

Starbulletin.com

Monday, February 25, 2002

[AT WORK]



BURL BURLINGAME / BBURLINGAME@STARBULLETIN.COM

Vending machine stocker Howard Merl

Vending machine stocker

Howard Merl's vending machines support his architecture habit

HOWARD MERL >>> I'm a licensed architect with 25 years of experience, and in that time I discovered that architecture isn't a business; it's an anti-business. Unless you're the boss, you can't make money at it. So when the kids were getting into school, I looked around for a real way to make money. The model was a lemonade stand. You stock it, you sell it, you get more and then you sell more. I was working on an MBA at the time as well, and that business model is diametrically opposite to architecture.

So, vending machines are my lemonade stand. And I make more money working a few days a week than I ever made seven days a week as an architect. And there's a lot of freedom. You set your own hours, you get to talk story with people, my plant is a roll-down storage facility and my office is a cell phone.

I called my company Acme Vending because it's such an archetypal name. People always think they've heard of you.

And it's surprisingly creative. Think about having to stock 32 kinds of consumables in a machine and have them equally consumed. And customers take it personally. You run out of Doctor Pepper at the post office, and you find a skull and crossbones taped to the machine!

I'm also interested in using the lighted front panels of soft-drink machines to display artwork. We're putting up a new one at Marks Garage on the 22nd. Just to make it more fun.

What I'm learning about is parts of Hawaii you didn't know existed, from the bluest of blue-collar to the whitest of white-collar, from tire shops to accounting offices. Our society values certain type of work more than others. That's why ball players earn more than cancer researchers.

What I've really learned is humility. Some people look down on me, particularly young women working at reception desks. Even though I'm making ten times more money than they are, and I can take a break whenever I want. And they can't, and never will.

At Work is a weekly feature that shows and tells what people do for a living in their own words. Comments:
business@starbulletin.com

[E-mail to Business Editor](#)

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Text Site Directory:

[\[News\]](#) [\[Business\]](#) [\[Features\]](#) [\[Sports\]](#) [\[Editorial\]](#) [\[Do It Electric!\]](#)
[\[Classified Ads\]](#) [\[Search\]](#) [\[Subscribe\]](#) [\[Info\]](#) [\[Letter to Editor\]](#)
[\[Feedback\]](#)

© 2002 Honolulu Star-Bulletin
<http://archives.starbulletin.com>