

**(U) Ask Zelda!: Scent of a Woman**

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

Run Date: 10/03/2014

(U) This article is unclassified.

Approved for Release by NSA on 09-20-2017, FOIA Case # 81057



Dear Zelda,

(U) I have an individual in my office who likes to "butt" into conversations that my coworkers are having. It's one thing to join in conversations every now and then, but he doesn't add any value, kills conversations, and just hasn't got a clue. I know my hair smells delightful, but I'm not okay with him creepin' two inches behind me every time he wants to join their conversations. If he's looking for a clue, he won't find it in my amazing hair. How can I kindly inform him to BACK OFF and not stand behind my desk when he wants to join in conversations?

Thank you,

-- Smell Me Not

Dear Smell-Me-Not,

It sounds like there are 2 issues here: creeping up on you and butting into conversations. Let me address them separately.

**Butting In**

It seems this lonely co-worker is looking to connect with his office mates. He may not add any value, but is there a way to include him so he might get a clue? Think of it as your good deed to society. In order to have conversational skills, you have to practice them. Let him practice a bit with his work center denizens. Try to be a little more patient with him, and even include him (rather than ignore or merely tolerate him) in the discussions.

Of course, perhaps he only wants to join the convo so he can sniff your hair...

**Hair Sniffing**

It is a little creepy when you turn suddenly to find someone right there, in your space, inhaling the pleasant aroma of your tresses. It must be some primeval urge; after all, other species learn a lot about each other through their olfactory senses. Just be glad humans don't go about it the way dogs greet each other!

Scent is so key that it has become a billion dollar industry. Soaps, perfumes, shampoos, and deodorant are all aimed at making humans eminently sniffable. You can hardly blame the guy for taking an interest in your olfactory emissions. 🤔

That said, the most effective way to stop this practice is just to ask. Nicely say, "Please stop creeping up behind me and sniffing my hair." He will probably be mortified and never do it again. To anyone. In order not to magnify his embarrassment, don't say this to him when others are around.

If the behavior persists, you can try a vinegar rinse on your hair (I hear it really makes hair shine). Unless the sniffer loves pickles, he will probably think your hair smells gross and give you a wide berth. 😊

If he continues to hang out behind your desk (only sans sniffing), you might

- tell him he's invading your personal space and it bothers you

- warn him you're afraid you might back up suddenly and roll over his toes or ram your chair into an even more painful body part
- invite him to "pull up a chair" and join the conversation, rather than lurk behind you.

Just tell Mr. Nosey how his behavior is affecting you. That conversation should clear the air and dispense with your unwanted shadow.

*Zelda*

**A Note from the Editor:** While much of Zelda's response was intended to be humorous--she picked up on the perceived humorous tone of the question (with its reference to "amazing hair") and responded in a similar tone--it should be emphasized that cases of harassment are treated seriously at NSA. As a first step, the person who is receiving unwanted attention should make the offender aware of his or her concerns. If the behavior continues, it constitutes harassment and should be brought to the attention of management or one of the Agency offices who address workplace concerns (Employee Assistance Service, Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution, or Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Directorate, etc.).

(U) Looking for some of the older "Ask Zelda" columns? They are filed away in the archives under the "Ask Zelda! 2010" and "Ask Zelda! 2011" and "Ask Zelda! 2012" and "Ask Zelda! 2013" series. Also, if you'd like to submit a question of your own to Zelda, just use the "comments/suggestions about this article" button below to send it in.

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