

BUSINESS CARDS

I still remember the thrill I felt when I was given my first box of business cards. It was September 1951, and I had been hired by Local 38 of the ILGWU as an organizer at \$60 a week. I was a graduate of the union's Training Institute, I had gotten my Master's in Education from CCNY, I had worked as a substitute teacher in the New York City school system for \$16 a day (which comes to \$80 for a five day week), and I was starting graduate school at night at NYU. Up to that time I had never had a business card. When I was in high school, and met someone for the first time, I would very formally say, here is my card, and hand him a playing card, usually a jack.

I now had my very own business card. It had my name in the center, in capital letters, and beneath my name, in smaller letters was my title: "Representative," supposedly more impressive than "Organizer." In the lower left was the name of the union: Ladies Tailors. Custom Dressmakers and Alteration Workers Union Local 38, ILGWU, A F of L, and in the lower right, the address: 117 West 46th Street, New York, 36, NY." The phone number was in the upper left: PLAZA 7-3575-6, and in the upper right was the printing trades union label, called the bug. I was very proud to have my own business card with my name on it. The prestige was worth the difference between what I was being paid, and what I would have made as a teacher. (I never realized that I could have had a business card printed, with "Teacher" under my name.)

I must have had 500 cards, and I gave them out to my friends and family, people I ran into at meetings and conferences, weddings and Bar Mitzvahs, and to workers I was trying to organize. I am sure it impressed them. It is 60 years later and I still have a bunch left.

When I returned from the army and went to work for another ILGWU local, the manager automatically ordered a box of business cards for me, but without consulting me. I was shocked when he handed me the cards. The layout had the name of the union in the center. In big letters: "LOCAL 99" and under it: "INTERNATIONAL LADIES GARMENT WORKERS UNION Affiliated with AFL-CIO." In the upper left was the local's seal, in the upper right the local's phone number, in the lower right the local's address, at the bottom, the union bug, and in the lower left, in small letters, was my name, "Jack Schlitt." and below my name: "Representative." I have always objected to anyone calling me Jack, and here it was on my business card! I asked if it could be redone. I was told no. I did not give them out to friends and family. I have a lot more of these business cards left.

Not only did I not like the card, I wasn't crazy about Local 99, and within six months I started looking for, and found, another job—with the Jewish Labor Committee, and was given another business card. This time, my name JACOB SCHLITT was back in the center in big letters, and under my name was my new title "Field Representative." This one I could distribute with pride.

For all the years that I carried a business card, I have been troubled by the term, especially since I have been associated with labor, non-profit and government organizations all my working life. Why do I have to call it a "business" card? I associate business with exploitation, capitalism, profit-making. Even when I worked for a union, I knew I couldn't call it a "union" card. It would be confusing. But I couldn't think of another term. When I looked up "business" in the dictionary, the first definition was, "The occupation, work or trade in which a person is engaged." I'll buy that. And "business card" was defined as, "A small card printed or engraved

with a person's name and business affiliation, including such information as title, address and telephone number." After reading that, I felt better.

Over the years, I have accumulated lots of business cards, all printed by my employer. That is, until I came to the US Commission on Civil Rights. Seems the federal government (or just my agency?) doesn't print business cards for its employees. But I could get them printed by myself, and they would provide the awesome government seal. And that is what I did. I found a union printer, designed my own card, and had them printed at my own expense. It really wasn't very expensive.

When I went to work for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I was again treated to a very pretty business card, printed by my agency. It was in blue ink, and my name and title were centered, and in the upper left hand corner was the State seal in blue and gold. What it did not have was the union bug. You can't have everything.

Then I retired. After a while, I felt there was something missing from my wallet: A business card. For months, I kicked around different ideas for a card. How should it be laid out? What kind of stock? What font? Where can I find a union printer? The biggest question for me was: What title to give myself? I had gone from "Representative" to "Director" to my last job "Inspector." How do I define myself? What word or words would go under my name? The following were some of the ideas I kicked around: husband and father (this was before I became a grandfather); meeting attendee; retiree; observer; thinker; commentator; multi-organization member; contributor; former representative- director-inspector; elder statesman; has-been. I was unable to settle on one. I intended to keep working at it.

One day, checking my e-mail, I came across an offer that was too good to refuse. Five hundred free business cards. You had a choice of two layouts. Send in your name; it would go on the top right in bold. Your address would go in the center on the right. You have three lines on the bottom for phone number; cell phone and e-mail address. A pretty design was on the left. Perfect! Neatly printed on the back in very small type was: Business Cards are FREE at www.vistaprint.com. A very small price to pay. I ordered them. They are in my wallet. I give them out at the drop of a hat. But there is no title under my name. And again, no union bug.

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