

Inbox x

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to me ▾ 

An original story of workplace confusion, redundancy, excessive emails, heavyhanded metaphors, redundancy, superfluous imagery, and even more redundancy.





Thirty-two new emails is far too many for a Wednesday morning.

Staring at the email portal of her office computer, Cassie could only wrap both her hands around her oversized breakroom coffee mug and let the slight burn of the freshly filled ceramic drag her out of an immediate sense of slightly-incredulous apprehension and back into the moment. Cassie worked in IT, and the first thing she had learned in this job was that most error reports, user requests, inter-office memos and the like all came in on Mondays. Conversely, Friday was the day to get all the reports filed, device fixes rushed out, and the paperwork all squared. The middle of the week was always decidedly the slowest.

Thus, the thought returned:

Thirty-two new emails is far too many for a Wednesday morning.

It would seem that answering the early morning correspondences might just become today's job unto itself.

Cassie wearily began sorting through her inbox to see what she could ignore first – or at least, put off until later. A whole seventeen of the emails were flagged as having been sent from outside the suburban Glen Waverly office she worked in, each one marked all-caps "URGENT" and having come from 'Barbara, Redun Dept'.

She didn't know what the "Redun Dept" was, nor had she ever heard of any Barbaras working for the company before. Either way, they were out-of-office messages and with as much on her plate as she evidently still had to get to, they could wait. Hopefully, Cassie thought, she might still be able to get through all these before lunch.

Her eyes had barely returned to the screen before another new email popped up in her inbox.

Thirty-three new emails is *absolutely* far too many for a Wednesday morning.

Sure enough, another one from 'Barbara, Redun Dept'. Eyeing some of the other, non-Barbara, messages filling up her screen, Cassie decided that the now-eighteen allegedly "URGENT" emails from someone she hadn't ever heard of from some other office entirely could wait until she'd dealt with the rest of the regular IT duties from her colleagues needing one technical solution or another from her first.

Cassie set her mind to taking care of the Barbara emails later. For now, she was happy with them simply being marked ostensibly 'read' with the swift shift-click, right-click, left-click of the mouse.

A sip of coffee.

Fifteen new emails is *still* far too many for a Wednesday morning.

First up in the un-Barbara-ed inbox, it looked like someone was requesting the repair logs from the desktop of someone on the sales floor. Computer 2-C, fixed that one last week – just a simple reformat of the main drive and subsequent reinstall of the operating system. Easy

stuff, just sometimes takes a while. Cassie still easily remembered the job from last week, handled it herself. Could tell you off the top of her head that was Mark Levitt's machine.

She opened the email and was taken aback for just the slightest moment at an unfamiliar name. The request for computer 2-C's full repair logs had come from Reid Jimson, the sales floor supervisor, but Cassie had to half-cough out a small chuckle through her coffee once she realised he'd made a pretty obvious typo, hence the initial confusion.

Jimson was apparently looking for the records of a *Levitt*. She was relieved, squeezing out a quick spelling correction back to sales and asking if Jimson might already have the paperwork he needed under the right name would be easy. And at the very least, waiting for confirmation back from him either way would buy her time to get around to clearing out the rest of the overstuffed inbox.

Cassie clicked open the 'compose' tab of her email browser and got started touch-typing out a reply without needing to even look at the keyboard like the IT professional of eight years' experience she was.

Hey Reid, you got your salesman's name wrong in your email here. You're looking for Mark Levitt not—

Cassie paused and scowled to herself. Now she was making typos too. She held down the backspace key until she removed the misspelt message and tried again.

Hey Reid, you got the name wrong in your message. Check you haven't already got the logs you want under the correct name. You mean Levitt, not Levitt. You miss—

Cassie sighed again and took a long draw of her quickly-cooling coffee, her sense of faint amusement now given away to a much more familiar early-morning frustration. She drained the last of the coffee mug — maybe she needed the caffeine, not just the warmth.


She navigated the on-screen cursor over to the twice-misspelt name to delete it and very slowly typed out a third attempt at the seven-letter name. Looking down and directly at her keyboard like she was still a first-year in the receptionist pool, she meticulously hammered out each letter slowly and carefully. The deliberate, percussive, tap of each keystroke over the

silence of her clenched breath filled the air in the one-woman IT office annex.

You are looking for the Lev—

Cassie's hand hovered, uncertain, over her keyboard. She was paused perfectly in place for a moment. Utterly confused.

She held onto each side of the cheap matte-black plastic office keyboard and tilted it slightly up towards herself to get a proper look at it head-on.

Her keyboard didn't have the  key.

