

A Flask of Fine Arcturan

C. C. Macapp

Date: April 29, 2017.

From: President.

To: Vice Presidents, Regional Managers.

Subject: Loose handling of information.

The Chairman of the Board has asked me to call to your attention a disturbing laxity in the handling of proprietary Company information. There has been too much casual discussion of Company plans, expenditures, technical processes and formulas. The Chairman and the rest of the Board were quite disturbed that a competitive distiller was able to learn in advance of publication details of our newest advertising campaign based on the virtues of our splendid new hardwood whiskey bottles. This leak of information will force us to spend additional millions of dollars educating the public to the fact that only our particular wooden container, with its special wood and unique interior design, confers the benefits described.

We of course want to maintain and promote interdepartmental co-operation and smooth working relationships, but it is considered desirable that there be less fraternization between personnel of different departments. Naturally this will have to be approached with tact and subtlety.

In particular, Technical personnel must stop casually revealing details of secret processes and materials to Sales personnel. Accounting and Sales must stop discussing selling prices, markups, salaries, commissions, etc, with Production and with Research. And Purchasing must stop revealing potential or actual fluctuations in raw material markets, to Sales and Production. This constant hubbub of gossip creates anxieties and dissatisfactions and is definitely inimical to the best interests of Interstellar Distilleries, Inc.

The Chairman and I want you to give this your personal attention and to enlist tactfully the co-operation of your department heads and managers.

Cordially,

Ellingsworth J. Pough, President.

Date: May 12, 2017.

From: Hdqtrs. Purchasing.

To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

Subject: Requisition for Pencils.

No. V-744-6-2129.

No doubt subject requisition become garbled in the sub-space transmission. As received, it calls for 500,000 lead pencils, medium soft, cedar, yellow lacquered, with red rubber erasers. How many new pencils did you actually want?

I. Haggel.

Date: May 14, 2017.

From: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

To: Hdqtrs. Purchasing.

Subject: Requisition for pencils.

Half a million was right. However, under separate cover I am entering an additional requisition for another half million, along with ten dozen pencil sharpeners, you know, the kind you fasten on the wall. Make sure they're good quality so they won't wear out. It doesn't matter what color the sharpeners are, but make sure the pencils are exactly as requisitioned, and that the whole shipment gets here by the date specified.

Otto Stehdenbed,

Prod. Mgr.

Date: May 17, 2017.

From Hdqtrs. Purchasing.

To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

Subject: Pencils.

We are still not sure we have the figures right, and if we do, we do not think we can approve the requisition. What possible use could you have for that many pencils and sharpeners?

I. Haggel.

Date: May 19, 2017.

From: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

To: Hdqtrs. Purchasing, Att'n I. Haggel.

Subject: Delayed requisition, and obstructionist tactics.

If you can't okay the pencils yourself, get the Old Man to do it, and while you're talking to him inform him that the first month's quota of wooden bottles won't be met because you're diddling around with my requisitions. Also ask him to explain to you why my reason for wanting the pencils is none of your damned business. As for the sharpeners, I want them to sharpen the pencils with.

O. Stehdenbed.

Date: May 20, 2017.

From: Shipping Dept., Earth.

To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

Subject: Rush shipment. ON 2017-V-939S2.

We are shipping this morning, special express, your order for one million pencils and ten dozen sharpeners. It is costing the Company seventeen thousand dollars extra to get these to you by the date demanded. If you had taken the trouble to enter your order a few days earlier, we could have shipped by regular freight.

E. O. Hippus, Shipping Clerk.

Date: May 25, 2017.

From: Director of Research

To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

Subject: Request for Development of New Process. Refer NP D No. V-2016-37.

I have your memorandum inquiring as to progress on subject project.

It has been less than thirteen months since you entered this request. Considerable laboratory time has been expended on this project, and a number of promising leads developed. However, press of other work (you yourself have several other requests in) coupled with personnel shortages and a limited budget, have delayed the project. Would you like us to assign it an "A" priority, or perhaps a "B"?

This project deals with a process for hollowing out wooden blocks, leaving a rather complex inner surface. It is regrettable that you find it necessary to be so uninformative as to the process you are currently using. (We presume that this is something you already have in production.) It would help immeasurably if you could at least inform us as to the finished product involved. We can only conjecture from the incomplete specifications you supplied that it is some kind of a food container. If so, you should so advise us so that we may start getting clearance from the Federal and Interstellar Food and Drug Administrations. We are sure you are well acquainted with this Company's liabilities in regard to edible products.

We find that we have used up all the sample blocks of wood you sent us. Since you specify that no other wood is satisfactory, could you send us another supply?

I. Ben Dopenoff, Ph. D Director of Research.

Date: May 28, 2017.

From: Director of Sales.

To: President.

Subject: Wooden Bottles Program.

As you know, E. J., we are ready to hit the market with this thing. TV and Feely-Smelly space is all hired, and everything's ready to go, and it's unthinkable that we should fall on our faces now by not having the product ready on time.

I was asking Otto out on Arcturus when the shipment of bottles is coming in. Attached is a photostat of his reply, which seems to reflect a negative attitude. I know you'll grasp the seriousness of this at once, and will want to make your own inquiries.

Goodwin Grype.

Date: June 2, 2017.

From: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

To: President.

Subject: Goddam wooden bottles.

Yes boss they'll be there.

Otto.

Date: June 3, 2017.

From: Headquarters Accounting.

To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

Subject: Pencils and Sharpeners.

As you know, such items as office supplies must be accounted under Supervisory Overhead. You have erroneously reported a month's usage of pencils and sharpeners under Production Costs.

We are returning your Monthly Operating Report for May, 2017. Please file a Corrected

Report promptly so we can clear your books for May.

