

Embarrassed bosses harass whistle blowers

Whistle blowers — those courageous government employees who risk their jobs exposing corruption and incompetence in the bureaucracy — are routinely subjected to retaliatory harassment by the bosses they have embarrassed.

But top-grade bureaucrats didn't get where they are without learning how to cover up a backstabbing — or at least to wipe off the fingerprints.

Jack Anderson & Joseph Spear

It's rare indeed when one of these experts gets caught with stiletto in hand — and his initials engraved on the handle.

This is another chapter in the saga of John Hnatio, a security specialist in the Department of Energy who ran into trouble for trying to do his job: seeing to it that the agency's nuclear-weapon plants are safe from potential saboteurs and thieves.

We have already reported how he was reprimanded and nearly lost his job for telling a congressional investigator that his superiors had lied when they said plants were secure.

Hnatio's story had a reasonably happy ending. After the Energy Department's inspector general had cleared him of impropriety and Rep. John Dingle, D-Mich., had begun to show a personal interest, the reprimand was expunged and Hnatio got an apology.

Now we've learned that Hnatio's harassment had started even before he talked to the congressional investigator. Our associates John Dillon and Indy Badhwar have obtained an internal Energy Department document that shows Hnatio's boss was out to

get him as soon as he realized that the security specialist might be troublesome.

Alerted by a memo in which Hnatio expressed differences of opinion on security assessments and asked for a transfer, his supervisor, Robert O'Brien, asked an underling to find a way to get rid of Hnatio.

The employee who was assigned the chore was apparently experienced in bureaucratic self-protection. She put O'Brien's instructions down in writing:

"O'Brien requested that I check with personnel to see if we could fire above-named employee (Hnatio)," her memo stated. She then proceeded to lay out the "steps that can be taken."

There were two options, according to the memo. One was to "reassign him as requested."

The other was more sinister. "If you want to fire him — start documenting records. Establish good performance standards. If he is rated unacceptable, then he can be reassigned, downgraded, etc. If he continues to fail to follow instructions (this) can lead to dismissal — after warnings, reprimands, etc."

The memo concluded with the warning that the "process could take six to eight months." Hnatio's superiors apparently were willing to invest the time.

Hnatio's personnel jacket began to bulge after the memo was written — and it wasn't with commendations. By the time the file contained a reprimand and a "warning letter," he had gone to the inspector general and won his exoneration.

Footnote: O'Brien wrote Hnatio that the incriminating memo was "totally out of context," and insisted he had "never taken any action to fire you." Dingle plans to look into the matter further.

Blunder of the week: Diet watchers are well aware that eggs are among the foods with the highest concentration of cholesterol.

They have also been linked to atherosclerosis, a major cause of heart attacks.

Physicians across the country were therefore surprised to receive a free egg cookbook recently from a company that specializes in the manufacture of drugs that combat heart disease. The book, which contained 250 artery-clogging egg recipes, was sent by CIBA Pharmaceutical Co.

"I thought it was a sick joke," said one physician.

Audrey Kriegman, CIBA's director of medical services, acknowledged that the cookbook mailing was in bad taste. She explained that the book's egg theme was designed to remind the doctors of an earlier CIBA advertisement that depicted a new product emerging from an egg.

Strictly personal: We receive hundreds of letters each week and cannot possibly answer them all. But here are our responses to concerns raised by two readers:

— What happens to Nazi war criminals that are found in the United States?

They are supposed to be deported, but unless a country willingly offers sanctuary, they are allowed to stay in this country.

It is the Justice Department's responsibility to track down and deport ex-Nazis, who covered up their bloody past when they emigrated after World War II.

It is the State Department's job to find countries that will take in the deportees — but the diplomats sometimes fall down on the job. Our sources say the State Department makes a cursory

attempt to find a country that will accept former Nazis, but makes no effort to persuade the reluctant countries.

— Is the Reagan administration's Central American policy winning any friends for the United States?

Consider this: In El Salvador a few months ago, the outgoing

commander of government troops in one embattled province created a new unit to fight left-wing guerrillas. He called it the "Ronald Reagan Battalion." And a combat outfit of the anti-government forces in Nicaragua is called the "Jeane Kirkpatrick Task Force."

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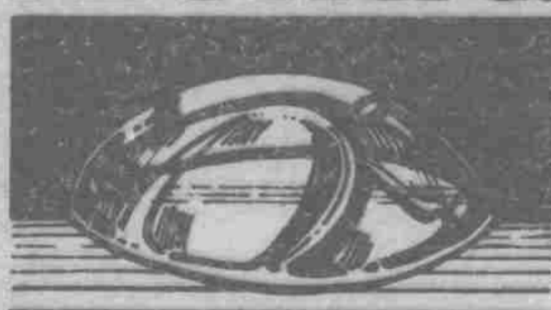


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