in our division's office know that I actually own and wear an extensive collection of woolen hats – although not at the same time. I'd like to know why Boss Ponder suggests that we all wear hats, then, when in fact I am the division's sole hat wearer. I can imagine he'll read this memo and say, "there's no 'I' in 'team,' Sandra." But there's no "we" in team, either. Only "me," mixed up. And wearing all the hats. And while I see boxes of chocolates and boxed pens doled to my colleagues as quarterly rewards, I – the lone multi-hat wearer of our division – have yet to see a reward, let alone a single feather, for my cap – or caps, as it were – come my way.

Perhaps the source of these elusive feathers is the ducks to which Mr. Ponder is so fond of aligning. Every time he urges us to get our "ducks in a row," I can't help but think we are getting bad advice. My father was a prize duck hunter, Mallard Class, and I know that, unless they are stuffed and mounted on your mantle, ducks do not readily get in rows, nor do they like to. As everyone knows, ducks in flight make v-shaped formations, which is not a row but rather an elegant, egalitarian arc. And anyone who's ever watched ducks in a marsh could tell you they aren't about to line up for you when they're sitting in the water. That's why they make buckshot. Yet Mr. Ponder seems to believe that there is some relationship between row-friendly ducks and our mission of division unification. But to put them in rows is contrary not only to the natural tendencies of ducks, but also to the true aim of the statement, by which I assume he means: get organized.

But in order to get organized, he wants us to think outside the very object that would help us, logistically, to achieve it. It has been nearly three decades since I have been able to maneuver my body to fit inside a box, let alone think inside of one. And, unless you are compelled to place a box over your head as inspiration to get the neurons firing, thinking outside of a box is a natural, if not logical, thing to do. It begs the question why a box would even need to be present in order for thought to occur. My experience suggests that thinking happens – and should happen – when no box is present. So it makes one wonder: why the emphasis on the box? If, perhaps, the word "box" is meant to suggest my rather boxlike "cubicle," then I heartily agree. And, since boxes tend to stay where you put them – except if that box happens to be in the supply room closet filled with staples and designer pushpins and the four-dollars-a-pop fountain pens and special desk calendar – it seems a far simpler and more logical task to put your boxes in a row, and to let the ducks outside where they belong.

By solving the dilemmas of box placement and duck-alignment, it frees us, then, to consider Mr. Ponder's third piece of advice to achieve division unification. When I first heard him say, "don't tell me your plate is full; always leave a little room," I thought he was talking about the holiday buffet the division pays for down in the break room. It's advice I get from my dietician, too. And my therapist. But I always want to know, and no one ever tells me: what are we leaving room on our plates for? Ducks? In boxes? But then I realized that leaving room on a plate simply means that there is more to life than ducks and boxes, and you need to be ready for it. Leaving room on your plate is, in essence, making room for change, something that would mix up and rehash stale leftovers, be it food or phrase. Maybe it's something that might inspire you to leave the division's office for a while, even for just an hour, to take a walk in the woods to experience box-free thinking. And maybe you'd find in the woods a lake, where, if you are lucky enough, you may come across a family of ducks and observe them. You would know how unwilling they'd be to get in rows for you, how easily they spook if you rush at them, scare them a little into taking flight. I used to do this when I was a girl, on those Saturday mornings duck hunting with my dad. I'd rush at the ducks and when they flew away, a feather sometimes would fall from their fold, and land, miraculously, at my feet.