Not as if it had been pulled off or anything like that. As if it had never been there to begin with. In every other respect, it looked like her usual keyboard – it even had her annex's official room number written in slightly-faded felt-tip marker above the numberpad. But it was distinctly missing the letter which usually sat on the keyboard between the letters V and B. She visually scanned the rest of the keys. It all looked fine, except that one row of letters of now just plainly missing one character and there

wasn't even a key-sized gap where it should be; it looked like the other letters that should be to the Æ's right scooted over and made room for an extra-long righthand 'shift' as if to evade at least a cursory inspection without arousing suspicion.

Cassie rolled her eyes, feeling just ever so slightly impressed. This must be one of Cohen's usual tricks.

She stuck her head through the annex's side-door where Levi Cohen – the office's other IT employee, and a consummate practical joker – worked most days, mostly on the hardware side of computer things.

"Nice one, Levi." Cassie leaned on the door frame.


"Where'd you get the board? Find it buried somewhere in your boxes of junk?"

Cohen looked up from his own mug of breakroom coffee with a start. "Oh, hey Cass – what board? What's up?"



"The joke keyboard on my desk – that one of yours?" It wouldn't be entirely out-of-character for him to keep

playing dumb for a bit, Cassie knew. "It doesn't have an  key."

"I didn't put any joke keyboards in your office." Levi's eyes narrowed into the same half-confident, half-confused stare Cassie had started the conversation with. "You okay?"

"There's a new keyboard on my desk, looks just like the standard cheapo office ones, but without the  key on the bottom row."

Levi shot a befuddled look at his own keyboard for a split second, then rotated back to face Cassie. He looked even more confused, and she was growing wearier by the second. He opened his mouth cautiously, "I still don't know what you mean."

She sounded stern this time. "The letter . The one between V and B on the keyboard. "You know, .

She started drawing a shape with the tips of her pointer-fingers in mid-air, "The one that looks like two circles with lines on top and below."

Levi might have assumed this was reciprocation for one of his old pranks this somewhat surreal experience been coming from anyone else in the office apart from the usually no-nonsense Cassandra Craft.

"... No?" At this point Cohen was thoroughly confused, and really hoping to see where his coworker was going with this.

Cas huffed with frustration one more time, feeling desperate to make her meaning known to the man opposite her in the IT support room. "The *orp* sound?"

Cohen had barely made one slow shake of his head, mouth slightly agape with bewilderment, when Cassie started up again.

She started muttering the alphabet under her breath in order to find her place. "*ay, bee, cee, dee, ee, eff, gee, aitch, eye, jay, kay, ell, emm, enn... orp... oh, pee.* The one that comes after N and before O."

"Cass, I—" He hesitated. "I think you might need to take a short time-out, you're not—"

Before Levi could finish his sentence or Cassie could properly even begin to formulate a response, the main door to Cohen's office on the other side of the room suddenly swung open. A portly man in a two-tone blue argyle sweater-vest carrying a pile of musty cardboard boxes stacked so high as to obscure his face entered the room.

The sweater-vest-wearing man put down the boxes onto an empty desk at the side of Cohen's room with a light thud. He eagerly turned to face Cohen and spoke, "Here's those cables you wanted out of storage. Got 'em out first thing today like I promised."

"Thanks Joseph." Levi wheeled his attention away from Cass for a moment.

"No problem."

Cassie shot out one arm with a single finger pointed between the two men now in the room. "Did you just call him... *Joseph*? *Joe-seth*? I know him, he's one of the executives' PAs, and his name's Jos**æ**ph.

"Uhh, what?" Both men muttered, almost in exact unison.

"Jos~~eph~~eph. *Joes-orph-eff*. Cassie tried explaining it, but was getting only silent, blank, stares in return.

A small part of her just wanted to throw up her hands and ask these two how far they were prepared to take this already unfunny practical joke. Maybe it was just the oversized mug of coffee she'd made with three spoonfuls of the instant freeze-dried stuff and the month-old sugar in the breakroom this morning and gulped down only minutes ago but enough of her was still fixed on explaining herself to these two oblivious brick walls in business casual before her.

Looking around the room for a potential visual aid, Cassie snatched up a handily available notepad and ballpoint pen off Cohen's desk and rapidly scrawled out the twenty-seven letters of the English alphabet, in order and in full, over three horizontal lines on the uppermost sheet of the pad.

A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N  O P Q
R S T U V W X Y Z

"See, right there in the middle." Cassie poked with one extended finger around the centre of the pad where she had drawn all the symbols.

The man who most recently entered the room was the first to speak up. "That's... not a letter. And my name isn't *Joes-orph-eff*."

Levi spoke next, "Yeah, it looks made up. Different to the others."

Cassie's voice raised beyond basic office fluster to full-blown exasperation, "What do you mean 'made up'? They're all 'made up' if that's what you mean. It's just two curved bits and a couple lines. Just like B, or the G."

Both men stood still and didn't say a word to their wildly gesticulating coworker. Thankfully, something else would draw Cassandra's attention away from them before their dumb-struck hush lingered too much longer.

