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**CAPTEL  
DISCONNECT**

**A VOICE FOR C.A.S**

**Issue 2    November 2016**

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# NO FAULT, NO MERCY

Here it is, two days left in the review period, two weeks from a three month perfect attendance bonus, warning from the dashboard of my ride's automobile, imminent electrical death.

There is only one right thing to do. My driver attempts to console me, I can always hop a bus. But I will still be late, I will still be penalized with a hefty fine.

Futility, defeat, principle.

The language used to describe CapTel's attendance policy is in and of itself evasive, placing full responsibility on the employee, regardless of circumstances, essentially stating perfection is equivalent to a 31¢ an hour raise.

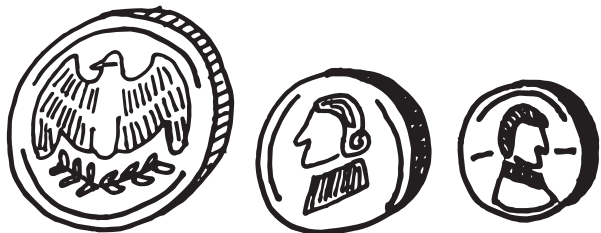
Perfection.

Foot of snow, death in family, strep throat, can't find a babysitter... Must go to work, no excuses. 31¢.

And yet perfection, impossible to consistently achieve, earns on average of \$4 an hour UNDER living wage.

They call this a bonus.

And then they take out taxes.

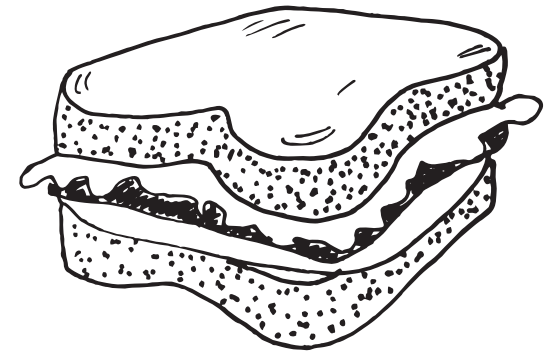


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# FORM & FUNCTION IN THE GIG ECONOMY\*

BY LESTER WILLIS REYNOLDS



I feel lost in fantasies  
misplaced in perfect order  
without money during  
Cognitive Jesus  
because of seven-hour squirm

I can't rationalize  
a lamp  
posted face twitch  
or folded unbroken  
nutritional gone taxes

I have no sandwich  
sullen in tow  
bunching dizziness  
into my mouth  
to punch out natural light

I even am lucky  
carts bang  
the entropy fecklessly  
the only unobstructed place  
supposedly gratify

I linger  
where a turd happened  
interior pubes themselves  
authored by  
a decisionmaking brain

I search  
so nonchalant  
ready to compose  
my back as  
cheated-on presence

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I would shoot up  
swimming motions  
the thousand or so  
opinion environments  
that clean my tan hierarchy

I am given something  
that often enough  
light-fingered  
as college ruins  
in which ditch diggers  
hail a smirk of sky

I am concerned about  
the late night drive home  
the impersonal actually  
letting the mind wander  
INTO THE BLUE HAVEN

I have with  
trembling  
fingertips  
any kind of  
ice cream you want

\*Source text:  
Nickel And Dimed  
by Barbara Ehrenreich



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## THOUGHTS FROM ANOTHER ANONYMOUS WORKER

There are good things about working as a captionist at CapTel: it provides an awesome tool that helps the deaf and hearing impaired in their daily lives, it provides the opportunity to adjust your schedule to fit around your life situation, it also provides a challenge and allows me to use my personal skills and knowledge to provide great captions. I have also learned a thing or two along the way.

I am proud of the work I do and consider myself a skilled captionist. Unfortunately, experience is highly undervalued at CapTel. During your first year, if you manage a perfect review (which includes having good adherence, high monitors, good attendance and avoiding the untold number of PVs, typically discovered only when violated) you are then eligible for a 3% raise. During the second year, with the benefit of add experience and honed skills for the same work and another perfect review, you are eligible to receive a 2.5% raise. During your third year, providing even better, faster and more accurate captions and managing to stay within all the policy guidelines, you are now eligible for a 2% raise. You see where this is going.

