

Vanguard Mail Operations

Kristen Gallagher

Below you will find an unpublished manuscript titled “Introduction to New Hires.” I’m not sure what the document is – maybe we can call it an unfinished pamphlet. It’s something my father had been tasked to write, but never finished, at a job he was fired from three days after he started it.

I found it in a box of writing my father left behind when he died. He was not a career writer, it was all unpublished except for one piece he got in the Philadelphia Inquirer about a vacation spoiled by a hurricane. The box also contained his unpublished novel involving voodoo, titled “Daddy’s Little Doll” (I never read it), his unpublished memoir which was also intended to be a takedown of the Catholic Church (I did read this, a combo of angry notes and attempts at beating the church at its own logic), and his various family eulogies (he wrote the eulogies for each of my mother’s deceased family members, which I found out later he’d basically forced on everyone as the self-appointed “family writer.”)

The only piece I was excited about was an unpublished manuscript titled “Introduction to New Hires.” I’m not sure what kind of document this is – maybe we can call it an unfinished pamphlet. I’d heard a lot about this one, from my mother. It’s something my father had been tasked to write, but never finished, at a job he was fired from three days after he started it.

The story around this manuscript was somewhat legendary, to me, because, on the one hand, it was the most banal piece of writing he’d ever done, and yet, on the other hand, his passionate attachment to its construction got him fired from the best job opportunity he’d ever had. He’d spent most of his working life as a night shift mailroom worker. And he hated it. Hated it. This pamphlet-writing job was his opportunity to get out, but he was fired before the end of his first week. As he told it, it was all because he fought for his vision that “Introduction to New Hires” should be written in a way that was unlike any other pamphlet that ever came before it.

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It all started when, after nearly twenty years working night shift in the mailroom of a major investment firm, someone from management in the Communications Department noticed that my father, Eddie, was a smart guy and a good communicator. The manager said, “we gotta get you out of this mailroom, I’ll find you something.” And soon enough, Eddie was hired to write “Introduction to New Hires.” For his entire life, Eddie had wanted to be recognized as a writer, “a published author” as he called it, but he never knew how to make it happen. With this hire into the Communications Department, he felt his time had finally come.

My mom took him suit shopping. They bought suits. She had them pressed. She ironed all his shirts. And like a good 1950s-era American Girl, she also ironed all his socks and underwear. At new job start time, he had a week’s worth of complete outfits ready to go.

On Day 1, he was given his task: write an introduction to new hires in the mail room. He was given earlier manuals to use as guides. He was instructed to keep it basic, informational.

He wrote his first draft. And he did it his way. He felt he had invented a new way, necessary, he said, because the examples he was given were too dry. He wanted to innovate, to really speak to these new hires, and make it entertaining to read.

He also refused to use a computer, and instead brought to work his old typewriter. He line-edited things by hand. He assured the manager he'd enter it into a computer when it was done.

The manager rejected the first draft, told him he was "getting too into it," that it was just a pamphlet. "Try not to take it too personally, Ed. It's just a generic introduction to the job, nothing to lose sleep over."

"No," Eddie insisted, "this is your introduction of the company to new hires! Don't you want them to think that you are the best, that we are the best, that you hire the best writers who take writing seriously, who innovate, I mean, isn't it right there in the name of the company? Vanguard! We tell everyone we are out ahead of the others, we do things differently here. Don't you want to show them that?" I knew my father's temper well. I could imagine him sitting across from his new boss, end-gaining off the edge of a cheap office chair, red-faced and getting belligerent about it. I could imagine his manager finding it all a bit odd.

"Just write the manual, Ed."

But Eddie was determined to prove the boss wrong. He spent the next few days working tirelessly on the manuscript. He brought it home at night. He skipped his TV shows. He ate dinner at the typewriter. And every morning, his drafts were rejected. He'd try again, work through lunch, but every afternoon, he was rejected again. Twice per day, for three days straight, he was told no, that they just wanted him to write a basic, ordinary instruction manual. And every day, twice per day, Eddie refused.

Before the week was over, Eddie was sent back down the mailroom. He didn't even get through all five of his new suits.

Introduction to new hires

Congratulations and welcome to ~~your new job in~~ Vanguard Mail Operations, one of the largest and most modern facilities of its kind in the world.

In time, you will learn all you need to know here. You will become a dependable operator, ready to handle any machine, any job, any time.

