

Dear grubs,

Hey there, it's me. Disenchanted young APN News and Media reporter #133,332. You remember me, that psychopath with a tendency towards terrorism that dared to question the practices of your noble and holy news organisation? I've emerged from house arrest and a dark cloud of paranoia and fear to give my side of what has become a controversial situation. Don't worry, I'm wearing a full Hannibal Lectre-style face mask and typing slowly but surely while restrained in a straight-jacket, so I promise I'm not going to rip out anybody's jugular.

As a dangerous sociopath without morals or a conscience, I thought I'd take a little time out from my busy schedule of depravity and wickedness to explain my actions and clarify my position. It really is difficult to think of other people, what with my latent narcissism and selfishness, but please do let me try.

Do you honestly think this is a hold-up? That I'm a bush ranger waving around a shotgun, ordering the women and children down on the ground and for the carriage driver to hand over the money? I don't want your money. As the proud owner of a beaten-up VS Commodore, a rucksack, a few shirts and a couple of pairs of jeans who is moving into a farm shed next week, I'm telling you that I'm a guy who likes the simple life.

Occasionally though, things happen that pierce this terrorist's stony cold heart and, would you believe it, affect him emotionally.

Your staff hate you: Ever get the feeling you're not entirely welcome when you set sail for the colonies and visit that frazzled mob with the bags under their eyes working their guts out on your regional sites? No, they're not intimidated by your freshly-starved business shirts and rugged good looks. They want to know how come when one of their colleagues breaks down, and quits, they're not replaced and they have to do even more work with less resources. They're upset that sometimes they get so stressed and anxious from writing half a newspaper them-fucking-selves they feel guilty for taking the time to go to the toilet for a piss. They're upset their partner is complaining about how tired they are all of the time and they don't have the energy to play with their kids.

They're worried about that colleague who had the nervous breakdown and won't answer his phone. They want to know why there aren't enough cameras to go around for the photographers and whether they can sketch up something nice for that page three yarn. They want to know why the senior photographer had to wage a six-month political campaign to get a new camera bag. They're pissed off that when they are sick, they feel obliged to come in and cough and hack their way through the day because of the knowledge that if they don't, those poor bastards back at the office won't be back in time for a hot dinner. Hell, they probably won't even make the 9pm news.

Workplace surveillance: The fact you think placing bugs in company vehicles is a valid management tool is disturbing. I'm sorry, but using electronic surveillance to monitor and control your employees is not an exciting new frontier of human resource management. It's a loathsome practice that should be left to people who actually need to use it like the Police and, well, actual spies. My objection to it doesn't make me a crazy bleeding-heart left-wing civil-libertarian. It doesn't make me a ruthless terrorist and my challenging of it wasn't about trying to gain leverage for financial gain. I conducted a bit of yard-stick research on this issue with some of my politically diverse and open-minded friends. Sorry guys, it was unanimous. Recording conversations in company vehicles is fucked. Really fucked. I know a guy who thinks Hitler was misunderstood. He reckons it's fucked too.

If you can't run a business without using electronic surveillance to identify and quash voices of dissent then some would argue you didn't have a business to begin with. I've got a simple definition of a situation in which general managers need to record conversations in company vehicles to maintain order in their work places. It's called a crisis. Objecting to a culture of paranoia and secrecy whereby managers control their workplaces with spy gadgetry does not make me a sociopath, as was suggested when I raised the courage to stand up to you people. I mean for fuck's sake guys, come on. George Orwell's 1984 was not a handbook for good corporate governance in the 21st century.

Take a teaspoon of cement: Employees of your organisation are constantly told that things are the way they are and they need to have a teaspoon of what's good for 'em and harden up. That's all good and well, and we are a resilient and tough bunch us journos, but sometimes when one of our colleagues who we consider a mate breaks down and doesn't even want to leave his house we can get a bit irritable about the way things are. When we see that look of worry on his wife's face it tends to upset us. When you watch your colleagues' marriages and relationships break down under the weight of their work demands and a different one of your female colleagues is in tears each week, sometimes you get, dare I say it, pissed off with the way things are.

When one of your colleagues gives the best 10 years of his life to The Company, working 90 hour weeks - I'm not exaggerating here - and sacrifices a marriage in the process it can upset us. When they're shafted we start to wonder how much you value your employees. When we bleed and sweat for a story and there's an error in the first paragraph from the subbing process it really gets on our nerves. What's worse is we know we can't complain because those poor bastards down at the centralised subbing hub have got it worse than we do. We don't like seeing the Newspaper Children sitting in the tearoom until 8pm at night drawing superheroes and dinosaurs, saying their hungry, and asking when Daddy is going to be finished. Do you realise many of your staff are teetering on the brink of a nervous breakdown every day? Sometimes we reckon that somebody needs to come down there and ram a shovel full of fabric softener down your throat.