D. U. Plicate.

Date: June 6, 2017.

From: Special Field Representative. (Confidential).

To: President (personal).

Subject: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

E. J.: Otto acting oddly. You may have to replace him. I'll be in with a verbal report day after tomorrow.

Date: June 8, 2017.

From: President.

To: Production Manager, Arcturus V.

Subject: Arcturus operations.

Otto, what's going on? WHAT IN HELL'S A PENCILBURGER?

Date: June 8, 2017.

From: Vice President in charge of Efficiency Cost Examination. To: President.

Subject: Savings, office supplies.

E. J.: I'm rather proud of some savings we've been able to effect lately, and I'm sure you'll appreciate having one particularly substantial item called to your attention.

Some of our divisions have been using considerable numbers of lead pencils. Working with our suppliers, I was able to find a new experimental pencil, just coming into production,

which is nearly nine per cent cheaper in wholesale lots. Instead of being made from prime solid cedar, this new pencil has a composition moulded around the lead, made from ground waste wood with a synthetic glue binder. As I understand it, the saving results from the use of the the substitution of moulding for the old cutting and shaping processes.

We are always alert for opportunities to reduce costs and thus augment our profits, I think we can be forgiven a little pride when we are as successful as we have been in this case.

I.C. Abuck, Vice President.

Date: June 11, 2017.

From: Ex-Production Manager, Arcturus V.

To: President.

Subject: Pencilburgers.

Enclosed is my resignation, which I am completing while I'm still able to write.

First of all, let me inform you that your shipment of 250,000 wooden bottles will not arrive on schedule. They are all ready to go, but I think when you hear about them you won't want to waste shipping costs. We may as well leave them here.

Secondly, I'll explain about the pencilburgers. It's very simple. The only way to make the damned bottles is the way the original samples were made. (If I'd known how those were made, I'd never have come out here.) The dominant race on Arcturus V is a race of intelligent termites, about two inches long. That is, the individuals are two inches long. They produce and trade around the galaxy all sorts of carved wooden goods. They're very artistic, and good scientists too in their way. The wooden bottles they make have just the right chemistry, and some damned thing in the pattern of their inner surfaces, to give whiskey the mellowness and special boost we advertise.

As you may or may not know, we've been trying for a year to get Research off its fanny to develop some mechanical way of hollowing out the bottles, but they haven't come up with anything, so when the deadline got close I went ahead and contracted with the termites to have them do the work. We take a block of wood and shape it on the outside, then they eat their way in through the neck and shape it on the inside the way its supposed to be.

About four months ago I discovered that there's something about an ordinary lead pencil

from Earth that makes it a great delicacy here. We grind up a pencil, lead and all, except for the little brass part and the rubber eraser. Some of the termites like it without any rubber. Others like it with the rubber sliced or ground up and sprinkled on, like onion in a hamburger. We serve a pencilburger between two small slabs of ordinary local wood instead of a bun.

They don't give a damn about Terran money if they can get pencilburgers instead.

Now, I was very thorough in my requisitions and specified the exact kind of pencils I needed and all, but some jackass went ahead and shipped some new kind that seems to be made out of sawdust instead of good aromatic cedar. I was out in the hills supervising some lumbering when they came in, and no one found out what was happening until over a hundred thousand pencilburgers had been doled out to the termites.

I tell you, E. J., I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't seen it. There was something about those pencils that made the termites absolutely ribald. The word is too mild. Think of the worst drunk you've ever been on, or seen, and multiply it by ten and imagine it went on for seven or eight days.

The first day wasn't so bad. They did carve all sorts of pornographic pictures and mottos on all the wooden buildings, and put a lot of equipment out of commission. The second day they got into the files and ate up all the records. Ordinarily they don't care much for paper, but they were too drunk to care. The third day they attacked personnel. They weren't vicious; just playful. One of their favorite tricks was to eat their way quietly up through the seat of a wooden chair someone was sitting on, and —

But all that we could have stood. On the fourth day we discovered that they'd gotten into the insides of the bottles.

I don't know what the hell they did, but I can describe the results. If you take good whiskey and put it in one of those bottles, the following changes occur within one day:

1. The alcohol content drops to nil.
2. The color changes to sickening green.
3. The taste becomes awful. I can only describe it as tasting like vinegar in which spoiled salt herring have been soaked.

There were other things that happened, but I haven't time to describe them. Everything considered, we're all happy to come through it alive.

I personally am in hiding from the Termite government, with a price on my head. I am also avoiding my former human employees, who seem to blame me for the whole thing. One bunch even went around looking for a rope, but fortunately the drunken termites had chewed them all up.

I'm starting for the hills as soon as I mail this report. I'm taking two loaves of bread I managed to steal from the commissary, and ten of the original sample bottles that are still filled with the good whiskey. I also have in my knapsack a few thousand of the old cedar pencils, with which I hope, after things have cooled down a little, to propitiate the Termite authorities or a least bribe my way to the spaceport. I thought I might head out to the Lesser Magellanic Cloud, or somewhere.

You can apply my last month's salary against the whiskey.

Good-bye and good luck, Otto Stehdenbed.

Date: June 15, 2017.

From: President.

To: Vice Presidents, Regional Managers.

Subject: Intercompany communications.

Sometimes the stupidity of some of our employees approaches downright treason. I refer to the disastrous and completely unforgivable breakdown in interdepartmental co-ordination in the recent matter of handling requisitions for our former plant on Arcturus V.

How can we advance, or even stay in business, if our right hands do not know what our left hands are doing?

Of course we don't want to jeopardize the secrecy of any valuable proprietary Company formulas or processes, nor do we want plans, costs, remunerations, etc., bandied about carelessly. But I want each of you to . . .

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