Getting there will be ~~challenging~~ and satisfying, but it will take time. How much time will depend on several factors: take it seriously, work hard, listen and learn, take notes until your memory ~~catches up~~ *catches up,* relax and let it happen. *be challenging + it*

~~Soon, you will start to realize just how much~~ there is to know in this job. ~~It's a lot~~ There may be days when you wonder if you will ever get it. But you will get it if you want to, with solid help from your supervisor and co-workers. Pay attention, ask questions, absorb. *a lot*

By coming
and
with
lit
* To help you get started, we present you with this Training Booklet. *which is divided into*
~~In these pages, you will learn~~ that your new job has its own vocabulary. *Hardware -*
You are about to speak, "mail room," a language that includes terms like -- *Software*
X1's, track jumper, D's, roll-to-roll, two-ups, N1's, vista, quarter-end, and on and on. *for reason you will understand.*

You ~~will~~ *will involve* begin working on a variety of machines, some of which turn out a blistering amount of mail -- with you at the helm. *CR's* *R2's* *Select mdge.*

* Congratulations again.

Now . . . let's begin!

*Everything but free pizza.
Come to think of it, there's free pizza
sometimes, too!*

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I recall Eddie saying he fought hard for the line “everything except free pizza. Come to think of it, there's free pizza sometimes, too!” His point was that this thing needed humor. Management disagreed and found it not only unnecessary but not actually that funny. Like, if there's pizza sometimes, why keep the line “Everything except free pizza.” In a pamphlet where the aim is to keep it brief and informative, a line that is about to be revealed as false should just be erased. But not in Eddie's book. In Eddie's book this was solid gold comedy and the boss was an idiot.

But the “star” of the pamphlet may be The Bell & Howell 6000 which my father says, is “speed itself.” This piqued my curiosity, so I looked it up: “Bell & Howell 6000 + speed.” The BH 6000 sorts 12,000 envelopes per hour and in its time was the fastest mail sorting machine in history. My father worked 40 hours a week, so that's 480,000 envelopes he processed per week, which is 25,000,000 envelopes a year. He worked there for 23 years, so that's 575,000,000 envelopes. Is processing envelopes for a huge investment firm a kind of writing? A kind of money? For who?

I tried to find out more about the 6K. But the machine is not on the internet, except for a Google Books entry I found on 4/2/2022, from the 1997 *Official Gazette of the United States Patent and Trademark Office: Trademarks*.

DATE OF FIRST USE 1995-09-20
™ EXPIRED 2020-05-01
SN 75-114,469 BELL & HOWELL MAIL PROCESSING
SYSTEMS COMPANY, DURHAM, NC FILED 6-5-1996
BH 6000
FOR MAIL PROCESSING MACHINES (U.S. CLS. 13, 19,
21, 23, 31, 34 AND 35).
HRST USE 9-20-1995; IN COMMERCE 9-20-1995.

I talked about the pamphlet with my friend Alejandro, who was doing a job that involved drawing 3D digital schematics of machines. He suggested he could try to create a design for what the BH 6000 might have looked like, if I could get him some information about its design or inner workings. So I called the sales and marketing departments at the firm to see if they had images of the BH 6000, but they don't. I tried to find a company archivist, but there isn't one. I even asked the nice lady who helped me process Eddie's death paperwork at the firm's HR. She knew of the machine, but had no further information.

I called various departments at the firm and tried everything from being honest that I was writing about my father to making up stories like “Hi, I am a tech reporter writing about the history of mail sorting machines and need information about the BH 6000, as it was a huge innovation. I seek patent or ™ documents, images of the BH 6000 or design diagrams, archival documents, or contact with someone who would have such documentation.”

But there is absolutely no record of the BH 6000 at the firm except that everyone seems to know it is a machine they once used and no longer use. There are no images of the BH 6000, no pamphlets, no instruction manuals. The firm's new mail operations division uses different machines now.

FINDING IT -- OVER

~~When~~ you are "over," you have ~~a few~~ **A FEW** things to look for.

