

The company man

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ellen Goodman has been named columnist of the year, she has won the Pulitzer Prize in 1980, as well as writing books, essays, and reports. She is an educator, researcher, and a syndicated columnist to name but a few of her talents. The short story that Ellen Goodman wrote, called "The Company Man" really identifies one's self with the in-group concept and the identity salience hierarchy.

The in-group concept, a concept of being grouped together by beliefs and values, a commonality within a group, is shown in the story with the group of workers sharing a common belief that hard work will pay off in the end. The identity salience hierarchy refers to ranking our roles based on importance. This can be seen when "The Company Man" ranks his role as a Vice President as the highest order of importance, even above his family.

The in-group in this short story is based on successful people who are trying to achieve more out of life. Just as the story describes there is a common belief that working hard will be rewarded with job advancement, more money, and power. Phil's common values and beliefs are implied because of the number of hours and days he works, as well as his desire to become the President one day; he is in fact tipped "one of three".

With the announcement of the Company Man's death, his friends and acquaintances have to stop for five or ten minutes to think about how they are living. They know he worked himself to death with working six days a week, some 12 hours a day. Not only that, but even on his day off, he continually thought about his work. While everyone was fully aware of the

devastating effects of this, they found themselves in the same position, that of being workaholics.

It is interesting to note that the one in-group that should be present in anyone's life is missing. This missing in-group is that of immediate family. While Phil had a wife and 3 children, he was not part of that in-group. This is clearly evidenced when in the days following his death, his eldest son went from neighbor to neighbor trying to find out about his father as he did not know him. Again, Phil and his daughter had "nothing to say to each other". The saddest part is when Phil's wife is told that she will miss him and her reply is one of sorrow "I already have" referring to the many years she has already lost him to his work. Although Phil was one of six Vice President's and had a team of "maybe sixty" working for him, one senses he was truly lonely.

The identity salience hierarchy is associated in this short story because "The Company Man" ranks his roles as a vice president as the highest order of importance, even over his friends and family. Phil also known as "The Company Man" had no extracurricular activities and took no other interest in any hobbies, he focused solely on his work. Phil had a wife, two sons and a daughter that he barely knew. His oldest son asked the neighbors about Phil, his dad; but no one could really say much.

His daughter didn't talk to him and his youngest son, which is very much like his father; stated that "My father and I only board here". Phil's wife accepts his behavior and more than likely encourages it, because she has no marketing skills and enjoys the fruits of his success. This is another reason

Phil's main focus in life was his job and to be the very best that he could be at it.

"The Company Man" really identifies one's self with the in-group concept and the identity salience hierarchy. The concept and the hierarchy are learned at a very young age and most likely came from Phil's father, just as Phil is passing it on to his youngest son. With all of Phil's accomplishments and hard work, he will be remembered not for being a good friend, husband, or dad; but as a devoted and loyal worker for the company. His friends and family will remember Phil as the man who worked himself to death.