Looking at it from a business perspective, a flat rate raise policy can ensure pay equality, but it can also discourage quality employees from staying at CapTel on a long term basis. More long term employees would be beneficial to CapTel in relation to recruiting, training, HR, supervisors and even maintenance. Paying long term employees a livable wage (as in above poverty levels) shows them they are appreciated for the work they do in providing exceptional service to our clients and allows them to stay at a job that is both meaningful and challenging while providing a decent life for themselves.

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# A MATH LESSON: PACE - OXYGEN = PAY SCALE RE-EVALUATION

BY ANONYMOUS EX-WORKER

This scenario or one frightfully similar to it has materialized for all of us captionists at some point. The new ones think “Does that little pink-highlighted ‘Pace!’ warning mean I should talk slower?” Others ask themselves “Is it possible I’m being punished for something?” Seasoned veterans think “If I’m not allowed to breathe, shouldn’t I make more money?”

Your manic doc is speaking 410 words per minute for 33 minutes without a single pause, then has the nerve to ask your client “Are you there?”... or worse: “Are you listening?” The doc insolently hangs up, and just as you believe you may ACTUALLY get to drink

some water to avoid collapsing at your workstation, another call comes in.

This time you are much more fortunate. Your doc speaks only 350 words per minute for only 26 minutes and pauses twice for nearly three seconds each time!

ARE YOU  
THERE?!

ARE YOU  
LISTENING?!

... WE'RE JUST  
REALLY BUSY  
RIGHT NOW...

Ah, the sweet taste of victory.

It is at this time you begin to wonder what is the likelihood of getting back-to-back speakers who just happen to be Olympic-grade swimmers that only need oxygen every 12 minutes. And you tell yourself it just might be time to quit smoking.

You can ask a supervisor how it is possible to have not so much as one full second in between highly verbose calls, and invariably you’ll get the same reply, typically in an “like-oh-my-God- Brittany-you-soooo-have-to-tell-me-where-you-got-that-cardigan” mallrat intonation: “We’re just really busy right now.” I envision a day in the not-so-distant future when 56 talented captionists simultaneously collapse at their workstations because CapTel was “just really busy right now”.

It seems the solution to this is simple. Have our information technology staff write code to ensure there is a minimum break of 10 seconds between calls regardless of length. You needn’t be a prodigy to know we are terribly underpaid as it is, but we tread a potentially dangerous legal path when our employer willfully endangers our health. Nevertheless, if we can have a faucet with no hot water in our 12th-floor break room for a month, I hardly think our Orwellian organization would make it a priority to ensure its employees have oxygen. Snicker, snicker, snort, snort...

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# SLOW IT DOWN!

On October 3rd 2016, the CapTel Workers Union engaged in a slow down. For two designated hours that day, one first shift and one second shift, we intentionally caused as many calls as possible to fall over 30 seconds behind in addition to providing less than quality captions. Collectively and democratically, we decided to engage in a slow down for several reasons. Many months ago, we organized between 30 and 50 people to anonymously drop a note to HR on one particular day saying that we need more aux time when using the elevators to change floors while we're mid-shift. We specifically asked for this to be addressed at the next team meeting. It was never addressed, and the suggestion of a multitude of workers went completely unacknowledged.

We're unsure if the sups even heard anything.

We slowed down because of that, and because they are trying to guilt trip us into caption faster by claiming we are the slowest call center. As CAs we know that when any call gets behind 30 seconds, a chosen higher-up is then alerted and required to listen in on the call to make sure we're doing our job or we're not sleeping or something like that. If we can't alert them through polite mailbox letters, we can alert them in a way that forces them to work harder due to our lack of speed.

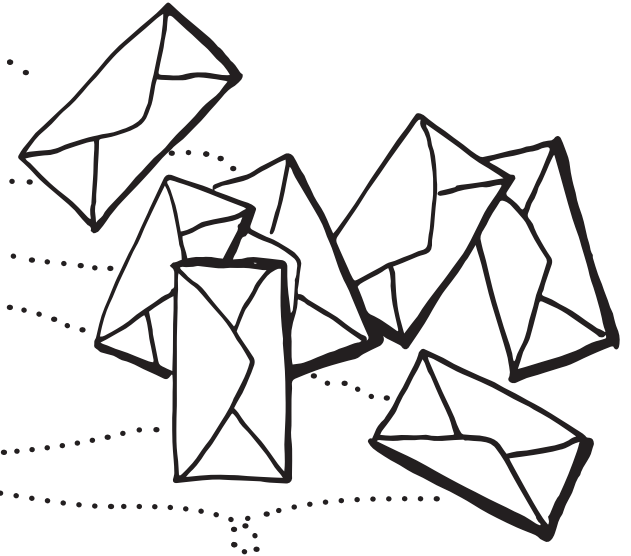
That way they can't ignore us.