First, check your smallest category. If you have 5,000 in the trays, 25 off-lines, 7 mutes and 3 overcharges, ~~count~~ **COUNT THEM** your overcharges again. ~~It's possible your first count was wrong.~~ **START W/ (SMALLEST #)**

If you ~~definitely~~ have 3 clean overcharges, fine. But be sure. Sometimes, if you've had a jam under a meter, ~~the meter~~ will stamp the same envelope twice. Are you just counting envelopes in your overcharge stack or are you counting all the overcharges. Look again. ~~If you've had a meter jam,~~ you might have an overcharge with a clean stamp and a red smear on the same envelope. Show that to your lead operator or your supervisor. ~~If they agree it's another overcharge,~~ and you were one over, you're good.

Now, check the mutes. Count them again. Make sure each mute is a complete set. If you have split a multi-page set and counted it as two, that could be it.

Now, off-lines. Count them again. Here, too, make sure you have'nt split a multi-page set into two envelopes. Another thing: When you're counting off-lines, you might simply be counting envelopes. Is there a set in each envelope? Are you sure? You wouldn't be the first operator who quickly picked up two envelopes to insert one set, then put it all with the other off-lines. You could be counting an empty envelope as an off-line.

~~Once all the above are done and~~ you're still over, it's time to flip through the trays. Look for an envelope that is double-stamped -- two post marks on one envelope. If your batch had bar codes in the addresses, that bar code was printed only on the first page of each set. If the machine split a set and put it into two envelopes, one of the envelopes will not have a bar code in the window. So, if you find a window without a bar code, or a window showing ~~only part of~~ an insert, open it. If it's a partial statement, the rest of it is probably in the next envelope. *Combine the two into one new off-line + 2 new dc.*

If you were one over, you're now perfect.
QUESTION: Did your batch have a "break"? ~~is it~~ That's a place where the printer stopped printing, ran off a few blank pages, then started printing again. Always check page numbers when dealing with a break. Make sure the set before ~~the break~~ and ~~the set~~ after the break are consecutive. If they are not, you could have duplicate sets, which will put you over. If there was a set missing at the break, you could be short.

Finally, if you're still over and nothing on this page helps you find it, you probably won't.

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My mom was a fairly sheltered good girl who liked to have fun. She married him expecting to be a stay at home mom married to a writer/editor. That's what Eddie had imagined for his life. But it didn't work out. By the time I was eight, she was the one working and he stayed at home – but without taking over the cooking, cleaning, or childcare. She still did all those things too.

She was a good Catholic girl from a solid, kind, wholesome family. My parents grew up a few blocks from each other, so my mom knew Eddie from kindergarten, including his abusive hateful mom, his silent ghostly dad, and his lovely and hilariously disassociated sister.

My mom was part of a standard late fifties high school girls' club, the kind of thing that looked, in movies like *Grease*, like a gang. But my mom's "gang" was a gang of good girls. They called themselves "The Checkers." Their motto was – and I am serious – "fun, but not like *that*." "And everyone knew exactly what it meant," my mother proudly declared every time she said it. They were fun party girls, a guaranteed good time always, but they weren't letting you do more than kiss! They kept it "in check." Hence, "The Checkers."

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My father didn't start working at the investment firm until after I went to college. About a week after I left, my mother gave Eddie an ultimatum: either get a job and start helping around the house or I am leaving you. She was able to get him to agree to dust, vacuum, and do the dishes. But on the question of taking an office job, he was stubborn. She could only convince him to try temping. "Temporary" was the only kind of job he was willing to take. He could not face the idea of himself as anything but a publishing author or a big time editor, and since neither of those things was happening, he became a temp. Ironically enough, he quickly found a somewhat permanent gig, somewhere where they needed him all the time. For ten years he worked the night shift in the mailroom, but for temp wages, with no health insurance and no retirement plan.

But one day, my mother found out that this large investment firm paid full time mailroom workers fairly well and provided them amazing benefits: a generous 401K, long paid vacations, a life insurance policy, secondary health insurance during retirement, and hundreds of thousands of dollars automatically placed in a health saving account. She was beyond infuriated, she was disgusted when she found out that he (they) could have been collecting on this the whole time. She confronted him, and after a long battle, forced him to accept that he did, in fact, work in a mailroom, and that after a decade of working there for a pittance, he needed to just accept it and take the appropriate pay that comes with the full time job. He had to do it, or – this was her second such ultimatum that I am aware of – she would leave him.

He did it.

It turned out that the main thing holding him back had been that as a temp, he did not have to wear the polyester mailroom worker uniform. He just hated the idea of the uniform, he said it was like "a confession of failure."

