The Guide
A theatergoer's resource

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 The Receptionist
 By Adam Bock
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*Note – A thorough synopsis of this play would be more than just a spoiler, so we have chosen to give you teaser blurb instead.

“Northeast Office.” Every day, clients who call in can expect to hear Beverly Wilkins greeting them on the other end of the telephone. When she is not trying to appease disgruntled callers she is dealing with wayward adventures of friends and office drama. Nothing at the office ever seems to change. Until today.

Above: Sharonlee McLean in The Receptionist. Photo by Owen Carey.
Adam Bock’s plays include *The Receptionist* (MTC, Trinity Rep, Studio Theater, Outer Critics nom.) *The Drunken City* (Playwrights’ Horizons, Outer Critics nom), *The Thugs* (SoHo Rep, PCS, OBIE Award), *Swimming in the Shallows* (Second Stage, Shotgun Players, 3 BATCC Awards, Clader Award), *Five Flights* (Encore Theater, Rattlestick, Glickman Award), *The Typographer’s Dream* (Encore Theater), *The Shaker Chair, Three Guys and a Brenda* (Heideman Award) and *We Have Always Lived in a Castle*, a musical with Todd Almond. His plays have been commissioned, developed and produced in NYC by Playwrights Horizons, Second Stage, SoHo Rep, Primary Stages, The Vineyard, Rattlestick, Clubbed Thumb, and regionally at the O’Neill, the Humana Festival, Yale Rep, and in San Francisco, Berkeley, LA, Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake, Montreal, Toronto, London, and Edinburgh, among others. He is the resident playwright at Encore Theater, a Shotgun Players artistic associate, and a New Dramatist member playwright. He is currently writing a screenplay for Scott Rudin/Miramax. His play *The Thugs* was part of the 2005 JAW festival and in March of 2007, it enjoyed a late-night run in the Gerding Theater Studio winning three Portland Drammy Awards.
Selections from an article by Ben Mathis-Lilley in NY Magazine

In theory, the office is a place where goals are fulfilled and prosperity generated. In practice, as evidenced in the following stories gathered from interviews with office-bound laborers in a range of industries, it’s a fertile breeding ground for threats to livelihood and sanity. And while the obvious response to many of the admittedly extreme situations described below would be to quit as soon as possible (which is something that several of our sources did, in fact, do), the issues raised can help illuminate situations in which resolution is not so easy to find. Read on for advice on how to use common sense, good manners, and the occasional deployment of well-intentioned deceit to make bitchy, passive-aggressive e-mail exchanges a thing of the past.

1. **Curing a Cubicle Headache.**

**Problem**

“We have this loud talker. It’s unbearable. If he’s in the room and he’s talking, you can’t get anything done. We’ve said things, but he just thinks it’s a joke. Now if you want to get someone’s attention, you have to IM them, because everyone bought noise-reduction headphones.”

**Solution**

Direct confrontation of a cubicle scourge can lead to resentment and retaliatory charges of hypocrisy. Or, as this example indicates, it can lead to nothing at all. To convey the seriousness of the issue without incurring a permanent grudge, consider staging a scene in which you take advantage of the open office plan by aggressively chastising a co-conspirator for his own loudness—making sure the encounter takes place in front of the nemesis and ends with your fellow actor apologizing abjectly for being so insensitive to co-workers.

2. **Giving Instructions to Idiots.**

**Problem**

“We have an assistant who makes millions of errors at a time. Once she was given a list of things to buy and the list had a typo on it. She said, ‘I have been looking in all the office catalogues and I can’t find anything called a calthaculator.’ Another time she was like, ‘The fax number you gave me didn’t work, so I randomly added a 123 at the beginning and it went through.’ ”

**Solution**

At least she didn’t buy 123 calthaculators! But seriously, folks. The best way to deal with rank incompetence is to pretend you’re correcting a simple misunderstanding, which will help the transgressor save face while you raise the issue and add some sort of double-checking redundancy system (e.g., personally signing off on every fax cover sheet). Micromanagement is most effectively passed off as mere adherence to the tiresome requirements of faceless management meddlers. “I’m just a functionary in an inefficient bureaucracy” is one of the most eminently believable excuses for any action, no matter how absurd, in office life.

3. **Getting into the Club.**

**Problem**

“A guy can ask any junior guy out to drink, which helps them advance. But no man wants to seem like they’re hitting on someone, so they won’t ask a woman out to lunch alone, or a drink. They don’t form a bond with junior-level women because they don’t see us as little versions of them. I don’t remind them of themselves when they started, so I don’t get that mentorly treatment.”

**Solution**

To enhance her chances of getting to the top without having to sleep her way up, the enterprising young woman should consider developing an interest in the hobby that reeks of camaraderie, yet is scientifically proved to reduce potency and libido: golf.

4. **Bringing a Deadweight Up to Speed.**

**Problem**

“Once when I was in school I was in a meeting with a few other summer associates getting an assignment from a more-senior member of the firm. During the meeting, one of the people I was working with on the project ate two bags of Cheetos and covered all the documents in orange Cheetos fingerprints. I think she was mentally unbalanced.”

**Solution**

Unfortunately, albatross collaborators don’t always oblige your anxiety by having flaws or Cheetos habits so obvious that no one could possibly hold you responsible. If simply doing their job for them and begging to never be assigned to work with them again isn’t feasible, you’ll have to take one for the team—from yourself. Return from a meeting with your supervisor in a conspicuously downbeat mood, and then explain it by grimly—yet collegially—describing how badly you just got chewed out, and what serious trouble you’ll be in if everyone doesn’t start working harder.