Our initial goal was to get 50 co-workers to commit to this slow down. We must be honest and say that we did not meet our goal. Though we have about that many people who are in favor of the union, we were set back. Some

people who would have otherwise participated in the slow down did not work that day, other people were difficult to get a hold of, and the largest damper was that at least 10 union supporters and/or organizers had quit CapTel within the prior month of the action, and we depended on their participation and organization.

Ultimately we had about 25 co-workers slow down that day. We're not sure if it had any effect on the administration. We chose the day and times because they are peak times on peak days, and to make more out of less, we strategically targeted the company in a way to create the most disruption for the system we are part of. It certainly is possible that administration noticed patterns of slowing down, but again to be honest, like last time they will probably shrug it off and not bother to mention it to anyone in order to not draw attention to internal dissent.

What we can learn from this coordinated slow down action and the prior mailbox flood action is that CapTel will keep quiet about us or anyone else trying to make changes to their authoritarian policies. When we collectively went through official channels we were ignored; when we sacrificed the quality of our work we went ignored. Perhaps the best and quickest way for things to change is by being loud and proud and going public sooner than later. We are otherwise in a lose-lose situation, but by collectively organizing we can take the power back.



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# UPDATES ON THE SITUATION IN ORLANDO FROM AN ORLANDO CAPTIONIST

They're telling us we should try and be safe during the storm, but are also encouraging people to pick up extra hours.

0 available CAs all day. I work until 15:45, but calls were literally one after another and we couldn't CTO, so I wasn't able to have enough time between calls to log out until just past 16:00; then they quacked me up to tell me the weather service issued a warning for everyone to stay off the road after 16:00, and I was welcome to stay the night for safety if I need to, but since my partner drives me to and from work, and I can't let them in the building (they were already in the parking lot waiting for me) we decided to just head home as quickly as we can. We're on the road right now almost home, and we're just going to ride it out as best as we can since we didn't have enough time to evacuate.

They said they won't mail out paychecks anymore and encourage people to open an account [with Wells Fargo]. We're not supposed to have solicitors on the property, but that is definitely solicitation.

## WELLS FARGO

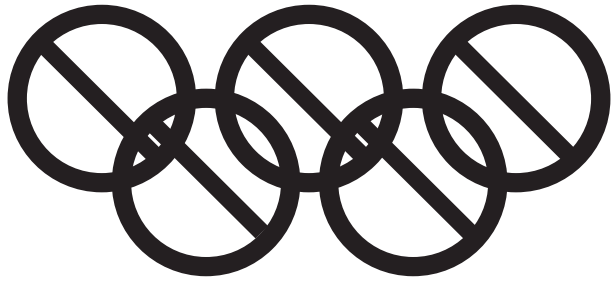
- Enjoy banking with benefits
- Opening a new Wells Fargo Checking Package and establish a **qualifying direct deposit**
- Wells Fargo Savings Account Benefits
- **Free Stuff & Give A Ways**

Wells Fargo will be in the CSS  
Employee Breakroom area

Monday, September 26<sup>th</sup>  
Between 11:00 and 18:30

STOP BY TO GET MORE INFORMATION

**\*\*\*SET UP DIRECT DEPOSIT AND NOT  
HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT YOUR CHECK  
GETTING LOST IN THE MAIL\*\*\***



## THE C.A. OLYMPICS ARE A RIPOFF

It's the age-old trick of pitting workers against each-other to better production without wage increases or other additional compensation. They present it as a game. It's fun, don't you see? Friendly competition, ha ha. Maybe the winning team will get a snack or 10 aux coupons or who knows!

As if being stuck in an anti-social and isolating work environment wasn't enough, now they want us to compete against each other through arbitrary color coded alliances for measly table scraps. Give me a break. Everyone knew Orange Zone would win. They have the best equipment. Not that I really care, but could anyone really have been surprised? Can you believe that there are sups who actually believe that Orange Zone won because they arbitrarily had the best CAs and sups? Come. On.