Batching Out - *The good, the bad & the ugly*

Many of the jobs you ~~will~~ run will have a "batch count," which ~~means~~ they ~~will~~ have a Beginning Banner Page and an Ending Banner Page. ~~There is a lot of~~ important information on Banner Pages, ~~but~~ among the most important info to an operator is a ~~section~~ ^{line on} of the Ending Banner Page ~~in~~ which ~~one line~~ says, "number of envelopes." That ~~means~~ ^{is} the number of envelopes the batch you just ran was supposed to have in it. Also ~~in this section~~ ^{on this page} will be blank lines where you will enter the number of off-lines, mutes and overcharges.

Your meter won't give off-line & mutes, unless it must match "# of Env."

Example:

You just "spun off," ^{finished running} at the end of a batch. You checked the "hoagie hole" and the cutter, ^{and} you have your ending banner page in hand. ^{Now, it's fun time!}

~~All your mail is accounted for~~ . . . you think. You count your mutes, your off-lines and your overcharges, ⁵ then you check your meters to find out how many envelopes you've posted.

Let's say the Banner Page ^{indicates batch} says you should have 2497 envelopes, total.

^(s) your meter says you've posted 2350 ~~envelopes~~ you have 1 ^b off-lines, with 8 mutes. ^{because "# of mutes" & your actual count = match} Those last three numbers add up to 2497 and you're in ~~good~~ ^{good} shape.

However, overcharges count as a minus and if you have one, then you have to subtract it from the total and you're now at 2497 ^{minus 1} = 2496. You are

~~short~~ "short." and that is not good. ^{You might have somewhere 1 Ok or your count might be more than # of env. "over" by "over"}

Quick review. Add metered units, mutes and off-lines, ^{then} subtract over-charges.

That number must be the same as "number of envelopes." ~~Short is bad, over is bad,~~ ^{to make a good batch,} ~~the numbers must match.~~

If they don't, you have to find out why and make it right.

if the count you need doesn't come out of this, then you're either "short" or "over". Short is bad, over is bad & bad is ugly.

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Alejandro's idea to design a BH 6000 still seemed interesting to me. Recreating it feels like an homage to work. We can ask questions about the place of this machine in the economy, the mail sorting machine that tries to keep up with the stock market, and the person who must sacrifice nighttime sleep to work it.

Since I got nowhere with the firm, I began writing to everyone I could at Bell & Howell. But no matter what I wrote or who I pretended to be, I got the same reply:

Thank you for your inquiry. The BH 6000 was a Bell and Howell inserter introduced around the early to mid 90's and was the fastest inserter of its kind at the time. However, we discontinued this product and have no information to share with you.

You can find the current listing of Production Mail equipment on our website at <https://go.pardot.com/e/138131/production-mail-solutions-/2qz12p/247992038?h=FuxFYJinP1t87T4wjIspOPVQTbu5MMRpUlfGco8GUTA>

Thank you,

The Bell and Howell Team

I contacted the lawyer who oversaw the Trademark; he too has no images of the BH 6000 and nothing much to say.

Sunday, April 3, 2022

Greetings Mr. Kim,

Possible strange request: I am a writer who is writing the biography of another writer who also happened to work in a mailroom that used the BH 6000 mail inserter, for which, if I am correct, you served as patent lawyer in the years 1995-96. He refers to the BH 6000's speed a few times in his work, and one of his first writing opportunities occurred when his boss let him write the training manual on how to use the machine. So I am trying to learn more about the BH 6000. I am especially interested in the patent. I'd like access to the patent language.

This message is a desperate appeal to your good will. Do you have a copy of the full text of the patent or can you direct me to where I might find it?

I hope this message finds you well. Thank you in advance for any and all assistance you can provide.

Kristen Gallagher, Ph.D.
City University of New York
917-673-4536

He wrote back to me thirty minutes after receiving my request.

Sunday, April 3, 2022

Hi Kristen:

Thank you for your email letter below. Unfortunately, as Bell & Howell's trademark attorney, I had nothing to do with any of the patents. I do not know who was responsible for the BH 6000 patents.

I wish you good luck.

Regards,
Richard Y. Kim
Snell & Wilmer L.L.P.
2001 K Street, N.W. <x-apple-data-detectors://0/1>

I searched for patents. Through this, I realized that the BH 6000 is not so much an object, a thing, but a union of various gears, switches, cranks, funnels, and levers, put together in a sort of way that stuffed and moved envelopes really fast by 1995 standards. The patent would never be for "the machine," it would be for its various parts, and the parts are all replaceable.

