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Reading between the Lines

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When those of us that are asked to write a letter of recommendation, we sometimes do not quite say exactly what we really mean to say. We often try to avoid saying something negative about the person and we want to put the most positive spin on things. Below I provide the uninitiated some clues about what it is that is really being said in letters of recommendation. You might want to save these for future letters that you will be asked to write:

“I was most impressed by Silva’s help in the early stages in the statistical analysis, especially his knowledge of SPSS” really means “The only thing that statistical-novice Silva could do was to enter the raw data.”

“Because Abercrombie worked with Professor Smith, I do not feel that I know her as well as my own students” really means

“Abercrombie must have a full time job or something, because she only comes in to the department to pick up her paycheck.”

“Quigley is full of energy and enthusiasm and the life of the party” really means “Quigley is out of control and is likely visiting the methamphetamine lab too often.”

“Bigelow is an enthusiastic teacher and works diligently at perfecting his teaching” really means “Bigelow has no idea about research and will likely never publish a study.”

“I am most impressed about the ability of Lee to exploit the full potential of the web” really means “Lee seems to be at the computer all the time downloading MP3s and porn.”

“I often found myself totally amazed at the creative responses that Hutchins gave when we discussed his extensive research project ” really means “I was truly amazed at the incredibly bizarre excuses that Hutchins gave for why his projects never got completed.”

“Garmin is rather reserved at laboratory meetings and class, but the few times that he does say something it is worthwhile” really means “Garmin is painfully shy, and he would not even speak even if his ass were on fire.”

“There have been several times while in my office that I have sought out Merckle for assistance and he has been resourceful in departmental projects ” really means “Thank goodness Merckle is so tall that he can reach books on my top shelf and play center on the department's intramural basketball team.”

“Oglethorp's real strength shines through in his ability to work with others” really means “Oglethorp is incapable of ever doing anything on

his own and so he must freeload to get anything accomplished.”

Prozac that Fiori started taking has begun to kick in.”

“When Smorch enters the room he always get noticed” really means “Smorch seems to never take a shower or a bath.”

“In finishing a recent paper with Farnsworth, she was very resourceful in writing the last part of the paper” really means “Farnsworth cannot compose a meaningful sentence, but we finally found something for Fransworth to do and that was to prepare the bibliography.”

“Upson decided to take off two years from graduate school to work in an intensive men’s group project” really means “Upson had to spend two years in jail on a drunk driving charge.”

“Students come early to class when Kraft is giving a lecture” really means “People get there early so they can find a comfortable enough chair far in the back for a nap.”

“Ladupa is quick to volunteer and he has often picked up speakers at the airport” really means “Ladupa has a part time job driving a taxi.”

“I see McGuillicudy as someone who would network well at conferences” really means “McGuillicudy will be in a different bed every night of the conference.”

“Of late, I have noticed that Fiori seems enthusiastic and full of the joy of life” really means “Finally, the