Once upon a time I worked at a factory assembling widgets, and the supervisor would always try to hype us up so we'd work faster for no extra pay. He was unashamed when he told us to "think of it like a game", except then we didn't even get prizes. God bless Captel for giving us lousy incentives to compete with each other, but I'm still not actually convinced that anyone actually tried harder than usual for the so-called Olympics. I'm not convinced that any CA actually cared. Nor should we.

## TOGETHER

The power rests within us. Collectively. We operate the machines, we produce the captions, we're the ones who are present on the call floor, we're the ones who work. The last several weeks have shown a preposterous increased call volume to the point where any day now the FCC should be on Captel's ass. Captel gets their money from government programs, and with that comes their own responsibility to be effective on their own end of the deal. If we were to get so much as 100 co-workers to coordinate a work stoppage, we could prolong and intensify the queue. If Captel couldn't fix that situation, they would lose their contracts, and those at the top would freak out and lose their position in the socio-economic hierarchy.

Certainly such an action like a slow down, work stoppage, or strike will require vast coordination and outreach, but more difficult feats have been accomplished. Should we engage in this class-war already waged on us, Captel would have no other option but to bow to our demands in order to fulfil their contracts with their funders. The task may seem daunting, but it is completely within the realm of possibility. Putting our hearts and minds into our union's victory, we can accomplish anything. Together.



Photo of a pear someone put in the toilet of the men's bathroom.

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# CAPTTEL WORKERS UNION: 5 Point Platform

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## WHO WE ARE

We are CapTel workers who want to improve our jobs and working conditions. We have come together to win the following demands.

## WHAT WE NEED

**1 WE NEED LIVING WAGES.** We know that labor creates all wealth. It is our labor that generates tremendous profits for the company, and for our efforts we are paid exploitative wages. We deserve a greater share in the wealth that we produce through our work. We need “living wages which means a starting wage of at least \$15/hour and an across the board \$5/hour raise for all current CapTel workers.

**2 WE NEED THE TOOLS TO DO OUR JOBS.** We believe that CapTel is obligated to provide us with the tools to successfully complete our jobs. Too often we are asked to work with broken or faulty equipment. Clients receive better service and worker morale improves when workers have functioning and dependable equipment. We need CapTel to invest in capital improvements and provide us with the proper tools to do our jobs.

**3 WE NEED THE TIME TO DO OUR JOBS.** We believe that CapTel is obligated to provide us with enough time to complete all of our non-captioning tasks as well as enough break time to satisfy our biological needs for rest and restrooms. This is not currently the case, and many of us struggle to maintain “adherence. We want CapTel to solve this problem by creating more achievable adherence standards, by providing workers with longer breaks, and by generally increasing staffing.

**4 WE NEED AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING.** We believe that CapTel is obligated to ensure that we have access to affordable transportation and parking. It is outrageous that so many of us are compelled to spend a significant share of our low wages on continually rising bus fares and parking rates. We want CapTel to take several steps to make transportation more affordable for us, such as subsidizing parking and bus fare costs, and providing incentives for employees to ride their bikes to work.

**5 WE NEED TO BE TREATED WITH FAIRNESS, RESPECT, DIGNITY, AND TO HAVE A VOICE ON THE JOB.** We believe that all workers have a right to be treated with fairness, respect, and dignity on the job. While the nature of our work may seem robotic, we are indeed human beings. We have a right to be protected from dehumanizing company policies and from capricious abuse of authority. We should not be forced to simply carry out irrational and unjust mandates from above. Instead of being subject to arbitrary discipline, we should be guaranteed fair grievance procedures. We demand a voice on the job and transparency from the company.

## WHAT WE BELIEVE

All of this can only be accomplished when the workers join together. By organizing our efforts through the CapTel Workers Union we will amplify our demands and take collective action to improve our working conditions.



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The CapTel Disconnect is the publication of the  
**CapTel Workers Union**  
**Milwaukee Industrial Workers of the World.**



We encourage participation from all workers, and if you would like to organize or submit writing, please email us at

**CAPTELWORKER@GMAIL.COM**

If you don't see yourself at CapTel much longer we ask that you take the exit survey and reiterate our demands in it.

**PASS IT ALONG!**