By now, the BH 6000 has evaporated from history. In part, because it barely existed as a unity in the first place. Maybe I can give Alejandro some patents with drawings for what kinds of parts were involved.

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I imagine it as beige, a long rectangular cube of heavy duty plastic that makes no sound but gets warm from the speed of the work it's doing inside. It would of course have a digital control panel, a green background with black courier new letters and numbers that flash when ready, then stay still and count down as the job runs.

I imagine my father, standing at its side, rocking slightly back and forth, somewhat dazed, occasionally moving to the output end to lift the box where the finished jobs fall and pile up, a box that will be taken away by someone with a different job, the mailroom box carrier job.

mutes, off-line + ok

"Mutes" is a term shortened from the word "mutilate." When you are running a batch, even when you know what you're doing and the machine seems perfect, a ~~useless~~ ^{one happens} jam at any time. ~~usage~~

That's when all or part of the ~~set~~ ^{set} contents intended for a single envelope get out of line and the machine crushes ~~or mutilates~~ ^{mutilates} paper. It could happen to the principal element of the set -- a letter addressed to a specific investor, a check, a financial statement -- or it could happen to an insert, ^{or to a whole set.} If it happens to an insert, just replace it, ^{or the proper track station} If it happens to the principal element, you must decide if it can still be sent or if it has been ~~damaged~~ ^{damaged} so badly that it must be re-printed. If it must be re-printed, it's a mute.

^{in the principal element} Check the number of pages. If it is more than a one-page set, make sure you get all the pages together, staple it, place it in a prominent and visible place and number it, #1, #2, etc. ^{you might be able to} If it can still be used, it's not a mute. ^{or, it might be an...}

"Off-Line," which means it will be part of your batch but ^{will not get} postage. ^{put} Make sure the set has appropriate inserts and ^{put} place it all into a clean envelope. ^{Off-lines can come from a few different} ^{reasons.} They are ^{there are various reasons} just envelopes that have not been posted when the batch ends. Example: Any

batch marked BATCH 1 could have foreign addresses at the beginning. The machine should ^{divert these} ~~put these~~ ^{before they get to the meters, thus, no postage.} ^{Sometimes} ^{the machine will throw a set into a compartment called the "charge back" ^{rather than putting it}} "Overcharges" are envelopes ^{with postage} that got posted but cannot be used. ^{placed on empty envelope got charged}

The envelope may have been stamped in an unreadable manner. The envelope is not usable but it will be part of your batch because it is now part of your meter count. Save it. You'll need it when you batch out.

** place it in a prominent & visible place*

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Shortly after taking the full time job, Eddie became obsessed with the firm's founder and CEO. He read the CEO's autobiography and talked about it constantly, for years. He also drank the wine from the CEO's winery. He loved to open it, let it breathe, pour a small amount in a glass, swirl it around, smell it, take a sip, and say "oak." He regularly reminded us of the heroism and genius of this CEO. It was strange. But we let him do it. "As long as he stays employed," my mother said, "he can like whatever he wants."

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Both before and after the days of the "Introduction to New Hires" fiasco, one way he handled the humiliation of working in the mailroom was to tell everyone he knew that he worked in communications. "Technically true," he'd always say to us. "I have a gift. And that gift is communication. The mailroom is beneath me. I don't know why I am there, or how this happened, so I will not allow it to be how I am seen. That's not me. I am the guy who has a job in communications. And it just so happens that the mailroom is part of the communications department, so, technically, I do work in communications. I don't think anyone needs to know that my part is sorting the mail."

His strange relationship to the truth was part of his Irish inheritance, what we call "The Blarney." Not all Irish people have it, but it has something to do with the Irish way of storytelling — and also making shit up to the point of lying. Eddie's mastery of The Blarney was part of his creativity, but it also really sucked sometimes. For example, in 2004, at a Christmas gathering of his childhood "friends," Eddie, fronting as an executive in communications, decided his "go to" conversation topic would be the wonderful new invention, track changes. Unfortunately for him, the party was full of successful executives who had been using track changes since the 1980s. Eddie, however, had only just learned about it and so imagined it was new. He kept describing how to use it in detail, as if no one at the party had yet encountered it. "Have you heard about track changes?" he'd ask. And the person he was speaking to would respond half-seriously, "Sure, yeah," as if the question was rhetorical and leading to something greater. But it wasn't. Eddie would launch into his routine no matter how anyone responded: "Track changes is this thing you can click on and it will keep track of different changes or deletions you make to a specific document. You can actually see, people can comment or suggest changes and you can accept them or delete them! It records all the changes and suggestions, and you can even restore things, you can change something and then undo it!"

