

Office Sweet Office

The first thing that strikes you when you walk towards the entrance is the silence. The absence of all that familiar and reassuring sound environment: the continuous hum of the escalator, carrying with it the voices of colleagues saying hello in all languages, the incessant and sometimes capricious beeping of the electronic portals, the kitchen noises of the nearby cafeteria.

None of it. Hearing only the clacking sound of my footsteps on the stairs, I climb up to the R3's Security Control Centre and, relieved, am greeted by a security team, all smiles and always loyal to the post. First exchanges at 2 m distance while disinfecting my hands.



Passing through the airlock, first bumping into a member of the senior management team, who has been loyal to his post from the start. Something different concerning him appeals to me; I've found it! It's the dress code, more casual (it will be a constant throughout the day for all the people met).

To go up to my office, I discover the new that is signage gradually being put in place and try scrupulously to conform to it even though I am for the moment the one and only wandering official in R2. But where are they all?

Having finally received clues by phone, here I am in a first floor where I discover a colleague, torn between laughter and exasperation, under her desk, trying to reconnect her PC to be able to follow a skype session properly. These are the joys of resourcefulness, each civil servant turns into a Mc Gyver, in any case visibly in a good mood and it's a pleasure. Her office neighbour, for my visit, shows me the first small instrument that is used to open doors without touching them. Ingenious and practical!

I hurry up for my first official meeting of the morning and note that each member of senior management is in pairs with his assistant and this since March 16. Respect for all these colleagues who have held the helm throughout alongside their bosses.



Another place, another atmosphere: the unloading dock. Here I am in the basement of the building where a handful of colleagues have taken up their duties as part of Phase 1, here to receive the deliveries that are starting to resume. Exchanges. Everything seems to be going well.

A little later, I push open the door to the printing department, where the noise of the machines clearly indicates that the resumption is also in order. Colleagues work in shifts to produce all the posters that will be used for the building's COVID signage and other urgent work needed for the organization's visibility and activities. They would like to emphasize how much the Safety and Health Officer has been available to explain the new protocols that have been put in place.

Then I am running to the 4th floor, my favourite one since it is the human resources floor, for a visit to the Director who confessed his satisfaction at finally having a meeting with someone in the flesh. A scene worthy of a Fellini plan, where everyone stands religiously at one end of the table. All we have to do is pass the salt (an ingredient never missing in the discussions between the union and HRD).

Back in my office. I'm waiting for my next appointment. He's one of the two colleagues responsible for installing signage on all floors so that he can show me how to get around on the floor, in the elevators, on the stairs and even to go to the bathroom. Not easy, but only then will it be possible to return.

Lunch time at last! I'm pleased to see the person in charge and the head cook of ELDORA, who have never left the ship either. Cafeteria is still reduced to its simplest form during Phase 1. You go, get your plate and stagger into the "Viennese" section. I witness unprecedented moments of conviviality between colleagues of all categories: it's a great laugh from one table to the next. I feel that all these colleagues have experienced extraordinary moments together. Probably quite isolated in their office, they take full advantage of this short moment of socialization at lunchtime. Diffuse feeling of being an intruder.



Back again in the empty and silent Staff Union offices of the 6th, for a not-to-be-missed and now usual virtual meeting with my team.



Then back upstairs, like a treasure hunt, looking for as many colleagues as possible already on site, to find out how they live those moments back home or those moments at the office that they have never left since they are considered essential staff. The second colleague in charge of signage, also recently returned, a colourful and well-known character in the ILO microcosm, is inexhaustible on the variety of signs to be put up. As his explanations go by, I realize the magnitude of the task of preparing for the return and am overwhelmed by a deep sense of gratitude to all these colleagues whom I have just met, who contribute in their own way and in the same way as others immersed in their reports and research, to the activities of the ILO.



I cannot therefore omit a final visit to the first floor, the IT services, to meet those who, from the outset, have been striving to make teleworking easier for all staff, both at Headquarters and in the Field, juggling hundreds of laptop orders (to be configured of course), extra screens, mobiles and the more than once unreasoned requests of some (personal consideration of the author).

This particular day will finally end with a mandatory passage to the Security Control Centre, the opportunity one last time to exchange with the guards and, icing on the cake, by a completely fortuitous and unplanned meeting with the master of the place. He appeared like a captain, choosing the best sea routes to bring the ILO ship to port, avoiding the pitfalls. The mission is certainly not an easy one, but I hope that he knows he can count on his crew, of whom he has taken, let's admit it, great care during these unprecedented moments.

All these meetings were therefore necessary and useful and will enable the union to better respond to the many questions its members have about returning to the office.

In any case, one thing is sure, no virtual discussion will ever replace human contact.

Video :

