



I QUIT

If you hate your job, don't be so Asian American about it.

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THERE COMES A TIME in your life when your job doesn't feel like a job. It starts to feel like a career, like work you want to do for the rest of your life. You don't mind waking up every morning bright-eyed, bushy-tailed and ambitious to make a difference!

This was not one of those times.

I was working as an instructor at an art university. It paid well, I loved most of my co-workers (can't win 'em all) and I liked the creative environment.

When I told my father that I was going to be a teacher, he laughed. "Really?" he said. "Are you sure you have the patience for that?"

I thanked him for his vote of confidence.

In the beginning, I loved it — the challenge of creating curriculum, the enthusiasm of the students and how, during three-hour lectures, my nervousness would produce beads of sweat on my brow and stains on my pits.

I was like Professor X and they were my X-Men; I was creating an army of journalists that would be just like me: snarky and cynical, with a discerning skepticism about anything and everything.

But about six months into the job, I began to lose interest in the work. After a year, my disinterest was apparent. More than that, I didn't have a clear idea of what the hell I was doing. My bosses occasionally gave me direction, but I was basically on my own. I used a lot of random "media" (i.e., movies and TV shows) and desperately tried to connect them to my haphazard lesson plans. I came to the conclusion that, if this were a high school, I'd be the cliché frumpy teacher with fewer prospects than my students.

My lack of enthusiasm finally caught the attention of my boss and the director of the department. They called me into their office and told me that many of my students were complaining about my teaching methods. The director also grilled me with questions like, "Why don't the students know who Tina Brown is? Why don't they read Newsweek?" Her words were coming at me like a machine gun loaded with guilt-ridden bullets.

I broke down. Worse than getting called out was the knowledge that my students didn't approach me; they went to my superiors. The jig was up. I admitted all my faults and said I would leave at the end of the semester.

I was demoted and got a pay cut to boot. I felt defeated, but at the same time I deserved it. Even though my interest in the job was

deteriorating, I wasn't being a responsible adult. I wasn't doing the work that I needed to do and I was facing the consequences.

A few days later, I read Wesley Yang's "Paper Tigers" article in New York Magazine where he discussed Asian American over-achievers and why they don't break through the "bamboo ceiling." He argued that Asian Americans don't really speak up when it comes to injustice in the workplace, re-enforcing the passive pushover stereotype pinned to us.

With this article awakening my inner-militant, I went into my mental time machine and replayed the meeting with my director and boss.

"Why aren't you doing your job?" my director says.

"Maybe because I only get told what I need to do when it's convenient to you," I say.

She is blindsided with shock.

"Look," I say with a fire in my eyes. "I take full responsibility for not being fully invested in my work lately, but it's not easy when there's no clear

direction. How in the hell am I supposed to know that I should be shoving Tina Brown down these students' throats? I already force-feed them articles by Robin Givhan, Cathy Horyn, Guy Trebay, Eric Wilson and Simon Doonan — I would think that would be enough, but apparently not according to your standards."

A staredown ensues. A tense silence fills the room and she says, "I appreciate your candor. I didn't realize you covered so much ground in your teaching. Let's fix this and try to make things work for next semester."

I stand up confidently, dust off my shoulders and wait a moment before replying, "There won't be a next semester."

I swagger out of the room and pump my fist in the air.

This, of course, did not happen and it probably wouldn't have played out exactly this way, but at least I would have spoken up and tried to fix the situation instead of succumbing to defeat. Then again, I don't think the job was worth fighting over.

My dad was right; it wasn't for me.

BIO NEEDED?