

## CLEAN THE PHONES

By James Collins

In 1958, I joined a very high tech, innovative electronics firm specializing in electronic warfare. All of the technologies were new and the company considered every concept or idea. As a result, the majority of the engineers were out of school less than five years. Management viewed that they had not been stylized or rigid in their thinking as result of their experience or their previous management. Unfortunately, this resulted in a high-energy group of young males who are always looking for a good laugh or an exciting activity.

One of the secretaries to a group leader in the office was a lovely 18-year-old, named Susie, who was always trying to help but was not the brightest bulb on the tree. A group of three or four of the young immature engineers decided to make Susie a target of a mini plot. She was always coming to them with questions as to what very basic words meant, and from conversation indicated that she had little or no knowledge of any technical activity. This became the basis of the plot.

Susie received a telephone call from a person presenting themselves as a technician in the telephone company. His presentation sounded like this.

"Is this Ms. Susie Smith, the senior secretary in the electronic warfare department at AIL? And are you the person to contact for a very important task which will have great savings to your company?" (Of course, she was not a senior secretary which she was not about to admit that.) I am Tim Jones from the telephone company and we have a special assignment from your company to clean up the phone lines this weekend to improve your communication. My boss received your name as a key contact point.

"Yes, this is Susie Smith and I am very glad to help if I'm able. What is this task about?"

"Well, we're scheduled to clean out the telephone lines this weekend by blowing compressed air through the wires and it may result in an awful lot of dirt being on the floor all over your area. Last month we notified two secretaries in other companies who agreed to help us. However, they forgot and the following Monday, when the office was full of dirt they were fired. As the most competent secretary in the office, we were hoping you could help us and then we will notify your management after the event to look out and see how clean the office is. The task is very simple one. All you have to do is take some brown paper bags, which we will supply, and rubber bands which we will also supply and put one on each end of each phone and put the phone back in the cradle so no sound is made. When we blow out the phone lines, the paper bags will capture all the dust. Then when you pull the bags off, the rubber bands automatically seal the dirt in the bags and you can just drop them in the trashcan. Are you willing to handle this little task for us?"

"Certainly, when will this happen and when will I get the bags and the rubber bands?"

"Since were going to do the cleaning on Saturday, we will deliver the paper bags and the rubber bands to you on Friday. Now remember, you have to keep this secret because we are doing this as a special

favor for your company. If the other companies in the area hear about it, they are going to want their cleaning done right away. My boss will be very angry that the favor, he is offering your company, leaked out and I would be in big trouble."

"I understand and I have secret clearance so anything I learn that is secret will not be told to any one at all."

"Thank you Susie, I'll come over and meet you on Friday and personally drop off the brown paper bags and the rubber bands. I am looking forward to meeting you. Have a nice day."

True to her promise, Susie said never said a word to anybody about her new task.

On Friday, the plotters watch Susie carefully and after she went out to lunch. One of them put a stack of brown paper lunch bags and a box full of small rubber bands on her desk with a brief note that said *I was here; you were at lunch. Sorry we missed you; See you next week, Tim Jones*. The plotters all told Susie that a man wearing a telephone company uniform came looking for her while she was out at lunch and left a message. Susie was sorry she missed Tim, but never said a word about her task.

At four o'clock Susie started on her task. She first went into the two empty offices of the people were on travel, put on the rubber bands and the paper bags and continued on her merry way. The group watched her every move. When Susie knocked on her boss's door, the laughter started. Susie entered, left the door open, walked over to the desk, picked up the phone and put on the first bag and rubber band. At this point, her boss's voice could be heard, "Susie, what on earth you doing to my phone?"

"I'm putting bags over the mouthpiece so that when the phone company blows out the line with compressed air tonight there won't be dirt all over your desk."

"Susie, who told you to do this?"

"Tim Jones of the telephone company called me and told me that our company wanted them to blow out the phone lines with compressed air so that we can have better communications. He even came to the office this afternoon and dropped off the bags and the rubber bands."

"Susie, did you see him personally?"

"No, Danny, Tom and Casey told me he stopped in and left a note."

"Susie, take the paper bags off the phone and any other phones that you worked on and send Danny Tom and Casey into my office. I think I know where the problem came from."

The manager chastised the engineers, but their contribution to the systems was so valuable nobody got a bad mark.

THE END