These childhood friends at the party had "made it," in the gross Mike Douglas in "Wall Street" / 1980s USA sense. So at this party of rich business executives who he was trying to pass himself off as one of, Eddie, in 2004, couldn't stop talking about track changes causing a revolution in the communications business. My mother and I had to sit by and smile, gritting our teeth through the low key horror.

It was painful and humiliating to watch the looks come over the faces of his wealthy, non-friend "friends" as they realized what was happening. But of course, these people were the inspiration for the need to lie in the first place. He cared so much what they thought of him. Everyone had "made it" but him. I noticed in their silent smirks that they seemed to find his humiliation entertaining. They just let him keep going, and Eddie kept going.

Bell & Howell 6000
6K is like the 4K in that they both produce the same product. However, in its insert systems, track orientation, outside envelope presentation + general physical design, the 6K is alone.

6K

The Bell & Howell 6000 is ~~just~~ ^{only factor} like the 4K with a few differences. The 6K has a different insert system and is generally engineered in ~~the biggest diff is~~ ^{the biggest diff is} a different way, with the aim being that the 6K is much faster than the 4K. While a 4K ~~puts out about 7500~~ ^{puts out about 7500} almost at max putting out 7500 envelopes an hour, the 6K can go nicely at ~~over~~ ^{at most} over 10,000 envelopes an hour.

If the 6K is that much faster than the 4K, why not get rid of the 4K's and just use all 6K's?

Good question. ^{Answer is, each machine has its physical sides.} ~~to you don't know both machines.~~ ~~is, the~~ ~~is quick but it~~ ~~can't handle as many different jobs as the 4K.~~ ~~As we have said, the~~

~~4K is the workhorse. It can handle almost every kind of job, but it's not built for the kind of speed the 6K is.~~ ~~then the 6K.~~ ~~The 6K can go fast but it can't do as many jobs.~~ ~~purpose but it~~

We try to use a particular machine for a particular job with the aim being overall efficiency.

Once again, the purpose here is not to instruct you on how to run the 6K. You will receive training on that ~~probably~~ from an experienced operator on your shift.

For now, we just want you to know something about what the machine is expected to do.

When it's running well, the 6K is ~~at its~~ ^{speed itself}

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After my parents died, in the process of cleaning up their house and going through all their old things, I kept finding trophies from the firm. Countless clear acrylic / fake glass trophies of various shapes and sizes: globes, pyramids, cubes, bowls, all with the firm's logo, a date, and some text naming whatever the occasion was. Things like "\$500 Billion Milestone" or "Mutual Fund \$1 Trillion." These were never personal trophies except for the occasional "X Year Anniversary" or the final "In Honor of Your Retirement." None ever had my fathers name on it.

After what felt like a lifetime of listening to my father rave on about the glory of the CEO whose mail room he operated, I felt bitterly hateful at these fake bullshit "trophies." I threw each one in the garbage as I found it. Looking for silverware in the dining room, there's another drawer full of trophies; lifting the fake flower wreath out of the glass bowl centerpiece, I realize it says "Quarter End Record Broken" at the bottom, in a circle around the company logo. There must have been a hundred of these things. Why do the mailroom workers need a fake glass pyramid reminding them the firm just made a trillion dollars? Once I realized the sheer volume of them, I wished I'd piled them all up and taken a photo of them and then melted them in a bonfire.

I saved one as a memento in the end.

My father was proud of them, these pathetic little trophies crowded the house. All they said to me was that my father had been hoodwinked. How many people are hoodwinked into worshiping a small group of super-wealthy people who keep their fortunes stoked on the backs of workers who have real gifts but no real time or opportunity to develop them. The firm wouldn't be so rich without the mailroom, the firm wouldn't be so rich if people weren't forced to gamble their retirements on the stock market. But here, *enjoy this fake glass trophy, nightshift worker, and please remember to buy a copy of the CEO's autobiography too, maybe you'll learn a thing or two about hard work.* I imagined the real story was that the firm was deeply invested in the acrylics market. A double scam, the company store all over again.

