

Working Life

by Haidee E. Allerton

TRUE TALES FROM THE WORKPLACE

An Officer Reinhold, a 10-year veteran of a Maryland city police department, was kidnapped from his cruiser last summer and hasn't been heard from since. Not a word.

That's not surprising, actually, because Officer Reinhold is a dummy. A real dummy. He was snatched from his usual post, an intersection, where he sat stoically as a deterrent to speeders and red-light runners. Most townspeople had already fingered Reinhold as a dummy, but sometimes the police would change his position or switch places with him just to keep drivers unsure of whether it was a dummy or a real officer. (We shall not stoop to an easy joke here.)

The theft of the mannequin, valued at \$315, will be prosecuted as a felony, if the perpetrators are ever caught. Reinhold was last seen wearing his navy-blue police shirt, black tie, police baseball cap, name tag, and official badge. He was not wearing shoes or pants.

I GAVE AT THE OFFICE

A woman donated one of her kidneys to a co-worker with whom she had worked for more than 10 years. The physician who performed the surgery said that he had only done three or four kidney transplants in his 24 years of this type of treatment in which the donor was both living and unrelated to the recipient.

BIG BROTHER IS MONITORING

A new high-tech device is expected to be used with increasing frequency to monitor whether health care and



food service workers wash their hands when they go to the bathroom, reports the *Washington Post*.

The first such system, referred to as Hygiene Guard, is already being operated at the Tropicana Casino and Resort in Atlantic City to track whether its 20 chefs, dishwashers, and wait persons are using soap dispensers and

THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

The sad days are coming up. Many people—from 11 to 25 million—suffer from some degree of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) during the dark days of winter. They feel depressed, accomplish less work, and find it harder to wake up in the mornings.

Here are some tips from Time-Life Books on how to cope.

- ▶ Take a walk at lunchtime when the sun is high.
- ▶ Exercise regularly.
- ▶ Take a winter vacation to somewhere sunny.
- ▶ Use a light box, light visor, or lamp with increased lumination in your office and at home.

washing their hands after they use the toilet.

Under the system—made by New Jersey-based Net/Tech—casino employees are required to wear battery-powered smart badges, which communicate with bathroom sensors connected to a computer in a manager's office. The badges beep periodically to remind workers to wash their hands. The system costs \$3,600 to buy and \$90 a month to rent.

If an employee doesn't use a soap dispenser or stand for a required period of time in front of a sink with the water running, the computer records an infraction. In some instances, the employee's badge will flash.

Representatives of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Local 54 say they worry that Hygiene Guard will be used to punish workers who linger too long in the bathrooms or who make too many trips there.

"They're starting with these little badges. The next thing, they're using video cameras," says an assistant to the union president. "Some people feel violated. It's an insult."

Net/Tech defends use of the device, pointing to recent news items about E-coli and other illnesses being spread by bacteria from food handlers.

The next location expected to use Hygiene Guard is a business located in Flushing, New York. (Sorry, we couldn't resist.)

RUNNING HOT AND COLD

Office temperature is the most-frequent complaint of workers, according to the International Facility Management Association, Houston. The number 1 gripe is that the office is too hot. Number 2 is that it's too cold.

Here are the remaining top 10 complaints:

3. not enough conference rooms
4. poor janitorial service
5. not enough storage or filing space in workstations
6. computer problems
7. poor air quality (too stuffy)
8. inadequate parking
9. no privacy in work areas
10. offensive smoke from smokers outside of the building.

TOP-10 WORST JOBS

The *Washington Post* recently interviewed people to find the worst job in Washington. Here are the winners...uh, losers. Whatever.

10. Carolyn, a postal worker, sits at an elevated chair with a conveyor belt in front of her sorting through millions of pieces of mail a day, one every 1.4 seconds. For five hours every night until midnight, she keys in the correct three-digit code that sends oversized mail items to their proper destinations. She interrupts that task with periodic half-hours of stacking mail so that she won't get repetitive-stress syndrome. She also gets five-minute breaks and a half-hour at 8 p.m. for "lunch." But Carolyn is not complaining. In fact, she loves her job. She makes almost \$38,000 a year, gets five weeks of paid vacation, and full medical coverage.

9. Bushra waits for a living. As an employee of a passport and visa expeditor, he is, in effect, a professional line-stander, though his title is visa consultant. He stands in line for people to renew their visas, passports, drivers' licenses, and other documents. He likes it because, he says, he gets to meet a lot of interesting people.

8. Bob vacuums human waste out of unflushable toilets. Enough said.

7. Phil works on power lines with enough voltage to zap him to kingdom come in an instant. He says that he tries to think about something else while he's working but it's always "there." What really gets him is when

COLOR ME SMART

If your boss is a man, wear a lot of blue to the office—that says you're brainy, according to color expert Brian Whelan in *In Style* magazine. If your boss is a woman, wear a lot of red. That says you can take the heat. Green conveys self-assurance.

he's trying to free downed, dangerous power lines during a storm and a tree owner will rush out of his house and start yelling at him not to trim too many branches.

6. Mary euthanizes animals at the Washington Humane Society. An animal lover, Mary, wishes more people would take advantage of the shelter's discount spaying and neutering program.

5. Patricia is a medical examiner technician. She picks up dead bodies found around the city and delivers them to the morgue, tags their toes, and helps perform autopsies—for \$23,000 a year. A recent "find" was a 620-pound man who took up the whole four-stretcher van. Patricia thinks that her work is fascinating—the miracle of the human body and the mystery of death—but is reluctant to tell strangers what she does.

4. Carlos works in Union Station as a gyro slicer. By the end of his shift, he is soaked with sweat after having to stand over the hot meat. He wants to become a chef and tries to be creative when stuffing people's pitas. Recently, a girl he was seeing was forbidden by her parents to go out with him because they didn't want her dating a fast-food worker.

3. For 13 years, Larry has listened to angry people who just had their cars towed call him an S.O.B. and other names. Larry's the guy you pay the \$75 fee to so you can get back your car. By the time people get to the towing lot in a not-very-convenient location, they're pretty mad and have

to yell at someone. That's Larry. Sometimes, he has had to have people restrained by the lot's security guards. Still, says Larry, only about two out of 10 people "go ballistic."

Larry also takes calls from people wanting cars towed because they are blocking their driveways. Larry remembers fondly one blustery, snowy day that he stopped to help one of his tow trucks remove a car illegally parked during rush hour and the owner, a woman, came running out of her house wearing only a thin nightgown, which blew up over her head. Says Larry, "It was so...vivid."

2. Douglas compares his former job to "white-collar boot camp." Now a law student, he was a legislative assistant (read: flunky) to a particularly demanding senator—a position that Doug says involved mainly getting yelled at. The senator delivered diatribes at Doug in front of everyone from ambassadors to his mother. Doug remembers driving the senator's car once and accidentally breaking the radio antenna. The senator asked, "Did you mean to do it?"

Says Doug, "I can work for anyone now. It was great training for life." (The *Post* panel of interviewers chose this as the worst job in Washington.)

And our vote for number **1.** Brian works in a windowless, fluorescent-lit room in the basement of the D.C. Superior Court building, collecting urine samples for drug testing. Brian has to watch the actual giving of the sample, up close and personal, to make sure it's coming from the genuine source. He has had people bring in bags of someone else's fluids to fake it.

God bless these workers one and all.

Have a nice day!

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Send your true tales from the workplace and other humorous items to worklife@astd.org or to **Haidee Allerton**, Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22313.