

If your name is Stinky, you have to be either very tough or very lovable. Jacalyn Valent named her bull dog Stinky and she says he's gone the lovable fuzzle route. Turns out, Stinky has been a real inspiration, not just to Valent, but to the readers of the book she wrote about him.

Since 1993, Valent has worked in some capacity in a variety of human resource departments. She is currently at Deloitte and Touche in Milwaukee. She's knowledgeable about employee compensation, but she also strives to help people get along by respecting and embracing different points of view from different kinds of people. As she sees it, "People make snap judgments, but we're better served if we don't take things at face value; take poor Stinky. People said to me, 'That's a horrible name for a dog,' and made assumptions about him."

Stinky, who weighs in at 45 pounds, didn't especially mind what people said about him. But one day while daydreaming in a boring lecture at a conference in New York, Valent had a Eureka moment. Stinky became a symbol for her of the way people react to superficial characteristics in the workplace and everyday life. The book was born. "I opted for a children's book but parents or teachers have to read it to them so I'm getting two audiences at once." In 2005, "Stinky, The Bulldog" was published by Author House. It is charmingly illustrated by local artist Michael Richter.

Stinky accompanies Valent to schools and bookstores for signings. He loves being petted, but, usually, he falls asleep, his favorite state of being according to his owner. Being a star it seems has not gone to his head. After work, Valent drives home to Wauwatosa, where Stinky greets her with a big stretch and a yawn. How much does she love this dog? For his recent fourth birthday, Stinky invited a ton of friends over to play in his kiddie pool and Valent served a cake in the shape of a bulldog.

While many companies encourage employees to post photos

of their families and vacations, in her office at Deloitte and Touche, Valent has created a doggie wall for canine owners. Dozens of mutts, pooches and purebreds smile — or is that pant — in their 4-by-6 glossies.

Valent's own life has made her sensitive to superficial judgments. "I was a victim of discrimination for years. Even though I had a 3.75 GPA at UW-Stout, I was terribly overweight and I worried I would never be able to find a job because of the way I looked," she says. She went on to earn a master's degree in human resources at Marquette University, and she did find work. Looking at her trim figure now, it is hard to believe she was ever overweight, but Valent says it is something she never forgets.

Valent has ideas about the value of diversity in the workplace. "First of all, diversity has become a buzz word," she says. "It has been bastardized to mean simply race. If a company does not have a diverse work force, if everyone looks alike and sounds alike, that company will ultimately not succeed. Age, gender, weight, race, these are all visual cues that do not make any difference in getting the job done. These are the snap judgments we make. In human resources, we need to take time and encourage others to dig beyond the first level, which is hard to do sometimes because of the pace of our lives and work."

While Valent stresses that it is top leadership at organizations which drives the concept, everyone has their role. "People at all levels need to understand that everything you say and do has consequences. Employees at all levels need to know that they too have responsibilities for being appropriate in their dress and manners."

Valent thrives on throwing parties and answering Stinky's fan mail. She also likes to think about the ideal world. "The ideal world would be one where we never had to use the word diversity," she says. "There, each individual could bring their knowledge to the table and it would be embraced." ❧

## It's good to be stinky



*In August, Jacalyn Valent became the president of Young Professionals of Milwaukee, capping her affiliation with the group since its inception in 2001. YPM is a networking organization that assists people who want to become involved in their community and help the region grow. Achieving diversity is also part of its efforts through its Mosaic Council.*