

This was it. I'd had enough. The final straw. It was the end of my short career as a telemarketer. At the end of the day, I'd be sharing some choice words with the manager to make it clear how I felt. I angrily gathered my few possessions in a cardboard box. The photo of me and my sister, the various pens I'd brought in, and the three-legged pig I had for good luck. I even decided to take the stapler; with all of the money that the company was saving by paying minimum wage, it could surely afford a new one. I felt as if I was throwing up a symbolic middle finger to the management by taking the object that I had often been reminded not to forget to use. And when I had thought about using the stapler, it had not been on order forms, but rather on the managers themselves.

I stared across the office space at my cube mate Eugene. His beaklike nose stood out against the blown-up copy of the telemarketing script that we were all forced to memorize. While I called him my cube mate, I hardly knew the guy because of his desire to stay active during the day. It was strange that he had decided to get a job that entailed sitting by the phone for hours. He always paced back and forth with his headset on, speaking in a quiet and terse manner. Eugene claimed that he liked to keep moving so that he wouldn't get fat. I had always thought he was a bit off, as the man was no more than stick and bone. The only way he could possibly lose more weight would be to lop off his long blond ponytail or shave his beard.

The man reminded me of a bird of prey. His eyes stood out like those of an owl from behind his black glasses. When he ate, he pecked at his meals with his long-nailed hands. He moved around the office with great speed, silently gliding from place to place. Many of my coworkers were entertained by his odd ways and didn't mind his idiosyncratic behavior. The management loved him because he always came into work, kept his head down, and got the job done.

I hated Eugene. He was the only one that management allowed to leave his desk during calls because they knew he would not cause trouble. He was the only one who didn't treat the job like a joke. I, along with each of my coworkers, was just trying to make ends meet while looking for a good job straight out of college. He never joined in our hourly gripe sessions around the water cooler. Eugene, who was a few years my senior, didn't have a passion for the toner or other printer supplies that we were pushing

onto the customers, yet he knew what he was doing and completed tasks without complaint. I couldn't understand how he seemed to have accepted his position as a telemarketer. At parties, I had made a habit of shying away from questions about my job.

What bothered me the most about Eugene was his calm manner. Often, when I would vehemently curse at the computer under my breath, Eugene would offer unsolicited advice. While his suggestions were always right, he never addressed me when he gave it. He muttered it as if to no one in particular. I wouldn't even mind if I had met with a snarky remark or sarcastic comment, but his placid tone just rubbed me the wrong way. This refusal to fully interact with me underlined all of my problems with Eugene. I couldn't understand how he could behave that way.

Just then an intriguing thought struck me. Eugene was regarded as the best salesman in the office, yet I had never heard him close a deal. I hopped over to Eugene's desk. Pushing my long brown hair behind my ear, I picked up the receiver to listen in on his conversation. Trying hard not to breathe heavily, I sat quietly.

"And you're sure this is foolproof?" That was Eugene. "I just can't have anyone finding out about this."

"Believe me, the plan is perfect," said a cool sounding female voice.

"Alright, if you're sure," replied Eugene. I couldn't gage anything by looking at him in the office. His owl-like face looked composed as always. I, however, could not contain my excitement. I knew he couldn't be the perfectly mild employee that he tried to portray. Scandal was in the air. I would make my fiery exit from the company by bringing him down. I would expose him for whatever he was planning. No longer would he be viewed as the perfect employee.

I decided not to quit in my excitement. This opportunity was too good to pass up. I sat alone in my small apartment, smiling at the thought of Eugene's face when I revealed his secret to the whole office. I had called the number he had talked to earlier and had figured out what he was doing. The jig was up. It would cause such a scene, the very thing that I knew Eugene would hate. I let out a small cackle. Eugene had

bothered me with his behavior for too long. His time was up. I would now be able to return the favor.

My foot tapped incessantly as I sat at my desk early in the morning. I was waiting for the right time to bring about Eugene's demise. The managers hadn't come into work yet, so I couldn't enact my big reveal just yet. While I was just mulling about at my desk, Eugene was already up and making calls. It was common practice for all of the office employees to relax while the manager wasn't in. All of the employees, that is, apart from Eugene. He always made sure that his list of phone numbers was done, rain or shine. And apparently, he was able to complete his list on top of the extra phone calls that he made during the day.