"Knock, knock, knock. Anyone home?" An unfamiliar, feminine, voice said aloud with just the faintest air of humour at the same time as its originator gently rapped a manicured hand against the open main door at the other end of Cassandra's personal annex.

As Cassie turned and walked fully back into her own office room to greet this unexpected visitor to the IT department, she heard Joseph file clumsily out of the adjoining room behind her, but she didn't hear a relieved Levi Cohen very gently shut, then decidedly lock, the door between their separate annexes.

The newcomer was a woman, of perhaps her late twenties, with shoulder-length brunette hair and green eyes – not much unlike Cassie herself. Except donning a bright orange-coloured blazer jacket and matching ensemble pantsuit trousers that made her look distinctly more formal and flashy than almost anyone else you'd ever see in the building, except for maybe on the occasional inspection-by-the-executives days.

The orange-blazer lady flashed a pearly-white smile and extended an open hand. "Hi there, we haven't been

properly introduced yet. My name is Barbara, and I'm from the Redundancies Department."

"Oh." Surprised, Cassie only got the one word out. This was Levi's most involved prank yet, he'd gone so far as to get their co-workers in on the joke and now an outside actress who must also have filled up her inbox overnight. She mentally noted that she'd have to congratulate Levi at the end of the day. He'd outdone himself.

Lost in her own thoughts for an increasingly-long moment, Cassie forgot to say anything else, and neglected to shake Barbara's outstretched hand.

Nevertheless unperturbed, Barbara simply retracted her hand away from her absent-minded conversational partner, and, without dropping the pearly smile for a single second, cleared her throat in such a way as to snap Cassie back to the discussion. "You were such a rather tricky person to get in contact with, I figured I ought to swing by for an in-person visit. No trouble, I was already in the area."

"Oh." Cassie said again. She was listening now, but still confused and unsure how best to respond. This sort of

tendency to zone-out talking to people is why she had graduated out of the company's typing pool into IT, and not reception, in the first place. "Sorry, I don't usually read or respond to emails overnight and I only just got in."

"That's no trouble." Barbara simply doubled. "But I do need to ask that you stop using that letter. The α . You've already used it ten times this morning by my count, and that's at risk of putting us over-budget for the month as it is.

Cassie paused. "That's... crazy."

Barbara raised a flat hand up into the 'stop' gesture with an almost patronising detachment, before gently lowering it again to speak. "That's why I've made such an effort to contact you. You were the one remaining person at this office who is unaware. We've decided to finally dispense with that letter. To be quite frank, we ought to have done this years ago."

"What are you talk—" Cass began, but Barbara's hand shot up again and stopped her.

Cassie wasn't sure if she was still impressed or just annoyed by the commitment to the joke at this point.

"Cassandra, it's our job in Redundancies to remove anything that we feel is unnecessary or superfluous or uses energy that could more productively be better directed into other efforts." Barbara explained. "And we've concluded that the aforementioned character is just no longer needed."

Cassie paused again, then began to laugh heartily. "Okay, sure thing." She wheezed out through sustained chuckles. "And how exactly did you all come to this great administrative decision?" Cassie wasn't much for organising jokes herself, but she had a sense of humour about things and knew well how to banter along with them.

Barbara's emerald-green eyes lit up at the question and her pollyanna smile widened even further. "Oh boy, I was afraid you weren't going to ask." She took a pocket-sized ledger book and two-inch ballpoint pen from a pocket of her blazer and made a tally mark in the book before replacing both items and continuing.

Barbara beamed back at Cassie. "Pay attention, because obviously I'm only going to explain this once. Essentially, our department has decided that the character in question often doesn't impact the pronunciation of the seven most-common English words; *the, be, to, of, and, a,* and *in*, and as a consonant sound, it's mostly vestigial in the words it does appear in, so we axed it entirely."

Raising her own hand in order to pull herself out of confusion just as much ask a question like she had to back in primary school, Cassie began her objection. "But just before, you used—"

"Stop." Barbara's unyielding wall of a hand silenced her once more. "Yes, I did say that letter out loud before when I was addressing you. But there was an important distinction, I was making it explicit to your which letter we needed you to stop using. We in Redundancies take a lot of pride in being thorough. Which is also why we've been working around the clock since Tuesday evening to make you aware of the change. Thank goodness we managed to fix your keyboard before you got here. At any rate, I'm glad I finally made it to you before you said it too much."

Barbara made a single finger-snapping motion without actually producing any sound.

Cassie wasn't sure what she was doing standing up in the middle of her office either. The digital LED-display clock on the wall only read 9:12 AM, so she mustn't have been getting up to go on break already, and she'd already gotten a hot cup of coffee on the way in.

Still confused, but assuming that whatever she had stood up for would either come back to her if important or was already taken care of, Cassandra sat down to her desk and opened up her inbox.

Three new emails?

Three new emails is far too many for a Wednesday morning.