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Since my father's retirement the mail operations department closed down, and the firm outsourced all mail services to a large mail sorting company in El Paso that uses the labor of day workers from Mexico.

A reddit-style discussion board for people involved in the firm offers pages and pages of speculation about the outsourcing, everything from surveys and opinions about cheap cross-border labor in El Paso to the idea that Texas' lower humidity, compared to swampy southeastern PA, might allow mail sorting to move faster by keeping envelopes from sticking together. I found out that all those great benefits my father got working there no longer exist. No one working at that firm today gets that package. Those benefits are gone.

4K

The machine we call the 4K is ~~actually~~ the Bell & Howell 4000.

It is ~~not~~ not an overstatement to say the 4K is the workhorse of the mail room. *We have 13 of them.*

We will not, in this booklet, instruct you in the workings of the 4K. That will be done by a Bell & Howell factory employee who will come to the Vanguard mail room specifically to train you.

What we will do here is to ~~inform~~ *tell* you for the ~~first time~~ *a little about the 4K,* ~~the machine~~ *is* actually an incredibly sophisticated machine ~~which~~ *operated correctly* turns out almost every kind of mail we produce.

Some will have inserts; some will not. Some will have bar codes; some will not. *Some will have*

Some will be letter-fold; some will be half-fold; *Some will have postage* on the envelope; some will not. It will be up to you to know ~~which is which~~ *the diff*

and how to set up ~~the machine~~ *your* so that ~~the envelope~~ *the envelope* coming out the end of the machine ~~has~~ *puts out* the correct contents in the correct envelope with the correct

postage and the correct date. *More about that in the section called "Your book"*

You will get to know where ~~the~~ *the* Accumulator is, ~~and~~ *what to do when the* machine stops and the screen says, "Accumulator ~~is~~ *ENTIV* Cell Exit Jam," or any

one of dozens of other ~~statements~~ *readings*. Same for knowing where the Collector is.

Same for the Cutter, the Hold and the TOS.

Are your envelopes sealing? Is the mater ink too dark? Too light?

Problems will arise. ~~Some will occur.~~ You will diagnose and fix.

What does "Aims Read error," MEAN? *Could be a few things. You'll learn. You really will.*

As this goes with heat to the

Frank of the trade not all that.

My father was King of the Bullshitters. He raised me on the old Irish rule: *never let the facts get in the way of the truth, and never let the truth get in the way of a good story*. We lived by this. I was raised to think of the truth through a storytelling lens. This meant the “truth” was less about a moral evaluation of what I say and more about what my words cause a listener to imagine and feel in their heart. The storyteller’s work, as I understood it, was to tell the story that gets to the heart. If the facts don’t give the feeling of the experience, then we reshape, remix, resize those facts. You may need to twist something to drive in a point, use hyperbole, create incredible images – many effects can work towards creating the truth. It’s about the listener’s feeling matching the feeling of the experience that led to the story. This roundabout path, the theory says, cuts to the heart of the matter more than facts usually do. But I’ve had to unlearn a fair amount of what I learned from Eddie on truth. Too often he took it, I think, too far. But also because as his primary pupil, I’ve sometimes taken it too far. Because I believed this was how truth worked. The biggest lies I ever told were sincere efforts to point to my most inexplicable truths.

For awhile, in response to all this, I became a truth purist. But I learned that also does not work. You can write your truth one day, then return to it the next day and find it lacking. You remember what happened but your brother remembers it differently. You tell someone your story, then they retell it incorrectly at your funeral. In the end, many aspects of Eddie’s theory of truth bear out. People tell you what feels true to them. Or what they’ve decided to believe. Or the version of past truth that will make you see them the way they want to be seen today, because it feels true to who they are now, however metaphorically.

I’ve come to believe Eddie’s self-mythologizing (and my own) is an outcome of unresolved trauma in the family line. It’s not only about him not being able to admit his position in life. It’s about needing to hide weaknesses to avoid being discarded by your tribe; to connect with others, for survival. It’s wanting to be seen and valued, but not looked at; to share (and shed) certain feelings, without being compelled to directly repeat the worst of what has happened to you. To suture one’s broken self back to the human group by trying to make oneself understood, though invulnerably. Self-mythologizing is an act of defensive translation, telling stories as directions for how you want to be viewed, a cover for the rejected misfit in you, written by that misfit, however deludedly.