He won't be finishing his list today, I thought. He'll be gone long before five o'clock.

The rotund belly of the manager came into view as he pulled open the door to the office. He gave a curt nod to the employees, who returned it with a few miserable greetings. He walked into his office, where he stayed for a few minutes, setting up his work.

I began to rise out of my seat. The manager was about to do his morning check-in. This was the opportunity I had been waiting for. I walked towards the water cooler, where I knew the manager would make his first stop. As the manager approached I began my destruction of Eugene.

"I have an announcement," I said, voice raised. My coworkers' heads perked up at the sound of something to distract them from their tedious work. The manager looked over at me, but returned to pouring himself a glass of water.

"It has come to my attention, that some of my coworkers have been using company time to make personal phone calls," I said, pausing on each word and stressing "personal". I was holding the attention of everyone in the office. Everyone except Eugene, who was still trying to complete his work. The manager was even looking at me now and didn't seem to care that his glass was now overflowing. This was my big moment. I would immediately become an office legend. Tales would be

told in telemarketing offices everywhere of the day that Francine Waters proved that no one's job is safe and that no telemarketer is infallible.

"I can now exclusively reveal that our very own Eugene has been using the company line to make personal calls." I had saved the best and juiciest information for last. "And these personal calls were made to a drug trial clinic," I grinned. "I'm sorry to say that Eugene has a terrible habit of abusing dangerous pharmaceuticals not yet ready for the market."

The manager let out a gasp, making my smile grow even wider. He whirled around to face Eugene, whose hand was on his headset as he ended his call.

"Eugene," the manager growled in an unmistakably accusatory tone. "Is this true?" Eugene took off the headset and placed it on a nearby table. He waddled over to the water cooler where I stood triumphantly next to the manager.

"Sir, I am so sorry," Eugene said with his hands held up in front of him. "You see, it's just that my mother's health hasn't been great lately. I've taken her to see all sorts of doctors, but nobody can tell me what it is. I've been trying everything, even these questionable drugs that are still in trials just to see if they make a difference."

The manager's face lightened. He was by no means a kind man, yet he rushed over and embraced Eugene in a full on sympathetic hug. Unbelievable. This was the first nice thing I had ever seen him do. I almost spat out of disgust.

"And I'm sorry about using the company line," Eugene added. "I would have called on my own time, but I had to give up my phone service in order to pay for some of her treatments."

"Eugene, there must be something we can do. Perhaps we could start a fund?" he offered. The other coworkers mumbled in agreement as they pulled out their wallets.

Meanwhile, I had blown a fuse. This was supposed to be my moment, my glorious dethroning of Eugene. I was supposed to rid the office of the most irritating man I had ever met in my life. But here I stood, watching the manager hold the very man I despised. Eugene and his goddamn mother had stolen my thunder. Everyone seemed to care about this stupid sob story that he was telling. I had become irrelevant in the very moment I expected to be crowned and victorious. I had to do something to bring the attention back onto myself.

"I QUIT!" I exclaim, silencing the people who had been gathering around Eugene and the manager with cash in their outstretched hands. "I never even liked this dump," I continue. My outburst has no effect. The workers continued to swarm around Eugene, giving him their sympathy. I grabbed the box I had prepared the day before and stormed out, defeated.

The local news channel caught wind of Eugene's story. He soon became the talk of the town. There was a walkathon to raise money for research on his mother's illness. Eugene received an unheard of promotion for his excellent work for the company, another attempt to help him raise more money.

On the other hand, my job search proved to be fruitless. I could find nothing that paid more than my job at the telemarketing office. After pleading with the manager, I was able to regain my position at the company. I was even able to regain my old cubicle. I had to keep to myself to avoid the muttering of other staff members. I wanted to avoid all their death stares and gossip. Shortly after I began to work again, a younger man filled the cubicle recently vacated by Eugene. On his first day, he got into a swearing fit when he couldn't figure out how to work the computer.

"Just hit control and click," I muttered. I was certain that the new employee had been told the stories about me, and I was too embarrassed to show him my face. My new tactic for dealing with my coworkers was to quietly say what I needed to without speaking directly to them.

"Er... thanks," the new guy said. We sat in silence.