LETTERS TO FORTUNE

The GE Polish

"Get Me a CEO From GE!" (April 18) was fantastic! I am a former GE executive who just joined Merrill Lynch in New York City. I have been preoccupied with all the same issues my former GE colleagues mention in your story. I have been working very hard not to let my GE DNA show in unproductive ways.

GE culture and leadership development processes are unique in corporate America. As you point out, those of us who are products of that system can sometimes overwhelm our new colleagues. GE is a fantastic company, one that equips its employees with the tools to lead in any industry or business context. Thanks for treating this subject with candor, clarity, and sensitivity.

Loren Douglass
Equipment Management ’94
Jersey City, NJ.

Walk the Plank, Maybe

"Why Quattrone Deserves to Walk" (First, March 21) may very well respect the letter of the law, but it betrays its spirit. Frank Quattrone has blatantly and repeatedly breached his fiduciary duties. He must have known very well that CSFB’s pre-IPO reports were rubbish, and he never raised any concerns. Anyone who advocates that he should walk does not understand the word "honesty."

Pietro Peri
Basel, Switzerland

Get Wise

"The Best Advice I Ever Got" (March 21) is as inspirational and thoughtful as one could want. It is good to discover that plain but insightful advice can have such an impact on people’s success.

Jaraphan Yenpyong
Division Manager
Category Management
Amphoe Muang, Thailand

Wisdom is gradually being displaced in corporate America by smartness. Smart people are tactical, concrete thinkers who make decisions quickly but have a poor grasp of complexity and subtlety. Wise people think more abstractly and strategically and incorporate more factors into their decision-making. Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard were wise; Carly Fiorina was smart. Perhaps that is why she didn’t understand that Hewlett-Packard’s culture was much more than stock options. Wisdom requires insight that comes from reflection and contemplation. Unfortunately, today’s corporate environment doesn’t allow for such luxuries, and its focus on near-term results rewards smart people over wise people.

Victor Riley
Point Roberts, Wash.

The financial fellows in your article should follow my second law: If you can distinguish between good advice and bad advice, then you don’t need advice.

Bruce W. Van Roy
Vienna, Va.

Coup de Gras

As a veterinarian with 30 years’ experience, I can answer the question you raise in “A Wild Goose Chase” (Business Life, May 2)—Does foie gras amount to cruel and unusual punishment?—with an absolute yes. The birds do suffer during the feeding process. A stomach tube is rapidly forced through the esophagus into the stomach, sometimes leading to injury, and the huge amount of food being forced into the stomach causes harm in and of itself. Not only does the liver become enlarged, but it also malfunctions, so the birds are chronically ill. The ducks are kept in crowded conditions, and their bills, which are rich in nerve endings, are removed with scissors, which causes acute and chronic pain and prevents normal feeding and preening.

When you consider what these birds must endure—and the many other food choices available—it seems that promoting foie gras reflects human indulgence at its worst.

Nedim C. Buyukmihci
Professor Emeritus of Veterinary Medicine
University of California at Davis
Daly City, Texas

Oysters à la Bing

I salute Stanley Bing’s wit and craftsmanship in his FORTUNE 500 parody of “The Walrus and the Carpenter” (While You Were Out, April 18). I loved it. And I’m still smiling.

Mike Deputy
Salt Lake City

Correction

In the rankings of the “500 Largest Corporations in the U.S.” (April 18), the revenues for Hilton Hotels and those of Starwood Hotels & Resorts were understated because of the exclusion of “other revenues” from managed and franchised properties. The revenues of Hilton Hotels should have been reported as $4.146 billion, bumping it up to No. 459 from No. 566. Starwood’s revenues should have been $5.368 billion, making it No. 364, not No. 440. Thus, Hilton joins the FORTUNE 500. FORTUNE regrets the errors.