

TEST PILOTS

When you think about it, a test pilot's job is fairly easy. All he has to do is flip the plane upside down a couple of times, mumble a few garbled "rogers" into his radio, then double back through the clouds to his favorite empty field. Ease it down. Spend a few hours with his girlfriend. Knock back a couple of six-packs. Reel in some rainbow trout. If his supervisors accuse him of not responding to their calls, he can simply say his radio went dead. It's his word against theirs.

"But our radar shows you landed fifty miles from here."

"Landed? I almost crashed!"

He reaches into his flight suit and lovingly fingers the packet of coke his girlfriend slipped him as they kissed goodbye. Test pilots! I sit at my desk, a stone's throw from my boss' desk. Making a personal phone call involves incredible risk. Sneaking a few minutes with the crossword can send me hurtling to the ground in a ball of fire.

ZERO MOTIVATION

An honest day's work. That's all my boss expects. But this place isn't conducive to work. There's coffee to drink, people to talk to, the morning's mood to absorb. Somebody's selling chances for a trip to Ireland. Somebody else comes in with a get-well card for a secretary who broke her hip over the weekend. In scribbling my best wishes, I feel pressured to match the wit of those who've already signed. Should I make a joking reference to the broken hip, or take the high road and be poignantly sincere? I stir my coffee and picture myself in the hospital under similar circumstances. Which would I prefer?

I don't want to come across as overly sentimental, because normally I don't give this person the time of day. As I'm pondering my options, the window washer drops into view. He's hanging from tight straps that yank his trousers up. He doesn't acknowledge my presence and I decide it's best not to acknowledge his. So much to do! With a careful tug he descends to the floor below, leaving only ropes and bright blue sky. The window looks so clean, it's as if he polished the sky, instead of the window. That's exactly the sort of thought that keeps me from getting anything done.