What does your human resource department actually do? I've sometimes wondered whether you guys print out all the Gallop employee satisfaction surveys you make your staff submit each year and have paper aeroplane throwing competitions out an office window. You could make paper mache sculptures out of them for all the good it does. Listen up you jerks, university graduates are not a can of Coke that you can drink all up and then crumple and throw away when you're done. During my five years with APN News and Media I watched young reporters enter through the door with passion and determination and get spat back out of it a year later depressed and broken. Burning up and booting out starry-eyed young journalists is not a business model. They are not an infinite, exploitable resource to feed the newspaper machine. You are not generals in a war and your employees are not cannon fodder. They're people.

Not replacing staff who break down and quit is not a clever cost-cutting measure. It puts increased pressure on those who remain and then they in turn break down and quit. You see a cycle starting here, guys? Have you crunched the numbers on your staff retention? How about the percentage of editorial staff on regional sites under the age of 30? Attrition rates? Do you even read the Gallop survey? That's the one that consistently reveals a deep-seated resentment from staff towards their employer and a worryingly high level of job dissatisfaction among employees. It also puts APN News and Media in the company of some of the lowest performing businesses in Australia.

Your nice little visits: A travelling road show of your regional sites in the weeks prior to the survey is not an effort to improve the working conditions and lives of your employees. Your staff don't want to see a bunch of old men in nice shirts and false smiles and hear about how this year is definitely the year that things are going to change. They don't want your lame jokes and they're not impressed by those little cakes and quiches either. We're sorry you can't afford your house repayments and your partner was fucking his exotic Filipino neighbour while you were staying back until 9pm each night but you must understand it was for the good of The Company. Here, have another cake. They've got sprinkles on them. Your employees want to get home to their families at a reasonable hour. They want to be able to look up at the clock without feeling like each tick of the minute hand is bringing them one step closer to the end of the universe. They want work-life balance. They want to be able to go home without feeling like they've been hit by a cattle truck and dragged along the length of the Nullarbor Plain. Sometimes work gets so rough they wake up the next day feeling like they've got a hangover.

Bullying: APN News and Media has had a number of skirmishes with the union over bullying allegations in recent years. The thing is, I'm not sure the responsibility lies at the feet of your site managers. I don't think my bosses were evil ogres who loved nothing more than to crush the spirits of their employees. I don't think they stayed up late at night with schemes to torment that new cadet. My managers were hard-working stressed out people with problems of their own who were desperately trying to keep it together and produce a

quality product under enormous pressure and with a skeleton budget and resources that verge on the ludicrous. Tell me, how do you expect a manager to chain a gang of 20-somethings to a desk for 12 hours a day without speaking a harsh word? It can be pretty difficult to keep your composure when you're trying to put out a serious daily newspaper with half the staff you need and the employees you do have only been in the job a year or two.

Victimisation: My father cried last night, you cunts. My old boy's a hard man. A former centre-half-forward who grew up in Warwick in regional Queensland during the Bjelke-Petersen era. He chased his dream, fell in love, and then brought up his children on a Macadamia farm on the Far North Coast of New South Wales. He's seen it all, my Dad. He's faced hard years on the land, deaths in the family and one of his best mates was killed. Not once in my life have I seen him cry. You know what broke him? Seeing his eldest son frantic and distressed relating to an acute mental health response team how he felt suicidal because his former employer had been secretly recording conversations in company vehicles and that when he spoke up about it, they tapped his mobile phone, went through his rubbish, hacked his computer, fuck knows what else, and waged a psychological campaign of intimidation to break him down.

Look, I understand this newspaper game's a serious business and that thing called the internet is making life pretty hard for us all. I heard how those classies are drying up fast and circulations are in free-fall. It confuses me too that an Epic Fail photograph showing a fat man stuck in an elevator door can get ten million likes on Facebook in hours while many regional papers struggle to sell 10,000 copies on a Saturday. It is worrying that the Facebook generation are more interested in their friend's status update that shows a maltese-shih tzu cross in a lion costume chasing a lizard than they are a beautifully-crafted story depicting, say, one mother's struggle to secure a disability education specialist at the local school for her son. I get that you guys are trying to make the best of a bad situation and it's all getting a bit out of control.

What I want to know is which fucking genius thought tapping the phone and hacking the computer of a 27-year-old reporter and waging a campaign of intimidation and harassment was a suitable way to deal with an honest objection to the recording of conversations in company vehicles. I mean come on guys, have you ever heard of conflict resolution? Mediation? Whistle blower management? Can you please stop and think about what this has done to me? There have been long periods where I didn't even want to leave the house I was so paranoid and out of my mind.