The Blarney, overall, operates on the assumption that social life is less about having one’s facts in order than it is about being preoccupied with, maybe even lost in, maps of human desire and upheavals of feeling, obsession with belonging, looking for little signs of connection, knowing perception and language for the labile systems they are, and expressing oneself accordingly.

Once in my teens I got myself in trouble by revealing facts about myself to cops who had arrested me. My father was not mad that I’d done something illegal, he was angry – and didn’t speak to me for three days – because I had not come up with a story to get myself out of trouble.

There is an ethics here, one that is easy to miss if you have a more puritanical / actuarial take on life and language. The Irish don’t simply *lie*, as WASP culture has historically loved to say. In my upbringing it was repeated often that you should never lie about your feelings, never pretend to be ok if you were not ok, never pretend to be someone’s friend if you’re not, and never to break a promise, you had to be a person of your word. My father said often, with a stern austerity, sometimes even grabbing me by the arm, “tell the truth when it’s important,” which he explained was when something real is on the line, like when there are consequences that could affect people negatively, or when there’s a need to “get something correct, for the record.” Then, to the best of your knowledge, you tell the facts. But for things like dealing with authorities who can harm you, or when trying to make the feeling of something understood, facts are labile, and are often not the truth. Facts never equal the suffering and wonder of the real story.

Finding It

~~If you're short or over, you have to make it right.~~ *find out why + get good numbers.* If you're short, check all parts of the machine for the missing set(s). Check the floor under and around the machine. Look everywhere. Look in the trash. You might have

absent-mindedly tossed a good set in there with a bad envelope. *times, no* an envelope will go through a meter without posting. If you find it, *check the batch for an envelope with no postage*

on the belt or in the trays, it's an off-line. *and must be counted as such. If you're changing your count, use / short + you get /* NOTE: When your machine stops with an "out" light, the next envelope *is not*

might not post. Got an out light? Check the belt. *check it now.*

Earlier, we used the term, "track jumper." That's a *letter or check or statement* settling into the section of track behind where

the track at an odd angle, *ending* it should be. If there is already a *letter or check or statement* in that section, well, now you

have two *statements* in that section. They will be inserted into the same envelope and you *could* be short. This condition can be very difficult *to find.*

While you are looking for off-line physically inspecting the envelopes. If one looks or feels thick, *(to weigh: 1 oz. postage but 2 oz. or scale)* weigh it. If it weighs more than indicated by the postage, open it. You

might find two in one and you're good to go.

If that doesn't work, put the batch through the Mailweigh, a machine that separates envelopes according to weight. If that doesn't find it, *you have a bad batch. It might have to be re-printed + that is a bad thing!*

somebody is going to tell you to be more careful next time!

FURTHER NOTE: Do not avoid being short or over by fudging your numbers. You could be sending a check or statement to someone who is not supposed

to have it and that is nothing but trouble. Besides, *it could come back to you + if you get caught,* it's not worth the hassle. Even the best operators come up short or over.

It happens. Don't take it personally. Just clean it up and move on.

Your Job

This one could be very wordy or real, real short.

Let's make it short.

~~Your supervisor's job is to get as much work done in a shift as necessary and that means his job is to make sure you do your job~~

Your job is to ^{do} your assigned ^{work} ~~machine~~, -- to do whatever job you are ~~given~~ -- in a timely and professional manner. *If that means running a machine*

~~If you are running a machine, and if you can run it at 7500 an hour and you can keep it running, fine. Do it. If you have trouble keeping it running at that speed but you can do a good job at 6000, do that.~~ *5500 clear some jobs can be run faster than*
Within reason, *it's better to run the machine at a comfortable speed and keep it running, than to run it at 7500 and go through a shift stopping and starting.* *you'll learn what is right*

Get it running and keep it running. That's the job.

Anybody can press the "~~start~~" button. *run* The question is, "What do you do when the machine stops?" *Good operation is not merely challenged by that Q. The answer to that is the central difference between a good operator. These are identified.*
~~and someone who just shows up and never gets a good review.~~

Somewhere in all the information you are receiving these days is a list of performance standards. If your work is clean and *consistently correct and* ~~quick~~ and your numbers are roughly in the area of the performance standard, you'll be fine.