**Codes of Conduct**

Office horror stories and how not to become the star of one
Sharonlee McLean and Laura Faye Smith in The Receptionist. Photo by Owen Carey.

Chris Harder and Bob M. Thomas in The Receptionist. Photo by Owen Carey.
The Night Stalker

Behavioral trait: Considers self an ace at office banter; in reality, spreads awkward pauses and inappropriate comments the way Johnny Appleseed spread apples. Like a wolf, his sudden approach toward your cubicle chills the blood.

How to eradicate the menace: Starve him with lengthy anecdotes about people he doesn’t know. Change the names of your characters mid-story just to be an ass.

The Endangered Species

Behavioral trait: Petulance that must be tolerated because the perpetrator possesses a unique skill. Akin to owls around which entire forests must be maintained.

How to eradicate the menace: Put your trust in the market. A replacement will come along soon enough, offering what economists call “the marginal value of not being an utter tool.”
**The Beast**

*Behavioral trait:* Constantly getting his way by hanging the threat of a prima donna tirade over everyone else’s head, like a crocodile who gets the entire water hole by eating all the monkeys and antelope trying to get a drink.

*How to eradicate the menace:* Defeating an office monster head-to-head is possible, but might require you to act despicably yourself—after all, the person who kills crocodiles is a poacher.

**The Whimperer**

*Behavioral trait:* Acting continually put-upon but never explaining why, like a neighbor’s dog that incessantly expresses its displeasure at your mere presence.

*How to eradicate the menace:* Can eventually be turned into an ally with the right combination of patience, kindness, and food-related bribery.

**The Nuisance**

*Behavioral trait:* Constant, public naysaying of statements and positions you hadn’t even realized anyone could find objectionable. Reminiscent of the mouse that continues to show up despite your most conscientious efforts to maintain an environment free from mouse nutrients.

*How to eradicate the menace:* Poison.
Coordinate several people to help you play this prank. Have them take turns throughout the day calling the victim and asking for “Larry.” At the end of the day, have someone make the final call and say “This is Larry. Do you have any messages for me?”

Tie a piece of cord under the victim’s office chair to hold down the lever that adjusts the chair height. (When you sit on the chair it will slide all the way down, but as soon as you stand up the chair will rise all the way up.) All the ups and downs will drive the victim crazy.

Go into the victim’s office and locate every pencil and pen in their desk. Paint the tips with clear nail polish. When they try to write, none of them will work. (After the prank is revealed, the nail polish can be removed by dipping the pens and pencils in polish remover.)

Take about 20 (or more) paper or plastic cups, place them on the victim’s desk and fill them with water. Then take a stapler and staple them all together. You can also put the cups on the floor blocking their door, or just about anywhere.

Find a small rubber ducky, remove the jug from the office water cooler, and squeeze the duck inside. Replace the jug and wait for the fun!

This prank is for a co-worker who has an office with a glass window in the door. Find a box slightly bigger than the window, cut off one end and tape it to the door around the window (with the open end at the top). Fill the box with empty cans, balloons, packing peanuts, or other item of your choice. When your victim looks in the window it will look like the entire room is filled! For added effect, put a chair or something behind the door to make it hard to open.
Where did the first coffee mugs come from and who invented them? To fully understand, we must go back to the origin of coffee. Most people may be shocked to discover that coffee has been around since the 11th century. In the ninth century, the Ethiopians were the first experts to cultivate coffee. Later, when the Arab world started to expand their horizons, they eventually came across Ethiopia and had their first contact with coffee. It was an experience that left an enduring taste in their mouths, and the Arab world developed many different brands of coffee from light tasting Nescafe, to the thick consistency and strong taste of Turkish coffee.

The English word “coffee” began developed from from the Italian “café”, which itself was an evolution of the Turkish word “kahve.” However, we still have not reached the true origin. The original word for coffee, qahwar al-bun, is Arabic and means “wine of the bean”. Now that we know a little bit more about the history of coffee, we can turn to the history of the coffee mug.

Archaeologists have found old bones carved from whales that were used for drinking dating back to the Stone Age. From there we can make a giant leap to the first coffee shop built in modern recorded history in 1475. This shop in Constantinople would have used coffee mugs made of wood. Now take a giant leap to present day mugs’ functionality and durability. Mugs are a staple in almost every household and a whole industry has been built around them. You can get a mug with your dog’s picture on it. You can get a mug in the shape of your favorite athletic ball. You can get a mug in the shape of Elvis. Now take a giant leap into the future and picture mugs that keep coffee at a specific temperature indefinitely. Or a virtual coffee mug!!

No means of communication has revolutionized the daily lives of ordinary people more than the telephone. The actual history of the telephone is a subject of complex dispute. The controversy began with the success of the invention and continues today. Some of the inventors credited with inventing the telephone include Antonio Meucci, Philip Reis, Elisha Gray and Alexander Graham Bell. Bell’s experiments with his assistant Thomas Watson finally proved successful on March 10, 1876, when the first complete sentence was transmitted: “Watson, come here; I want you.”.
Original Sources and Links to Further Research

http://aprilfoolzone.com/office.htm
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