This is a fucking atrocity. I actually feel like I have been raped. That's the only way I can describe it. My mind has been raped and some maniacal bastards have my soul in a box down there in Brisbane somewhere. Along with all the phone recordings and surveillance that's been gathered on me. I feel like I've been held captive. I don't want to do the things I enjoy doing. I don't want to see my mates. All I've been doing is staring up at the ceiling. I've

had to lean on my family much harder than I like to and they're carrying this awful situation around too. I spoke to a couple of private investigators and they couldn't believe this had happened. They assured me that one of their own wouldn't do this sort of thing and that the horrible bastards must have been doing it all by themselves. One of them offered to come around to my house to talk me through it all. Fuck you people. I am never going to be the same after this. I loathe you bastards for bringing me into this world - you know, the one where people who should have better things to do monitor the private communications of employees and then make them feel as if they are being hunted in some sort of fucked up dystopian nightmare a science fiction writer dreamed up in the 60s. I get that I've been dealing with some hardened, veteran journalists here and that you're all delightfully cynical and world-weary but using electronic surveillance to harass somebody to the point of psychological oblivion is fucking unacceptable.

Smear campaign: Sometimes my mates and I do drink alcohol and tell stories and carry on like idiots. Okay, I did have a bit of a wild streak in my younger years and yes, I was hauled into the magistrate's office by my ear for being a naughty boy. You know what that's called? Growing up. My experiences and my past fit pretty neatly into the realm of normality for a young guy growing up in the 90s and 00s. Sorry guys but public nuisance charges for which I didn't receive a conviction don't make me a sociopathic criminal and wanting to be single for a while in my 20s doesn't make me a womaniser. Trying some recreational drugs doesn't make me a former substance abuser. Objecting to illegal work practices such as recording private conversations in company vehicles sure as hell doesn't make me mentally-ill, or sociopathic and narcissistic for that matter. I suppose I should have married the first girl to rub my belly and kiss my neck, then develop a drinking problem and have an affair with that cute secretary and raise my children in a broken home. It seemed to be the winning formula for your generation.

I've been to a psychiatrist since I worked in an environment where conversations were recorded in company vehicles and those who spoke up about the practice had their personal computers hacked and their mobile phones tapped. Guess what? Turns out I'm sane and that I was working in an oppressive, poisonous environment. Oh my, just what are we dealing with here? Somebody who thinks independently, stands up for himself and questions authority. Clearly this is a threat to modern journalism. A sociopath. A narcissist. A dangerous terrorist. How dare this young man think for himself and develop opinions of his own. How dare this troublemaker question authority and stand up for what he believes in. The best thing to do, of course, is to place him under total surveillance and try and destroy him psychologically. Anybody with the moral ineptitude to question the practices of your news organisation must, of course, be a psychopath. Similarly, anybody who threatens to publically voice concerns about the illegal and unethical actions of your general managers is clearly mentally-ill, sociopathic and narcissistic. This is not demonization and vilification. This is objective and reasoned logic. The sort of rational and balanced thinking that springs from

the mouths of Supreme Court judges. Socrates himself, I'm sure, would be proud of such reasoned fucking thought.

My mate, the photographer: Nobody's seen or heard of him in nearly four months now. The thing that got me was that I watched that breakdown come on slowly. I watched the circles under his eyes get darker and that spark in his eyes disappear as more and more photograph request slips pile up on his desk. I watched him become increasingly frazzled as he gave his all for the good of The Company. I watched his passion for photography fade until he was just going through the motions and trying to make it through the day. He is not a parasite trying to scam a free lunch from the system and live the easy life on workplace cover entitlements. He's another staff member who buckled under the weight of their duties and it's about time you listened to people like him.

In summary, you grubs: It's been three months since I resigned from my position as a reporter with APN. Since then I have left the country and moved interstate in an attempt to stop the gross invasion of my privacy and the related victimization that has bothered me. I've threatened you people, I've pleaded with you people, yelled screamed and barked, but nothing I've tried seems to have had any effect. This whole experience has had a real impact on my health. I want a resolution. I want closure so I can move on with my life and put this horrible situation away in some dark recess of my mind. When I was younger, I used to dream of working as a journalist and sticking it to the politicians, exposing corruption and holding people in positions of power accountable. Pretty idealistic, I know. I suppose it came true in a way, but I'm not happy about it. I'm not impressed by the irony that to make you people stop and think about what you were doing I had to threaten to go to the media. I've wanted to be journalist since I was a child and you guys ruined it for me.

How can media organisations hold people in positions of power accountable if they're involved in illegal and jailable offences? How can they expose corruption when they're actively covering it up? I really don't know where to go from here. The fact that you people think this is all no big deal and are happy to let it continue without resolution has convinced me that my beliefs do not fit in with the APN ethos and as such, I quit. I left without making a fuss and I expected this horrible situation would have ended when I returned from overseas. I am looking forward to the day when all of this is a memory and I can tell my grandchildren about how when I was a young man I worked for the newspapers and my colleagues and I printed stories about car crashes and pub brawls on bleached pieces of dead old trees. The internet won, guys. The battle's over. Sort your shit out.

Yours sincerely,

Disenchanted young APN News and Media reporter #133,332.