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Declassified CIA Guide to Sabotaging Fascism Is Suddenly Viral

JASON KOEBLER

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The World War II-era "Simple Sabotage Field Manual" is full of steps that office workers can take to resist leadership.



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A declassified World War II-era government guide to “simple sabotage” is currently one of the most popular open source books on the internet. The book, called “Simple Sabotage Field Manual,” was declassified in 2008 by the CIA and “describes ways to train normal people to be purposefully annoying telephone operators, dysfunctional train conductors, befuddling middle managers, blundering factory workers, unruly movie theater patrons, and so on. In other words, teaching people to do their jobs badly.”

Over the last week, the guide has surged to become the 5th-most-accessed book on Project Gutenberg, an open source repository of free and public domain ebooks. It is also the fifth most popular ebook on the site over the last 30 days, having been accessed nearly 60,000 times over the last month (just behind *Romeo and Juliet*).

(12) General Devices for Lowering Morale and Creating Confusion

(a) Give lengthy and incomprehensible explanations when questioned.

(b) Report imaginary spies or danger to the Gestapo or police.

(c) Act stupid.

(d) Be as irritable and quarrelsome as possible without getting yourself into trouble.

“Sabotage varies from highly technical coup de main acts that require detailed planning and the use of specially-trained operatives, to innumerable simple acts which the ordinary individual citizen-saboteur can perform,” the guide begins.

“Simple sabotage does not require specially prepared tools or equipment; it is executed by an ordinary citizen who may or may not act individually and without the necessity for active connection with an organized group; and it is carried out in such a way as to involve a minimum danger of injury, detection, and reprisal.”



Do you work for the federal government? I would love to hear from you. Using a non-work device, you can message me securely on Signal at +1 202 505 1702. Otherwise, send me an email at jason@404media.co.

The guide’s intro was written by William “Wild Bill” Donovan, who was the head of the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, which later inspired the creation of the CIA. The motivating factor for writing the guide, according to a passage within it, is that citizen saboteurs were highly effective at resisting the Nazis during World

War II, and the Office of Strategic Services wanted to detail other ways sabotage could be done: "Acts of simple sabotage are occurring throughout Europe. An effort should be made to add to their efficiency, lessen their detectability, and increase their number," the guide states. "Widespread practice of simple sabotage will harass and demoralize enemy administrators and police," the guide states, adding that citizens often undertake acts of sabotage not for their own immediate personal gain, but to resist "particularly obnoxious decrees."

Because it was written during active wartime, the book includes various suggestions for causing physical violence and destruction, such as starting fires, flooding warehouses, breaking tools, etc. But it also includes many suggestions for how to just generally be annoying within a bureaucracy or office setting. Simple sabotage ideas include:

- "Insist on doing everything through 'channels.' Never permit short-cuts to be taken in order to expedite decisions."
- "Make 'speeches.' Talk as frequently as possible and at great length. Illustrate your 'points' by long anecdotes and accounts of personal experiences. Never hesitate to make a few appropriate 'patriotic' comments."
- "Bring up irrelevant issues as frequently as possible."
- "Haggle over precise wordings of communications, minutes, resolutions."
- "'Misunderstand' orders. Ask endless questions or engage in long correspondence about such orders. Quibble over them when you can."
- "In making work assignments, always sign out the unimportant jobs first. See that the important jobs are assigned to inefficient workers or poor machines."
- "To lower morale and with it, production, be pleasant to inefficient workers; give them undeserved promotions. Discriminate against efficient workers; complain unjustly about their work."
- "Hold conferences when there is more critical work to be done."
- "Multiply paperwork in plausible ways."
- "Make mistakes in quantities of material when you are copying orders. Confuse similar names. Use wrong addresses."
- "Work slowly. Think out ways to increase the number of movements necessary on your job"
- "Pretend that instructions are hard to understand, and ask to have them repeated more than once. Or pretend that you are particularly anxious to do your work, and pester the foreman with unnecessary questions."
- "Snarl up administration in every possible way. Fill out forms illegibly so that they will have to be done over; make mistakes or omit requested information in forms."

The guide also suggests "general devices for lowering morale and creating confusion," which include "Report imaginary spies or danger to the Gestapo or police," "act stupid," "Be as irritable and quarrelsome as possible without getting yourself into trouble," "Stop all conversation when axis nationals or quislings enter a cafe," "Cry and sob hysterically at every occasion, especially when confronted by government clerks."

(11) *General Interference with Organizations and Production*

(a) Organizations and Conferences

(1) Insist on doing everything through "channels." Never permit short-cuts to be taken in order to expedite decisions.

(2) Make "speeches." Talk as frequently as possible and at great length. Illustrate your "points" by long anecdotes and accounts of personal experiences. Never hesitate to make a few appropriate "patriotic" comments.

(3) When possible, refer all matters to committees, for "further study and consideration." Attempt to make the committees as large as possible — never less than five.

(4) Bring up irrelevant issues as frequently as possible.

(5) Haggle over precise wordings of communications, minutes, resolutions.

(6) Refer back to matters decided upon at the last meeting and attempt to re-open the question of the advisability of that decision.

(7) Advocate "caution." Be "reasonable" and urge your fellow-conferrees to be "reasonable" and avoid haste which might result in embarrassments or difficulties later on.

(8) Be worried about the propriety of any decision — raise the question of whether such action as is contemplated lies within the jurisdiction of the group or whether it might conflict with the policy of some higher echelon.

It is impossible to say why this book is currently going viral at this moment in time and why it may feel particularly relevant to a workforce of millions of people who have suddenly been asked to agree to be "loyal" and work under the quasi leadership of the world's richest man, have been asked to take a buyout that may or may not exist, have had their jobs repeatedly denigrated and threatened, have suddenly been required to return to office, have been prevented from spending money, have had to turn off critical functions that help people, and have been asked to destroy years worth of work and to rid their workplaces of DEI programs. Maybe it's worth wondering why the most popular post in a subreddit for federal workers is titled "To my fellow Feds, especially veterans: we're at war."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason is a cofounder of 404 Media. He was previously the editor-in-chief of Motherboard. He loves the Freedom of Information Act and surfing.

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